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**New Endings and Old Beginnings:
The Return to Myth
Through Technology**

Toivo Koivukoski

submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of Ph.D. in Political Science
at
Carleton University
spring, 2003

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New Endings and Old Beginnings: The Return to Myth Through Technology

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Abstract

Technology is like myth in its ambiguous wholeness, its indeterminate flux, and its ability to abolish human perspective. Following Alexandre Kojève, Marshall McLuhan and Giambattista Vico, I argue that technology works over us to produce changes in our perceptions that make us like the first mythic men, completely involved in our changing surroundings.

Kojève argues that now at the end of history we are no longer human; instead, we are either 're-animalized'- turned into beasts-, or 'Japanized'- turned into mortal gods. As in myth, there is no longer a strict boundary defining human being. Similarly, McLuhan argues that electronic media abolish our sense of perspective, enveloping us in a fluid, amorphous system of instantaneous interconnections. Our societies are 're-tribalized' as the individual is abolished. Before Kojève and McLuhan, Vico was the first to identify the 're-barbarizing' effects of modern thought, arguing that it was caustic to the *sensus communis*, and made man a god in his own mind and a beast in reality. In all of these thinkers one sees technology resulting in the abolishment of the human being and the ascendancy of a new type immediately connected to a changing, amorphous environment.

In order to cast some light on this shadowy new type- technological man- I turn to Mircea Eliade's and Ernst Cassirer's studies on myth. They too portray myth as an all-enveloping whole. In spatial terms, myth is a closed cosmos, with man at its center. In temporal terms, myth is a process, circular and self-referential. In terms of language, mythic man uses a system of signs, which, unlike symbols, are identical with their referents. Through this identity mythic

language exercises a magical power over the world. Mythic man is at the center of the cosmos, adapts himself to continuous changes, and makes word-magic when he speaks.

These studies on myth allow us to look with some perspective on our technological condition. Our technological condition can be understood according to the way we know space and time, and the way we use language. Our space is a closed cosmos, within which everything is interconnected. Our time is a process, lacking any end, but driven instead by the self-referential criterion of efficiency. Our language does not consist of symbols that refer to meaning beyond this world, but becomes a set of tools for effecting the world. We are deprived of meaning outside of our technological cosmos.

Technology is self-referential, and takes up man within it. How to respond to technology is a tough question, precisely because of technology's all-enveloping character. Using Roland Barthes, Murray Bookchin, Leni Riefenstahl and Georges Bataille as examples, I show how attempts to escape technology only radicalize it further. I then suggest, following the examples of George Grant and Martin Heidegger, that it may be best to accept our technological fate in order to recapture a sense of wonder at being within our technological cosmos.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to my wife Lieann, for teaching me that grammar is the structure of thought, and for giving me a sense of perspective on an all-absorbing topic. Thanks to Professor Tom Darby, who encouraged me to take on this topic, and who helped me tirelessly through numerous drafts. Thanks also to Professor Will Mullins, who generously took time from his retirement to give advice on my Vico scholarship; it was in his graduate seminar on politics and ideology that the idea for my argument first occurred to me. I am grateful to Professor Randy Newell for proof reading my translations of ancient Greek. And thanks to my colleagues, especially my good friend David Tabachnick, for the conversations out of which much of this thesis arose.

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Preface: THE MYTH OF NARCISSUS

My soul is wrought to sing of forms transformed
to bodies new and strange! Immortal Gods
inspire my heart, for you have changed yourselves
and all things you have changed! Oh lead my song
in smooth and measured strains, from olden days
when earth began to this completed time!

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. 1.1-6.¹

I begin where technology ends- in myth. I begin with a specific myth, one well suited to describing our experience with technology. I refer to the Narcissus myth.² In Ovid's telling of the story, Narcissus is entranced by his own image reflected in water, and his self-involvement becomes so deep that he is drowned. He loses himself in himself, or more precisely, in an image of himself. Our involvement in technology is like this. The myth shows the kind of circularity that attends technological thinking- process thinking. Technology is a system of artifacts (*techne*) that provides its own reason (*logos*), hence it is self-referential.³ It promises the power to remake the world in our image, yet provides no guide for how this should be done, except the hollow standard of efficiency. Technology has no transcendent purpose, no given limits, but it constantly

¹ *Metamorphoses*. Brookes Moore (trans.). <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0028>

² *Metamorphoses*. Mary M. Innes (trans.) (London: Penguin, 1955) 3.337-511. I have used Innes' prose version as the source of my exegesis, and Moore's more poetic version for its moving invocation. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is not, in a sense, a 'pure' myth. It is a recycled myth, composed of familiar stories, most told many times before. The *Metamorphoses* is a footloose encyclopedia of myth. But then, myths are meant to move, and to be retold. Myth's common substance is shared in many changing forms.

³ The self-referential character of technology is emphasized in Tom Darby's definition of technology as "(1) self-referential, (2) relatively autonomous, (3) progressively sovereign, and, being so, (4) tends towards the systemization of nature both human and non-human." ["On

reinvents its own artificial purposes and overcomes its own technical limits. Through it we are promised a world made in our own image, where nature is not our antagonist but where technology and nature are joined in a spontaneously beneficent order. We look at the world and see it as resource for our use, as a mirror to project our own image upon.

As technology is self-referential, so too is Narcissus' desire. He is fully absorbed in his own reflected image, even though he is fully self-consciousness of its emptiness:

'Alas! I am myself the boy I see. I know it: my own reflection does not deceive me. I am on fire with love for my own self.'⁴

While it may seem that Narcissus has found a solution to the incompleteness of human desire, that his closed-circuit love could mean complete self-satisfaction, he vacillates between total absorption in his image and total rejection of his situation. Perfect self-consciousness goes along with the annihilation of consciousness. Narcissus cries out:

'How I wish I could separate myself from my body! A new prayer this, for a lover, to wish the thing he loves away!'⁵

This is not so new for us. Feeling distant from our bodies, as if they were machines under our operation, pleasure factories for our enjoyment, or databanks for our information, is our common condition. Whether the attitude is licentious or repressive, the dissociation is the same. The promise of complete self-satisfaction through technology requires this sense of dissociation: the technological mastery of non-human nature requires that we master our own

Spiritual Crisis, Globalization, and Planetary Rule" in *Faith, Reason, and Political Life Today*. Peter Augustine Lawler and Dale McConkey (ed.) (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001) p. 53]

⁴*Metamorphoses*. 3.476-8.

nature. The sense of dissociation that results can lead to either abandonment to technological integration, or alternatively, to the violent rejection of technological ordering, even if this rejection is suicidal.

Rather than this though, shouldn't we simply turn from technology, the illusory image of ourselves? Ovid's words speak directly to us:

The thing you are seeing does not exist: only turn aside and you will lose what you love. What you see is but the shadow cast by your reflection; in itself it is nothing. It comes with you, and lasts while you are there; it will go when you go, if go you can.⁵

Letting technology go is just so easy, and just so hard. Technology has become part of us, and it would be no easier to let go of technology than to let go of ourselves, for technology is us.⁷ In this thesis I look at technology in terms of its effects on the way we think and speak: on our perceptions of time and space, and on our use of language. I argue that technological man thinks and speaks in a way that is generally comparable to that of mythic man. Both think of time in terms of process, and of space in terms of an integrated whole, held together by many centers, and both use language as a tool for effecting the world, as a kind of magic.

My argument proceeds first with a discussion of technology in Part 1, relying heavily on George Grant and Martin Heidegger's accounts of the same, then to a discussion of myth in Part 2, informed mainly by Mircea Eliade's and Ernst Cassirer's writings on the subject. These are parallel discussions, employing the same vocabulary and structure to account for two very similar phenomena- technology and myth. In Part 3 I point to others who have made

⁵ *Metamorphoses*. 3.484-6.

⁶ *Metamorphoses*. 3.429-34.

similar connections between technology and myth: Giambattista Vico with his 'barbarism of reflection'; Alexandre Kojève's end of history and the 're-animalization' it brings; and Marshall McLuhan's account of electric media and the 're-tribalization' that accompanies them. In Part 4 I look at several radical responses to the union of technology and myth- from Roland Barthes, Murray Bookchin, Leni Riefenstahl, and Georges Bataille. I argue that these radical responses to technology work to reveal the essence of technology, that the total freedom promised by technology brings with it subjugation to technological necessity. Hesitant about this, I turn to Grant and Heidegger's evocations of wonder in the face of technology as a way of thinking through technology, while at the same time short-circuiting its drive to unbridled mastery of human and non-human nature.

In less lofty terms, the most concrete conclusion that I have come to through my research is that ancient myths, such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (which I will examine further in the section on McLuhan), Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the Finnish *Kalevala* (all of which will be referred to throughout this thesis), are especially relevant to our time. They can be read as both descriptions that capture our technological perspective, and as sensible prescriptions on how to live in a technological world. While human beings are not autonomous within either technology or myth, this does not mean that one must give oneself over to technology in a wild abandon, or alternatively close oneself off from it entirely. There are patterns of release and restraint in myth that are conducive to good living. But before we can be instructed in these ancient patterns (which is not

⁷ Grant, George. *Technology and Empire*. (Toronto: Anansi, 1969) p. 137.

something I will attempt in this thesis), we must admit that the old myths have something to say to us. At the end of this research project, I am convinced that this is true, that the long-standing prejudices against myth as a fairy-tale, as ignorant science, or as a lie are slipping. Rather, to repeat Heidegger, the oldest of the old is the newest of the new.⁸ An aphorism cannot stand in for a thesis statement, but this one stands behind and beyond my thesis that technology and myth are alike, evoking in mythic language what will be spelled out in more analytic terms herein.

⁸ Heidegger, Martin. Pathmarks. William McNeil (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. XIII.

Part 1: ON TECHNOLOGICAL MAN

The first task of thought in our era is to think what technology is: to think it in its determining power over our politics and sexuality, our music and education.

George Grant.¹

Section 1: What technology is not

i) *introduction*

We are surrounded by technology, yet for that very fact it is difficult for us to see and know technology. Technology conditions our thinking and our acting, and it is hard to express an understanding of it beyond empty expressions of either self-satisfaction or anxiety: we are self-satisfied when we are in alignment with technology, and anxious when we are out of joint with it. It is widely remarked within the philosophy of technology literature that there is difficulty in defining technology, that its obviousness, and its obvious benefits, makes a clear, deep understanding of the phenomenon difficult.² We can

¹ Grant, George. English-Speaking Justice. (Toronto: Anansi, 1974) p. 1.

² Albert Borgmann argues that technology, as "the determining pattern of our lives resides and sustains itself primarily in the inconspicuous setting of our daily surroundings and activities" and thus "escapes scrutiny and criticism". [Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) p. 3] Carl Mitcham begins his book, Thinking through Technology with a statement that daunts his purpose: "Technology, or the making and using of artifacts, is a largely unthinking activity." [(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) p. 1] Langdon Winner comments on life in California, at the horizon of technological change, writing that "we were technological somnambulists, wandering through an extended dream." [The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) p. 169] What these others take as a methodological difficulty, I take as a central feature of technology: its ability to limit perspective and confine thought.

understand our microwaves and laptops as technologies, if by 'understand' we mean 'effectively use', yet we have trouble answering what technology is, in and of itself. This is not even considered an important question, however important we take technology to be in our daily lives and in the great events of our world.

The most accessible way to enter into the question of technology is through our perceptions, and what gives unity to those perceptions. Our perceptions are given unity by technology, and technology has an essence. This essence is not summoned by collecting a list of technologies and their functions, or even by arranging this list in a systematic fashion. I follow Heidegger's argument that the essence of technology is nothing technological.³ A focus on technologies as opposed to technology itself, if it is to be carried out with the greatest rigor, must move in the direction of a technical argument, made in the specialist language of technicians who, for professional reasons, cannot devote themselves to the question of essence, only design and function. Studies on specific technologies reproduce technological imperatives without bringing the essence of technology forth in thought.

The subject of this thesis is the essence of technology.⁴ Our entry into this essence is man- technology as we experience it, and as it shapes our perceptions. Hence I ask: 'What are the dispositions characteristic of technological man?'

³ Heidegger, Martin. "The Question Concerning Technology" in Basic Writings. David Farrell Krell (ed.) (San Francisco: Harper, 1993) p. 311.

⁴ I have no troubles identifying myself as an 'essentialist', in the terms of philosophy of technology scholars, and in the good company of the main thinkers I look at here: Heidegger, Grant, and Ellul. The more fashionable camp now is the 'social constructivist' camp, represented by such figures as Andrew Feenberg [Alternative Modernity: The Technical Turn in Philosophy and Social Theory. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995)], Don Ihde ["Which Globalization Do We Want?" in Globalization, Technology and Philosophy. Toivo Koivukoski and David Tabachnick (ed.) (New York: State University of New York Press, forthcoming)], Langdon Winner ["Upon Opening the Black Box and Finding it Empty: Social Constructivism and the Philosophy of Technology" in The Technology of Discovery and the Discovery of Technology. J. Pitt and E. Lugo (eds.) (Blacksburg: Society for Philosophy and Technology, 1991)], and Carl Mitcham [ed.. Research in Philosophy and Technology, vol. 15: Social and Philosophical Constructions of Technology. (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1995)]. They argue along the lines that questions concerning the essence of technology lead to an over-

First I look at our colloquial definitions of technology. I argue that these definitions manifest technological imperatives, rather than achieving real philosophical perspective. Our 'working' definitions of technology- those definitions that get us by in our day to day living- have a platitudinous quality to them; they are so 'obvious' that they are repeated unthinkingly, confirming technology without thinking technology.

Yet these platitudes contain some meaning, since they do express technological imperatives. In a sense, these definitions **are** technology, as technology is manifest in human thought. They are signs of technology, when by sign we mean a word that is identical with its referent. The discourse surrounding technology is itself a product of technology. What I will do in this first section is refute these working definitions of technology, not to dismiss them and pose an alternative definition, but to show how the essence of technology moves through them. In terms of our perceptions and practices: technology has us think of time in terms of process; of space as a integrated whole- a cosmos- with man at its center; and of language as a tool which can be used for changing the world. These three effects of technology on our thinking and doing can be read out of three common definitions of technology, respectively: 'technology is good or bad depending on its uses'; 'everyone has technology'; and 'technology is applied science'.

determined picture of technology, and that by addressing technology as a social construction they free up spaces for free thinking and acting. However, I ask how it is possible to view that which binds our world together as a social construction? This view is itself a manifestation of the essence of technology.

ii) 'technology is good or bad depending on its uses'

It is a common opinion that technology is value-neutral. Whereas abortion facilitated by modern techniques may be hideous in the hands of Nazis, it is good when practiced by sympathetic doctors today. One does not have to look hard to find other like examples. However, this should not suggest that the platitude is just an excuse for specific technologies, and an *ad hoc* gesture from a guilty conscience. Neither Nazis nor advocates of abortion see a need for an apology or a defence. Rather, what is evidenced is in both cases a self-apparent good: the elimination of Jews, and the freedom of a woman over her body.⁵ More fundamental than the shallow trickle of moral babble that flows over these stones is the stronger current into which it flows: technology makes all ends possible, as the river makes the stream possible. What is important, outside of any discussion of ends, good or bad, is that the river flows. The necessity of this continuing flow supersedes ends, and in time becomes exchanged for them.

Technique, as Jacques Ellul depicts it, is "totally irrelevant" to the notion of a human good, "pursues no end," and tends, "to create a completely independent technical morality."⁶ The very neutrality of technology trumpeted by those who would put it to this or that use levels out the moral pronouncements that they make, reducing them to a number of options, more or less efficient. Heidegger says similarly that although atomic energy, for example, "can be unleashed either

⁵ Grant uses the example of abortion as a sign of the inability of technological man to define in concrete terms what constitutes a human being. [*English-Speaking Justice*, p. 71] The same can be said of mythic man, for whom the human type is a fluid entity. The practice of infanticide is common in mythic societies, not only for practical reasons, but because the child is not considered a full human being until later in life, often after they have passed through rites of initiation.

⁶ Ellul, Jacques. *The Technological Society*. John Wilkinson (trans.) (New York: Vintage, 1964) p. 97.

for destructive or for peaceful purposes",⁷ this apparent choice doesn't open technology up to human purposes, but relocates those purposes within the context of technology and its enframing (*Gestellen*); in this case, setting upon matter itself to release its energy. All things and all processes must be integrated; and when nothing stands apart, there can be no point of departure from within this process. All that is left is the science of the helmsman-cybernetics- what Heidegger calls the fundamental science of our technological age,⁸ since it is concerned with directing all things, include human beings, from within technology, without even stars to sail by.

Grant calls attention to this teaching of Heidegger's concerning cybernetics,⁹ and through it shows how technology turns, especially in its late stages, to a mastery of human nature, non-human nature having already been conquered. In his meditation on the statement, 'The computer does not impose upon us the ways it should be used,' Grant reflects on the essence of technology and the requirements it imposes on us, even before any considerations of uses arise. The computer, for instance, requires a massive social organization to produce its materials and the technicians needed to design, program and operate it. It requires the direction of the most intelligent youth towards these necessary tasks, and hence the reevaluation of what was once considered good for youth to learn.¹⁰ Even the 'values' and 'ideals' which would direct the uses of technology are themselves products of its development- goods produced by human beings-, and only "ice the cake of technological necessity".¹¹

⁷ "The Question Concerning Technology" p. 320.

⁸ Heidegger, Martin. "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking" in Basic Writings. p. 434.

⁹ Grant, George. "The Computer Does not Impose on Us the Ways It Should be Used" pp. 418-434 in The George Grant Reader. William Christian & Sheila Grant (ed.) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

¹⁰ "The Computer Does not Impose..." p. 422.

¹¹ "The Computer Does not Impose..." p. 420.

Contemplation of ends, or to say the same thing, of goods, is replaced by a drive towards process, and towards the integration of processes into one another. Mythic, cyclical time replaces linear time. In the section on technological time I will consider: 1) Grant's argument that technology is essentially without ends; 2) Grant's encounter with Nietzsche and the idea of time as process; and 3) the rise of cyclical conceptions of time.

iii) *'everyone has technology'*

The drive to include and to integrate finds its expression in the platitude that all people at all times have had technology. As Donald Verene writes: "The technological form of society acts as if it were the only desirable form of life and presents itself as if all human history has always exhibited a tendency towards technique. Thus our age appears to be a fulfillment of all the hopes of past ages."¹² According to this view, the stone hammer is technology, just as an air hammer is technology. Similarly, Lewis Mumford points to the narrowness of definitions of human beings as 'tool-making animals'. He argues that this kind of definition projects technological rationalism back upon history.¹³ Mumford describes technics, or technology, in its high modern spirit, while progress was certain, and the past was seen as an imperfect version of the present. Then, modern technology was seen as superior, and ancient, non-progressive people were taken to represent imperfect versions of ourselves. This kind of opinion can be seen in Rostow's stages of modernization,¹⁴ as in Marx's theory of

¹² Verene, Donald Phillip. "Persons in the Technological Universe" in Globalization, Technology, and Philosophy. p. 339.

¹³ Mumford, Lewis. The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Development. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966) pp. 4-5.

¹⁴ Rostow, W. W.. The process of economic growth. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960)

economic and social development:¹⁵ early stages with their social arrangements prepare the way for later ones.

However, this crude, lockstep progressivism has been replaced by a drive to originality that periodically revisits the past for resources. In terms of the technological conception of time, history has been 'leveled out', or compressed, such that past, present and future are joined in one moment of pure potential. Something similar happens in the technological conception of space. Space is compressed as the globe is encircled in a web of interconnections. Anything can be delivered from one place to another; when one deals with information, this delivery can be nearly instantaneous. The platitude that everyone has technology is made truer if it reversed- technology has everyone. It is not that the technological cosmos that results is entirely homogenous; the point is rather that any place on the globe can be brought into connection with any other place- in potential. Any place can become a center in the global technological order. This open potential is what makes our world a closed sphere- a technological cosmos.

I will make this argument in the section on technological space. The argument will be supported by describing: 1) Kojève's idea of the Universal and Homogenous State as a model for our technological cosmos; 2) Heidegger's idea of standing reserve as the potential that binds that cosmos together; and 3) Hardt and Negri's barbaric reactions against the technological empire as the chaos that confirms the global technological order.

¹⁵ Marx, Karl. Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations. Jack Cohen (trans.) E.J. Hobsbawm (ed.) (New York: International Publishers, 1964)

iv) *'technology is applied science'*

Technology is the transformation of not only our perceptions of time and space, but of our ways of thinking and doing. This transformation is manifest in the platitude: technology is applied science; however, it is not recognized, because thinking and doing are still kept apart. Technology and science are assumed to be distinct, as applied science- assumed to be technology- differs from science that is not applied, from pure science. Between these two autonomous spheres, one can imagine man, who bridges the gap, and in so doing decides how the two will be put together. However, technology is more than just a casual joining of the thinking and doing, such that the particular characteristics of each are maintained. Heidegger writes: "The establishing of this mutual relationship between technology and physics is correct. But it remains a merely historiological establishing of facts and says nothing about that in which this mutual relationship is grounded."¹⁶ There is an essential unity of making and knowing within technology, and, as Grant argues, this union changes the nature of both terms.¹⁷ Making is liberated from its particular constraints to find new applications and unlimited possibilities, and knowing is brought to bear upon the world in a concrete fashion. There may still be humble cobblers and useless philosophers, but the governing reality is Nike and research scientists.

When the division between thought and action is collapsed, the place for language as a mediator between thought and action goes with it. The depreciation of language occurs as process is exchanged for ends, and words are

¹⁶ "The Question Concerning Technology" p. 320.

¹⁷ English-Speaking Justice. p. 1.

made to perform an evocative function, urging on or adjusting processes from within, rather than attempting to articulate an idea of the Good. Language then becomes a tool, like any other. Indeed, many say as much. In the radical critique of technology we see the essential features of technology showing through. The obscurations of tradition are removed to allow technology to come into its essence, free from the givens of tradition. While there may not be an explicit veneration of technology or faith in it alone, the drive to self-creation is foremost in these radical critiques. This self-creation does not need useless ideas but rather tools. This is what Deleuze says theory is, not different from practice. "A theory is exactly like a box of tools. It has nothing to do with the signifier. It must be useful. It must function. And not for itself."¹⁸ As theory is conceived as a tool for changing the world, so too is language.

Rather than ideas-transcendent standards for earthly life- all things are known in terms of presence and power, including language: words are no longer incomplete references to ideas which cannot be fully expressed, nor impotent commands to a world which will not fully obey, but come to constitute reality. We change the characters of things by changing their names; as, for example, the relations between the sexes are modified through the modification of the words we use to describe them: sex becomes gender; woman becomes womyn; mankind becomes humankind. The perceived efficacy of these changes is possible because of technology, the new union of knowing and making. Within this union there is no room for a language that is referential and metaphorical,

¹⁸ Deleuze, Gilles. "Intellectuals and Power-a conversation between Foucault and Deleuze" recorded March 4, 1972, first published in L'Arc (No. 49, pp. 3-10) pp. 204-217 in Foucault, Michel. language, counter-memory, practice: Selected Essays and Interviews Donald Bouchard (ed.) Sherry Simon (trans.) (Ithica: Cornell U Pr., 1977) p. 208.

but words must perform a function which is evocative and immediate. Words becomes signs, rather than symbols- they refer not to something else, but only to themselves. Hence the discourse surrounding technology too tends to take on a self-referential quality.¹⁹

This reformation of language further integrates the technological cosmos. Firstly, it removes the capacity to refer to anything beyond the bounds of the technological cosmos. The Good is replaced by values as the standard for human conduct. Instead of a purpose, we have social constructs assembled through the creative use of language. All considerations of purpose are brought within the grasp of human beings: purpose is something we create for ourselves.

Secondly, the power of words as tools draws together the technological cosmos from within. Surpassing the crude techniques of earlier times, the possibilities for the control of human and non-human nature broadens, and the traditionally humane spheres, such as politics and the family, which needed to be described in words and which needed words to function, are made into objects of manipulation. Technology is no longer limited to the physical manipulation of nature, but includes those human processes that work through language. Our language is like magic- it gives us complete power over our world, while relegating us to a world of our own creation.

In the section on technological language I will examine: 1) the emptiness of technological language- the 'chatter' described by Friedrich Nietzsche, José Ortega Y Gasset, and Martin Heidegger; 2) the new powers of technological

¹⁹ A good example of this is Carl Mitcham's book, Thinking Through Technology, which takes on the thesis that what is important is simply the process of thinking through technology. As long as individuals and groups think and talk about technology, everything will be fine. Mitcham's book gives a strange presentation that focuses on the personages of philosophers of

language, as described by Hannah Arendt and Donald Phillip Verene; and 3) the word 'technology' itself, traced back to its origins in Aristotle's use of the word τεχνολογία to describe the self-referential and dangerous art of rhetoric.

technology, and that shows pictures of scholars at conferences, as if to say, 'See, this is what we should be doing,'.

Section 2: Time as Process

i) *introduction*

Since technology is in a loose sense a synonym for change, it has a definite set of effects upon our perception of time. Technology can be partially described in terms of these effects. I will focus attention on three such effects in this section: first, the movement away from a perception of time in relation to ends; second, the movement towards a new perception of time as process; and third, the veneration of open-ended potential. All of these changes put us on the way back to myth. In particular, they regenerate the specific characters of the mythic experience in modern life by giving rise to cyclical conceptions of time. The example I will focus on is cycles in economics. In general this altered perception makes a return to the mythic sensibility possible by abolishing linear time and returning us to the origin- the oldest of the old, and the newest of the new.

iv) *technology is without ends*

To argue that technology is not oriented towards ends, but rather towards process, is to risk incredulity and incomprehension. For technology arose out of traditions of thought in which men and women thought deeply about ends, and from within political, cultural, and religious traditions that cared greatly for those considered ends. Whatever arguments may be made about the paucity of Platonic metaphysics or of liberal philosophy, as Heidegger and Grant do respectively, there is much that is noble in both these traditions. Moreover, that nobility may not be easily separated from that which causes one to pause

when considering technology. In simple terms, there are many high ends towards which technology is put, as well as cries for justice, charity, and freedom when technology is diverted from those ends. However, these ends are being transformed into something essentially different: justice becomes efficiency; charity becomes integration or (in gentler terms) accommodation; and freedom becomes the freedom to be immersed in an endless cycle of production and consumption. Processes replace ends.

* * * * *

George Grant's discussion of technology leans heavily upon his account of modernity and liberalism. However, he sees technology as ultimately independent of the milieu within which it arose, and capable of jettisoning its legacy, along with the goods which have come to be associated with it by tradition. This is the argument of his book, English-Speaking Justice, wherein he puts forward that, "there are signs that modern liberalism and technology, although they have been interdependent, may not necessarily be mutually sustaining, and that their identity may not be given in the nature of reason itself."²⁰ Technology is defended in liberal terms: technology makes us free and equal. Yet, through the revealing of the essence of technology, these ends and this original defense fall away. However hollow the account of the Good given by the liberal tradition, in liberalism the Good still retains some power to direct and to limit human thought, speech, and action. The Good retains some significance as an end, and provides unity to the human experience, and especially to the human experience of time as the unfolding of the Good. If the

²⁰ English-Speaking Justice. pp. 5-6

Good is equivalent to human freedom, as liberals argue, then there is a lasting standard by which to judge.

However, this standard cannot remain an abstraction and a speculative standard. If freedom is the highest good, and if freedom is understood in the uniquely worldly sense which Hobbes first describes, as the absence of external impediments,²¹ then man must find the way to increase his freedom through the overcoming of the given. We know the process of this overcoming as technology. This overcoming, in and of itself, becomes the good by which we judge our works and the world.

It is easy to see how technology finds its object in the natural world, the world which we see 'out there', and how this serves the ends of human beings, making us free. Nature is conceived as resource, as plastic 'stuff'²² to be used by humans. To this point Grant writes: "When one contemplates the conquest of nature by technology one must remember that that conquest had to include our own bodies."²³ In sum, technology is, according to one of Grant's definitions, the mastery of human and non-human nature.²⁴ This mastery requires the removal of man-made restrictions to human freedom. Early modern thinkers such as Machiavelli and Hobbes are conspicuous in their rejection of traditions which posed limits to human freedom; for Machiavelli this meant a violent critique of the Church,²⁵ for Hobbes, of the schools of philosophy (most notably Aristotelian philosophy).²⁶ Grant identifies this pattern of rejection as

²¹ Hobbes, Thomas. Leviathan. (London: Penguin, 1985) p. 261.

²² I borrow this term from Grant. See Technology and Empire. p. 23. Tom Darby uses this term also. See "Reflections on Technology" in Sojourns in the New World: Reflections on Technology. Tom Darby (ed.) (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1986) p. 17.

²³ Technology and Empire. pp. 23-24.

²⁴ Technology and Empire. p. 23.

²⁵ Machiavelli, Niccolo. The Prince. Robert M. Adams (trans.) (New York: Norton, 1992) chp. XI.

²⁶ Leviathan. part 1, chp. V.

characteristic of technology, which is directed towards, "the overcoming of old prejudices and the discovery of new experiences, so that we will be able to run our societies with fewer oppressive authorities and repressive taboos."²⁷

However, this process extends beyond the dismissal of old traditions- something which is hardly unique to modern thought- to the very core of these traditions, to the idea that there exists a Good which is self-subsistent and unchanging, a Good forever beyond the limits of human accomplishment. "It is the very signature of modern man to deny reality to any conception of good that imposes limits on human freedom."²⁸ In this, these early modern traditions abnegated the right to lay claim to a lasting Good with a fixed content. The Good becomes the many goods we are all free to choose.

Any lasting character of man or, in a broader sense, of politics, is attributed by these early moderns to negative conditions which cannot be entirely overcome, but which pose a constant threat to man's freedom. One can, however, imagine the overcoming of these conditions given greater technical expertise than was then available; for example, the elimination of violent tendencies in man through the practiced use of psycho pharmaceuticals. Apart from these provisional technical limits, the early modern formulations of freedom as the highest end of human striving did not have the character of a fixed purpose, but were essentially open-ended. Hence the striving itself must be viewed as a process, rather than in terms of the ends (negatively defined) by which the process was first justified.

This profound shift in emphasis, from seeing time as directed towards some fixed end, to viewing time as process, is responsible for the signs of the non-identity of liberal and technological reason that Grant describes. Whereas

²⁷ Technology and Empire, p. 28.

²⁸ Grant, George. Lament for a Nation. (Ottawa: Carleton Library Series, 1997) p. 69.

the extensions of the technological society (to use a term that Grant borrows from Ellul) are defended according to the ends of liberal democratic society- namely some admixture of freedom and equality- these defenses are either a thin patina upon or are reducible to a process which needs no defence- technological change. For Grant, the signs of a non-identity between liberal and technological reason are seen in the contradictions between the faces presented by liberal, technological regimes at home and abroad, especially as these contradictions manifested themselves during the Vietnam War. This war could not be defended using the language of liberalism, and found its harshest criticism from within liberal regimes, showing that the professed ends of liberalism are not the same as those of technological change, if indeed those changes have any set ends at all.

Attention should be paid to these protests, since similar protests are heard today; and more importantly, because the language of goods- or of ends- is often heard in them. Grant is equivocal about the war protest movement, with which he had some limited involvement.²⁹ In a note to English-Speaking Justice, he suggests that the protests may have been authentic, if hypocritical, since the protesters enjoyed the benefits of living at the center of a technological empire while criticizing what was necessary to their enjoyment.³⁰ In an earlier writing, Grant says something similar: that the protests served the role of safety valves, and therefore functioned to maintain a technological society in its integrity as the ends which were used in its defence became at odds with the means by which it perpetuated and extended itself.³¹ In a note to that passage written two years later (in 1969), Grant admits that protest may have served some function in

²⁹See his letter to Kenneth McNaught, 11 February, 1966. p. 84 in The George Grant Reader. Grant suggests that he and McNaught take part in the war protests to show their care for Canada as conservatives.

³⁰ English-Speaking Justice. p. 94.

³¹ Technology and Empire. p. 75.

redirecting the American empire in its conquests abroad, but that, "it cannot be effective in turning the US from its course as a great imperial power."³² More illuminating, however, than what protest can and cannot do, i.e. the ends it can achieve, is the means or process by which it works. Grant touches on this indirectly when he identifies the power of those protests as consisting in the risk of the alienation of the 'influential young' from their society.³³ The Good is not to be found in the shouts or on the placards of the protesters, but in the unity of a technological society that they threaten to disturb. This is the good as seen from the perspective of the helmsmen of the technological empire. From the perspective of the protesters, likewise the good is the integrity of the technological society as a whole, though they define this whole much more broadly, and perhaps, accurately (i.e.. not along national borders). To put it crudely, the protestors desire for all people to be technological, like themselves- free, self-creating beings- while those in power are content to use others as material for their technology, for their own benefit or for those within their national borders. Because of their technological inclusiveness their 'good' must be written in the lower case, for it is immanent and wholly human, wholly technological.

Grant's opinion on the value of protest matches what Ellul has to say on the subject, though the former is more hesitant and generous. For Ellul, protest involuntarily confirms the unity of the technological society by channeling otherwise uncontrollable impulses. Thus even the most radical reactions against technology find their place within it: libertarian eroticism alongside pacifism alongside Communism.³⁴

³² Technology and Empire. p. 76.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ The Technological Society. p. 426. Grant's overall debt to Ellul is made clear in his review of The Technological Society [*Canadian Dimension*, vol. 3, nos. 3, 4 (March-April, May-June 1966), pp. 59-60], and the impression of that work can be seen through Technology and Empire.

Technology comes into its own as a process and as a whole only as it ceases to be limited by ends which are external to it. Technology, as Ellul describes it, is totally independent of the idea of the Good and "pursues no end, professed or unprofessed. It evolves in a purely causal way: the combination of preceding elements furnishes the new technical elements."³⁵ The technology of today becomes the material for tomorrow's technology as technology cannibalizes itself, turning inward to see what can be reused, continually destroying itself to rebuild itself. The circle is closed. "There is no purpose or plan being progressively realized. There is not even a tendency towards human ends. We are dealing with a phenomenon blind to the future, in a domain of integral causality."³⁶ Technology is self-moving, and not teleological. Human thought is turned from ends to process.

iii) *time as process*

If in English-Speaking Justice Grant holds liberalism and technology up to the light in order to see the space between them, thereby removing the language of ends from the technological lexicon, in Time as History he looks at the second, non-teleological conception of time on its own terms. This conception he calls time as history, and this, he writes, can be called interchangeably time as process.³⁷ I prefer this second suggested term, since its commonly understood meaning expresses the technological conception of time, and because it is far

English-Speaking Justice, and Technology and Justice (Toronto: Anansi, 1986). The passage from Ellul quoted here is of especial relevance, since it treats the characters of technology as 'monistic' and 'self-augmenting'- that is, completely self-referential- two qualities that Grant found extremely frightening. [William Christian. Introduction to The George Grant Reader. p. 25].

³⁵ The Technological Society. p. 97.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ Grant, George. Time as History. (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corp., 1969) p. 5.

from earlier traditions with which a word like history can be confused. When we speak of process, we speak of change in itself, of itself, and for itself; that is, we use a word to describe change which does not force us to account for the end that change produces. When one uses the word history, one is brought before a long tradition of judgments on the passing of time; when one uses the word process, one joins the company of technocrats for whom such judgments are a waste of time.

To know a process is not to know its end, but rather to be capable of manipulating it, and this means becoming a part of it. The computer programmer who bends his thoughts to the workings of a machine in order to participate in and direct those workings knows this truth about process: to know it and to act upon it is to be a part of it. So the programmer thinks through the process; he thinks like a computer to effect computers, and in so doing adds himself to that process.³⁸

Processes tend towards integration. Research processes are integrated with industrial processes with commercial processes with educational processes, etc., etc..³⁹ Regardless of what goods are produced (and indeed, nothing leaves

³⁸ For an excellent autobiographical account of these demands written by a software engineer, see Ellen Ullman, Close to the Machine: Technophilia and its Discontents (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997). Here is Ullman's description of the weird sense of time she experiences:

I have no idea what time it is. There are no windows in this office and no clock, only the blinking red LED display of a microwave, which flashes 12:00, 12:00, 12:00, 12:00. Joel and I have been programming for days. We have a bug, a stubborn demon of a bug. So the red pulse no-time feels right, like a read-out of our brains, which have somehow synchronized themselves at the same blink rate. [p. 24]

³⁹ A rigorous and comprehensive account of such interrelations is only possible through contemporary economics (specifically the sub-discipline of econometrics), which is distinguished by its refusal to discuss 'real' value, and by its positive claim that all value is relative- reducible to exchange value. Incidentally, the Soviet Union chose a 19th century economic system which operated under the assumption of real value (=labour value), whereas the Americans had an economic system based on exchange value. The Americans did not have to haul around the dead metaphysical weight of real value, whereas the Soviets did, and this was an advantage for the former. Their economic system was more efficient because it was (and

the system), what matters is that the processes are integrated, that they continue to function as processes. Heidegger writes, "everything is functioning and... functioning drives us ever more to even further functioning..."⁴⁰ In functionality we see a completely self-referential criterion for value. This is not an imposed standard, but rather an immanent drive- a process moved from within, a movement that moves itself.

Symptomatic of this drive to process is Buckminster Fuller's popular but stupid book, operating manual for spaceship Earth. In it we see the desire to replace a conception of Earth as a given with a world-view that is at once dynamic and all-embracing. The Earth is no longer considered as an essential limit to us as humans, but as a vehicle- a spaceship- for our exploration of open-ended potentiality. In his 'manual' he urges that we quit teaching our children in schools about eternity and infinity, that the concepts are "meaningless" and "simplistic", and "preclude possible discovery of the significance of our integrated experiences."⁴¹ If, as the platitude goes, 'children are our most valuable resource', then we must put them to work efficiently, not wasting their energy on useless speculation, unless it is the kind of open playfulness that could be made to effect a 'paradigm shift'. Curiously, the drive to complete freedom reverses on itself: out of the dynamism of the concept of 'spaceship earth' comes a rigid sense of enclosure and the demand for social utility- every one has to be part of the process.

is) a closed, self-referential system: capitalist economics is purely about process, keeping capital flowing, along with the cycles of production and consumption.

But even with this difference, Heidegger is correct to call the USSR and the US metaphysically the same, [Introduction to Metaphysics, Ralph Manheim (trans.) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) p. 37] as Kojève is correct to call Americans rich Russians [Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, p. 161fn.]. Their different economic systems were different technologies, like VHS and Beta.

⁴⁰ Heidegger, Martin. "Only a God can Save Us" in The Heidegger controversy: A critical reader. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993) p. 105.

⁴¹ Fuller, R. Buckminster. operating manual for spaceship EARTH. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969) p. 22.

Ends do appear within processes, but they are temporary and epiphenomenal to the process itself. The conception of time as process results in both a remarkable intensity and an extreme shortness of attention. This compression of attention is called multi-tasking, and is an important faculty for living in our technological cosmos. Young people are especially good at it, having not been trained in the habit of prolonged, singular attention, as older generations were. The ruling technological elite has also acquired this habit, plugging themselves into a network of interconnected processes and people to gain power within that network. This requires of them that they move their attention constantly from one process to the next, keeping them all in motion even in temporary absences of attention. The multi-tasker moves from one phone conversation to another on hold (the 'hold' feature has become common on household as well as business phones), while network browser, email manager, streaming music player and word processing applications run simultaneously. The function of the multi-tasker is to keep all of these processes going, while linking them into one fluid process, like a plate-spinner.⁴² The appearance of stability is grounded in constant motion; ends arise out of process.

Apart from the ends that a process produces, there is the process itself. Grant turns to Nietzsche as one who thinks most comprehensively about time as process and who in so doing "lays bare the fate of technical man."⁴³ When one turns to Nietzsche, one turns to what is all around us: "Indeed some of what

⁴² ...or like a nomad. The shift from end-oriented action to process-oriented function matches the shifting ways of nomads, who do not invest their energy in the cultivation of one spot, but move from one place to the next. This comparison has been suggested by Tsugio Makimoto and David Manners in their book Digital Nomad (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), but like most techno-hype, they go too far. The authors imagine the entire population of the globe as entrepreneurial nomads, linked by cell-phones and laptops. This is a ridiculous proposition, given that many of us do have attachments to places and commitments to people that limit our wanderings.

⁴³ Time as History. p. 44.

Nietzsche says will seem obvious today, so that the response may easily be: 'what's so new?'"⁴⁴ There is an obviousness which even technocrats can grasp.

Grant writes, "In the conceptions of history now prevalent among those 'creative' men who plan mastery of the planet, changing the world becomes ever more an end in itself."⁴⁵ The work of technocrats, like the work of most human beings today, is dedicated to this continual creation. This dedication prohibits the consideration of ends that transcend this world of becoming. Our common-sense indifference to ends which cannot be produced by human beings, and so made a part of a continual process of creation (and destruction) is the pale reflection of the massive critique which Nietzsche levied against the idea of eternal goods, against Christianity and Platonism. For Nietzsche, goods are values, and values are not eternal, but they come into being through the destruction of pre-existing values and the creation of new ones. In immersing ourselves in a world of becoming- of continuous destruction and creation- we affirm ourselves as destroyers and creators of the world.

The creator must also be a destroyer because past creations impose an appearance of permanence upon the world, and this must be destroyed before a new creation can be born. The past must be periodically abolished in to make room for a new birth. Hence to truly give oneself over to potentiality and to becoming means also to divest oneself of the trust in the continual improvement of the world, a trust known to us as progress. Not only does such a trust obscure the dual character of technological man as a creator/destroyer by promising a continuous accumulation of reason, freedom, and equality, but it also ferries in a conception of an end standing at the end of history, and outside

⁴⁴ Time as History. p. 25.

⁴⁵ Time as History. p. 19.

of time as process. This end can only act as a restriction on our potential for change.

Grant repeats this again and again in his writings: technological man is unique in his veneration of the potential over the actual. To realize these potentialities we must, in Grant's words, "admit the absence of any permanence in terms of which change can be measured or limited or defined. In Nietzsche's ironic phrase, we are required to accept the finality of becoming."⁴⁶ We must abandon ourselves to the continually changing currents of time in order to unleash our powers as world-destroyers/creators. We are sustained in this not by some vision of a future good and the anticipation of our progress towards it, but rather by a cycle of destruction and creation. Technological man remakes his world, and himself, constantly, returning to a state of pure, open-ended potential.

iv) *time as potential*

The extreme orientation of technological man towards potentiality represents a kind of fatalism, in much the same way that the fatalism of mythic man generates a radical urge to recreate himself in the image of the gods. Both give themselves over to the pure potential and power inherent in the original moment; both recreate the world and themselves repeatedly. Mythic man is fated to repeat the work of the gods in his creation of the cosmos. Our fate is similar. As we took the power of the atom- the power of total life and death- for

⁴⁶ Time as History, p. 27. This love of fate- *amor fati*- is something in Nietzsche that Grant cannot comprehend. Why would one love something unless it is good? [George Grant Reader, pp. 282-3.] Though Grant enters into our fate in thought, and perhaps even accepts our fate, he does not love it. This is one reason why the notion of deprivation is so central to Grant's thought, and why Grant's encounter with technology is such an anguished one. In beholding our fate as technological beings, we are cut off from the love of our own, through which love of the Good must appear to us.

our own, we then realized our extreme freedom and open-ended potential. This radical freedom has the character of a driving fate. Oppenheimer's comment, singled out by Grant, expresses the technological imperative as our fate: "If something is sweet, you have to go ahead with it."⁴⁷ Grant adds that, "The new technologies are taking us into realms of making which occur as it were necessarily, that is, almost outside consideration of human good."⁴⁸ Ellul makes the same point in specific relation to the atomic bomb, arguing that the 'good' and 'bad' possibilities of atomic power come to us together, neutral applications made possible by a necessary development. He calls Jacques Soustelle's remark "Since it was possible, it was necessary" a "master phrase for all technological evolution."⁴⁹ At the height of potentiality, perfect freedom becomes its opposite.

The unleashing of pure potential- to make ourselves and our world- requires that the past be leveled out. The past is at once erased as a given limit, and transformed into a potential resource. The leveling out of time has this dual sense of destruction and creation: in Mircea Eliade's terms, to be examined further in the next part of this essay, linear time is "abolished" to make way for a new, authentically original creation. An original thought or deed is unrelated to the events that predate it. It cannot be considered as a mere modification of a presently existing set of conditions, but it turns over those conditions; it is a 'paradigm shift'; it abolishes the profane time of the past to make room for something new in the most radical sense of the term.

This is a version of progress beyond progress. Technological change in the twenty-first century is not the work of settlers plowing away at the edges of nature and fighting to hold that frontier, but it is done within the context of an

⁴⁷ Grant, George. "Knowing and Making" *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* Series IV, xii (1975): pp. 59-67. Delivered to the Royal Society, June, 1974. p. 415 in The George Grant Reader.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ The Technological Society. p. 99.

integrated field, within which changes of the part must be matched by changes of the whole. Our world is constantly changing, and not in a piecemeal fashion. Like the seemingly traditional mythic societies, our technological cosmos may not seem to change appreciably, but reconfigures itself annually and even daily with a striking sameness.

* * * * *

The veneration of pure, open-ended potential goes along with a repetitive or cyclical conception of time. These cyclical conceptions of time are apparent in the governing mentality. This mentality is well expressed in contemporary economics, which is based upon a cyclical conception of time and directed towards an open-ended future. Economists refer to business cycles, but chart these cycles not with a perfect circle, but as oscillating curves. Technology is the independent axis, and, in economic terms, is interchangeable with time. Yet the passing of time and the development of technology do not mean steady increase in production, but this rises and falls:

⁵⁰ This graph assumes limitless growth within the rise and fall of business cycles. This is a common assumption within growth economics. Even decreases in productivity are described as 'negative growth'. [Chiang, Alpha. Fundamental Methods of Mathematical Economics. 3rd ed. (Singapore: McGraw-Hill, 1984) pp. 280-281.] Though productivity is limited by scarce resources, the open-endedness of technological development relieves this limit. For non-

Technology is the independent variable in this graph. Technology refers only to itself and to its own unlimited potential, while production is dependent upon it. Any conception of ends must arise from within this potentiality. The ends- for instance the growth in gross domestic product- stand out as an orientation for our thinking, but are dependent upon technology and grounded in change. Our momentary focal points for orientation are not fixed standards set apart from change, but are epiphenomenal to change. As the most influential theorist of business cycles, Joseph Schumpeter, writes, the changes inherent to economic processes, "are theoretically and practically, economically and culturally, much more important than the economic stability upon which all analytical attention has been concentrated for so long."⁵¹ (Here he refers both to the emphasis on equilibrium analysis in his day, and to the orientation towards 'natural' conditions of exchange prominent in the classical economics of John Stuart Mill,⁵² David Ricardo,⁵³ and Karl Marx.⁵⁴) Schumpeter and almost all conventional, contemporary economists do away with the question of 'real' as opposed to market value. There is only marginal analysis, which is concerned

conventional treatments of the question of growth in economics that do not contain the assumption of limitless growth, see Mancur Olson and Hans H. Landsberg, The No Growth Society (New York: Norton, 1973).

⁵¹ Schumpeter, Joseph A.. The Theory of Economic Development: An Inquiry into Profits, Capital, Credit, Interest, and the Business Cycle. Redvers Opie (trans.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) p. 255.

⁵² Mill, John Stewart. Principles of Political Economy with some of their Applications to Social Philosophy. W.J. Ashley (ed.) (London: Longman & Green, 1917) pp. 478-482. Mill compares market value or exchange value with natural value, the later of which depends upon both use value and labour value.

⁵³ Ricardo, David. On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation. Piero Sraffa (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962) pp. 11-66; 88-92. Ricardo looks for a relation between market prices and natural prices.

⁵⁴ Marx, Karl. Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production. Vol. I. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (trans.) (Moscow: Progress Publishers, ____) pp. 173-192. Marx distinguishes market value and labour value, the difference between which is surplus value- the measure of capitalist exploitation.

with how much more someone will pay for one more unit of something.

Arithmetic is replaced by calculus as the summing up of real value is replaced by the mathematics of change. Economic phenomena are understood as being constantly in motion, with any apparent stability epiphenomenal to change. Equilibrium conditions may exist, though they do not correspond to 'natural conditions or 'real' value.

In this manner, Schumpeter argues that, "in their special way both the rise and the fall of families and firms are much more characteristic of the capitalist economic system, of its culture and its results, than any of the things that can be observed in a society which is stationary in the sense that its processes reproduce themselves at a constant rate."⁵⁵ One does not have to trust Schumpeter's argument for the broad importance of the theory of business cycles and continuous change: our stocks are our liturgy. Through this common orientation, we are united in a turning towards change itself. And, as Schumpeter notes, this change reproduces itself; that is, it is pure process. In terms of time in general, technology is without given ends; or to say the same thing, technology is process; or similarly, technology is pure potential.

Out of this process there may arise ideals that glimmer for a moment to justify and shed light upon the process, but these fall down as sparks into the fire out of which they arose. Ours is like the mythic cosmos of Heraclitus, where justice and injustice are interwoven, and where cyclical change keeps all things together:

⁵⁵ The Theory of Economic Development. p. 255.

As all things change to fire,
and fire exhausted
falls back into things,
the crops are sold
for money spent on food.⁵⁶

What could be a better description of our global capitalist economy? Time as process keeps the cosmos as a closed circle, a circle of our own making. Barry Cooper makes this same point about technology, but suggests a difference in that while for both Heraclitus and us the world is in constant motion, "we, unlike Heraclitus, are convinced that both the river and human beings change."⁵⁷ Cooper implies that while nature was essentially changeful for Heraclitus, we are in an even more precarious position because, "It is as if we were travellers through a landscape that is altered as a landscape by the fact of our passage."⁵⁸ However, this distinction is not supported by the text, and our situation is much closer to Heraclitus' and to myth than Cooper admits. It is good to remember the original:

Just as the river where I step
is not the same, and is,
so I am, as I am not.⁵⁹

We and our world are changing, and it is hard to know where to step to find solid ground, since we are at the center of that process.

⁵⁶ 22B90. The Collected Wisdom of Heraclitus. Brooks Haxton (trans.). (New York: Penguin, 2001)

⁵⁷ Cooper, Barry. Action into Nature: An Essay on the Meaning of Technology. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991) p. 102.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ 22B49a

Section 3: Our technological cosmos

i) *introduction*

It has become increasingly common to hear that we are living in an entirely new world. More precisely, I say that our perception of the world, and in particular our sense of space has changed. Here I attempt to answer the challenge set forth by Frederic Jameson in his influential essay on post-modernism in architecture:

...we ourselves, the human subjects who happen into this new space, have not kept pace with that evolution; there has been a mutation in the object unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent change in the subject. We do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace, as I will call it, in part because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space I have called the space of high modernism.⁶⁰

Jameson defines this new post-modern perception of space- hyperspace- in relation to the high modern perception of space. In architectural terms, the space of high modernism is the glass and steel order of Le Corbusier's U.N. Secretariat Building: a transparent, expansive world. In philosophical/mathematical terms, this is the Cartesian space of x, y, & z coordinates. However, the post-modern perception of space has little in common with what it replaces. Rather than transparent, the replacement is murky; rather than expansive, it is compressed; rather than discrete points abstractly connected, we perceive the collapse of distance and the possibility of identity across distance. Instead of glass skyscrapers we have McDonalds decorated inside as swimming pools. This is not 'hyperspace'- an extension of modern space. Rather, this is

⁶⁰ Jameson, Frederic. "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" in Rethinking Architecture. Neil Leach (ed.) (London: Routledge, 1997) p. 242.

space collapsed inward on itself. This is the space of myth, where the distances among things are abolished, and where all events take place at the center.

Technology encircles the globe in a web of human creations. We inhabit a technological cosmos in which space is compressed. Everything is connected to everything else as processes are joined for maximum efficiency. The whole planet is transformed into a resource for this development, such that not even nature can serve as an exit and reference point. Nature is just a potential resource, whether for our industry or amusement. An old, disenchanted woodsman⁶¹ told me that it is no longer worthwhile to go into the bush, because planes fly over it; nor is it worthwhile to look at the stars or moon, because the stars may be satellites and there's garbage on the moon. We live in a closed circle of our own making, with ourselves at the center.

Although our technological cosmos is integrated, it is not an entirely homogenous field. Thinkers such as Kojève were informed by the high-modern conception of space when they imagined a world in which everyone and everywhere was the same. In his presentation of the Universal and Homogenous State (UHS), Kojève still conceived of space abstractly and uniformly. In its current form, however, this is not so. Though we all inhabit the same cosmos, we are not all the same, nor are all of the earth's places interchangeable. Africa is not North America, nor will it be in any foreseeable future. Africans may watch the same television programs as we do, but we are richer than they are. This is so because we live at the center of the world, and as we look to ourselves the world looks at us. This 'centricism' is not limited to

⁶¹ Walter McFarlane was a painter by profession. His "Indian Grandmother & Child at Tea Fire" is on display at the Sioux Lookout Public Library; much of his work belongs to private collections. After fighting in first world war, Walter abandoned a life of privilege and left the United States for the Canadian bush, to travel by canoe and dogsled over seasons, to work as a fire-tower ranger, and to paint. McFarlane's paintings are realistic portrayals of life in the bush. In their depiction of Indian life especially they serve as reminders of something lost to us- an experience of the pure givenness of nature.

North America.⁶² The United States is a center of our technological cosmos, as is Britain, as is Japan. And in potential any place can be a center. Our technological cosmos has many centers.

In this section I will first look at Kojève's idea of the Universal and Homogenous State as a model for our technological cosmos. Although Kojève argues that we are living at the end of history, he suggests that this end in time needs to be extended into space.⁶³ However, according to his own self-imposed limits, he can say nothing about what space is, only time. While he inherits the habit of thinking of space in Cartesian terms, as a 'Universal' and 'Homogenous' field in which distinct events occur, he cannot account for this habit. Nor can he account for why he defines our world in political terms, as a 'State', when by his own argument politics and states are ended along with history.

Kojève's Universal and Homogenous State is corrected when it is understood in terms of a potential- a real potential that determines how our world is shaped now, not an indefinite ideal for some future world order. This correction is made through an emphasis of the importance of Heidegger's idea of standing reserve (*Bestand*) as the active potential that binds together our technological cosmos. This is a potential that does not have to be realized to be real. Rather, the potential for anything to be called upon as a resource is enough to abolish space as the distance between places. It is not that all of the inhabitants of the earth have to be on their cell-phones talking continuously, but rather that a cell-phone could ring anywhere. This active potential compresses space.

⁶² The explosion of the term '-centricism' within academic discourse is symptomatic of the technological drive to compress space. Anything can become a center. Hence we have ethno-centricism, logo-centricism, euro-centricism, etc.. As one can look to any idea and see the world collapse into it, so too can any place become a center of the world.

⁶³ Kojève, Alexandre. Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. James H. Nichols, Jr. (trans.) (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1969) p. 160fn..

Finally, I look at the most extreme reactions against our technological cosmos, and show that, far from rupturing its integrity, they confirm its order. I look at Hardt and Negri's 'new barbarians' and their 'affirmative violence' as the chaos that confirms order. The globalization protestor calls forth the riot police, as the riot police call forth the protestors. Or similarly, the technological ordering of the globe gives rise to terrorism, which gives rise to even stricter technological ordering. In this exchange lies the mythic cycle of destruction and creation that holds the technological cosmos together, regenerating it even in the absence of any purpose.

ii) *trouble in the Universal and Homogenous State*

Kojève's use of the term 'the Universal and Homogenous State' (UHS)⁶⁴ is in some ways unfortunate, for although it is the best consummate description of the world we inhabit, it carries along with it the trappings of a rationalism which are, by Kojève's own description, alien to our technological cosmos. It makes sense as a transitional term, but it is not of the same language which would describe our post-historical world. Such a description would have to rely upon myth, and specifically upon the idea of a compact space having multiple centers, all the same. This concept, impossible to the rational mind, is central to myth.

⁶⁴ The convention of referring to Kojève's endstate as the UHS is symptomatic of our slide into the mythic language of signs. Acronyms are a widespread example of our technological sign language (the subject of the last section of this part), in which articulate expressions are compacted. Lacking the symbolic meaning of its constitutive words, in an acronym the thing referred to is identical with its sign. For example the UN is just the UN; one does not think about its constitutive parts, but it appears as a kind of monolith (effective or not). Of course, we can still translate acronyms into normal language, but increasingly this step becomes unnecessary as speech and writing are moved by the drive to efficiency.

Kojève himself admits the limits of the term, especially inasmuch as it describes a state. He writes that, "the State, and Man himself, are born from the Fight, which presupposes a *difference* and cannot take place in universal *homogeneity*".⁶⁵ Because the UHS is universal, there is no external enemy to war with; because it is homogenous, without internal divisions along the lines of class, race, or ethnicity, there are no civil wars or revolutions. Any outbursts, any attempts at war or revolution are considered criminal and are treated through policing. Though man's political being is necessarily tied to the state, which is the vehicle for his universal recognition as a free and equal being, once that recognition is secured and the fight over, both man and the state properly so called disappear. The state may be preserved within the UHS, as art, love, and play remain for beast/god-like post-historical man, but they lose their essential character. Without difference art is purely mimetic, love is mutual masturbation, and play is purposeless (i.e. non- pedagogical).⁶⁶ Likewise, while states may still exist, they do so within a global context. The appearance of politics may be kept up, but it lacks any historical direction. If conflict occurs, it must subordinate itself to the mythic contest between Light and Darkness, Order and Chaos. There will always be demons hiding in the shadows, and barring the possibility of a complete control of the globe, we are fated to the re-enactment of ritual contests with them.

At this point I depart from Kojève's line of thinking, since it is this complete control that he envisages. However, although the pacification of states

⁶⁵ Introduction... p. 237.

⁶⁶ Darby, Tom. The Feast: Meditations on Politics and Time. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990) p. 190.

may be possible because there is rationality inherent in their constitution as states (in terms of self-interested calculation), there is no way to reason with a last man, a man who thinks he is a mortal god. In The Global Village McLuhan suggests that, "the satellite will body forth new tribal separatists who will make Yasser Arafat seem tame by comparison."⁶⁷ As McLuhan prophesies, these new terrorists will be trained within the west, but will see no place for themselves within society. They will find the patterns of integration through electronic media disembodiment and alienating, and will react against that system for no other reason than to destroy it and restore their sense of reality. "A terrorist will kill you to see if you are real."⁶⁸

There is no political purpose animating what Walter Laqueur dubs "postmodern terrorism".⁶⁹ Its aims, if we can call them that, are to destroy the global technological order by driving out the capitalist market, transnational policing forces, and consumer culture, and to restore the authenticity or real being of a community from these artificial impositions. However, if there are no discrete state boundaries that would make these purges possible, then the only resort is the wholesale destruction of that order.⁷⁰ This is not at all likely, nor will it be easy to expunge the sentiment that is at the root of this violent reaction.

⁶⁷ McLuhan, Marshall & Powers, Bruce. The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century. (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1989). p. 115.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Laqueur, Walter. "Postmodern Terrorism: New Rules for an Old Game " Foreign Affairs 75 (September/October 1996), 24-36. <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/laqueur.htm> Laqueur focuses on the ineffectiveness of terrorism in achieving political aims, and points to its pervasive millenarianism. Through this lack of definite purpose coupled with a vague sense of penultimate purpose, terrorism returns to the indeterminate potential of the origin, where, in Laqueur's words, "The premodern world and postmodernism meet".

⁷⁰ Or as Tom Darby writes of Kojève's Japanized man, "The Revolt is total, and it is a revolt against the West." [The Feast, p. 182.] It is just this totality that makes the terrorist violence

While integrated efforts to deal with refugee crises will help to stabilize the world in rational terms- restricting population growth and displacement- they will not satisfy the irrational impulse to destruction.

The curious aspect of this is that the attempted wholesale destruction of the global technological order may not be bad for that order, but may serve to regenerate it. In the absence of a historical goal- the vision of progress- the contest between order and chaos may hold our technological cosmos together. Indeed, the terrorist attacks on the center of the global technological order- on the United States- have had the effect of further integrating that order. The terror awakens us to the necessity of reconciliation and of integration. Progress as a lock-step advancement is replaced by a process which repeatedly folds back upon itself to retrieve a sympathetic sense of attachment which will bind the global community together. This sympathetic sense is experienced in the violent ecstasy of the battle between order and chaos.

This is not a glass and steel world order, nor an entirely peaceful one; rather, the light depends on the darkness, and peace depends on violence. As Tom Darby writes of terrorist politics, of the conflict between godly men and beastly men, Japanized and Americanized man, "there is a unity in the simultaneous experience of contradiction, yet no synthesis or unity of the phenomena experienced."⁷¹ The mythic cosmogony, with its ritualized contest

futile. It can only end in death, a death that, paradoxically, integrates the technological cosmos even further.

⁷¹ The Feast, p. 213.

between order and chaos, explains unity between opposites where reason cannot.⁷²

Arthur Kroker expresses this same irrational unity between order and chaos when he writes:

A dream of pure operability - transparent, fluid, circulating, a smooth semiurgy of data flows, digital reality is haunted by its own approaching catastrophe. Digital reality wants to impose the positive law of the Code, but human reality will not be denied. Human reality always contains a hidden, but powerful, reflex towards the rejection of the Code. A violent and primitive impulse of rejection that works less by open refusal than by excess, parody, and delirious intensity. ... these are natural antibodies secreted by

⁷² This mythic understanding has entered into the contemporary imagination. Here's how CNN correspondent Nic Robertson tells the story of the U.S. military action in Afghanistan:

Not far from Tora Bora and the White Mountains, local history has it that Buddha once flew here to fight a dragon in a cave. Mythology tells us that the dragon was merely the spirit of a disgruntled cowherder who committed suicide. To look around here now, perhaps little has changed: fewer cows, more sheep and goats maybe, little vestige though of the thousands of stupas, Buddhism's places of worship that dotted the landscape for centuries, when this place was an essential stop on any Buddhist trail of relics.

Of caves and bad spirits though something permeates the ages: the common thread of Good versus Evil, transcending the centuries. The difference today: those that flew here to fight their demon came from the West, not the East. They delivered their blow with a fiery vengeance that echoed up and down the hillsides. Caves billowed smoke, although not from any fire-breathing dragon. The white rock that makes these mountains split asunder by a power unrecognizable two centuries ago, never mind two millennia. When the dust settled no trace of the dragon, only a land loaded with hate and bad intentions. The modern day's dragon's henchmen, disciples of their master's suicide plan, herded down the hillside, and paraded for the chroniclers of the day. Had Buddha left such a recording, would we now play it on our world history cd's?

But history here is still in the making. These modern knights ride out daily to search caves that appear devoid of dragons. The best of the local fighters seem sure the bad spirits have been driven away. So when this story is told two millennia from now, will it still be a simple parable of Good versus Evil? Who will have triumphed, and how? Impossible to say. Likely though this chronicler's tale will seem as ancient, and hard to fathom, as the tales of Buddha's exploits, two thousand years ago.

Nic Robertson, CNN, near Tora Bora, Afghanistan.

[transcript (my own) from CNN online news, streaming video;
<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2001/trade.center/multimedia.invest.html#2nd>;
 Wednesday, January 2, 2002]

the cyber-body as ways of protecting itself against the sterility of dead digital codes. And ironically, digital reality requires this moment of excess for its very survival. But, as in ancient myth, by absorbing the anti-codes of Net reality, by drinking deeply of this song of slow suicide and delirious speed, digital reality only hastens its own disappearance.⁷³

Kroker's own strategic affinity for these reflex rejections is not explained in his account, which portrays these impulses as strictly immanent, as containable, and even as necessary to the functioning of the system as a whole. This system cannot be explained just as static rules of order- what Kroker calls the Code- but must include its moving elements, the reactions against from within that contribute to its biological dynamism. Without these internal reactions, Kroker is right- the system would die. He suggests a lesson from myth- that "song of slow suicide and delirious speed"- that reconciles opposites: speed and slowness converge, and technology justifies its continued existence by occasioning its own reflex rejection. In the absence of a historical purpose, in the absence of progress, the order of the technological cosmos requires the substance and justification given to it by the chaotic reactions from within. The global technological order does not die, nor does it exhaust itself through the totalizing application of static form. Rather, it keeps moving- even without purpose to guide it.

It is a mistake to think of our technological cosmos as a static state, if by 'state' we understand Hobbes' outline of a centralized set of institutions gathered together under a single sovereign. This mistake leads to the false conclusion that our world will be arranged along the lines of a global totalitarian state, ruling over the world as the head rules over the body and its organs. This is Ellul's

⁷³ Kroker, Arthur & Marilouise. Digital Delirium. (Montréal: New World Perspectives, 1997)

conclusion. For instance, Ellul repeatedly insists that technology is the drive to the "one best way", or similarly, that efficiency necessarily results in a consummate singularity. If we can judge by the world in which we live, this has not come to pass. Today, rather, technology and diversity go together. For the same reasons that global capitalism doesn't require centralized control over production and consumption, technology is not "rigid in its nature"⁷⁴ nor can it be said that it, "proceeds directly to its end",⁷⁵ but its power is found precisely in its flexibility and lack of determinate teleology. Global capitalism does not require economic plans administered by a state, as Ellul says it must.⁷⁶ The state as a total, systemic integrity of military, economic and social institutions under one sovereign is no longer an accurate model for describing our world.

The state, as Hobbes best described it, is a great machine,⁷⁷ and to work it must have its sovereignty centralized within one governing organ. Our world, unlike Hobbes', and unlike the world Ellul imagines, is not constituted mechanically, but electronically, and has many nodes of control, servo-mechanisms through which adjustments are continually and automatically made. Any place or person can be a center. Great powers do exist within the technological cosmos, but not as independent agents capable of setting its course. Rather, they are even more tightly bound to its cycles than the less powerful, for example the CEO has little choice but to seek profits for his corporation. In 'politics' too the range of choices is limited, and while the private person may be able to make choices and form judgments, in public life our choices are highly

p. xiv.

⁷⁴ The Technological Society, p. 193.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

simplified: as the current president of the United States has repeatedly said, one is either with the system or against it.

This massive uniformity in public life occurs simultaneously with a shift towards decentralization. We have seen this in military command structures, with the design of the nodal-structured Internet for nuclear defence, in business, as corporations such as GM fragmented themselves into smaller, more efficient, competitive companies, and in the widespread privatization of public utilities. Ellul insists that decentralization is "purely utopian"⁷⁸ because it cannot provide a stable basis for planning for the future, and hence, for progress. According to this view, the many institutions that make up our technological society need an organ of consciousness overlooking them, joining them together in one common purpose and providing the stability which this common purpose requires to be realized.

Centralization, and not decentralization- or the creation of many centers- has become utopian. A centralized, global government- along the lines of a United Nations with a standing army and executive powers- would not be efficient. Having many centers to the technological cosmos incorporates a redundancy which provides for more stability than a single center could. Only by having centers everywhere, at which the process is monitored and controlled, and thus power exerted, can the system as a whole attain the truly automatic and self-augmenting characters that Ellul says it must.⁷⁹ Overseeing intelligence is embedded throughout in the system, such that its self-consciousness is not detached and transcendent- 'Big Brother' watching- but itself a part of the system

⁷⁷ Leviathan. p. 81.

⁷⁸ The Technological Society. p. 194.

and strictly immanent. Only then can the system become a closed circle, composed of various powers, all joined together.

If everything is necessary, every machine, computer, event, person, and thing connected to all others, as the technological and mythical sensibilities inform us, then the cosmos, as the totality of such interrelations, is both perfectly ordered and unintelligible, since no principle of order exists outside of these many, moving interrelations. No one can know how all things are interrelated, as, for example, no one can know the connections between all the nodes on the Internet. Knowing the technological cosmos, in the sense of standing apart and looking on, seeing in one view, is both unnecessary and impossible.

The openness to diverse purposes inherent in having multiple centers makes the system as a whole more adaptive, and this flexibility, rather than a machine-stamped 'one best way', is now seen as the route to efficiency. Ellul represents technology as being completely suppressive of spontaneity; one thinks of the anti-globalization movement's carnival protests as expressive of the same sentiment today. However, even the latter have their place within the system, since, like the terrorist bombings, they serve to accelerate the process of integration.

⁷⁹ The Technological Society. p. 86.

This poster had widespread distribution prior to the Québec City protests against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) meetings on April 20, 2001. One can guess that the poster aroused investigation from CISIS and the CIA after 9/11. The poster symbolically anticipates the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York. The global technological order is attacked at its center, and replaced with spontaneous, ecstatic, and completely undetermined chaos- the delirium of the carnival.

There may be liberal compromise and inclusion, as when then President Clinton came down from Olympus to concede the concerns of labour groups during the Seattle protests, but this has only a minor function, and mainly confirms that no tribe can afford to alienate its members, especially its youth.⁸⁰ In this sense the 'corruption' of protest by either compromise or hypocrisy is insignificant. As an uneasy bedfellow for liberal protestors, Michel Foucault argues that, "resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real, nor is it inexorably frustrated through being the compatriot of power. It exists all the more by being in the same place as power; hence, like power, resistance is multiple and can be integrated in global strategies."⁸¹ Power exists for power and for its continual, spontaneous regeneration. This spontaneity can exist alongside the global integration of power. Ellul admits that within the closed circle of technology there may be an animating principle, a source of

⁸⁰ This is also Grant's re-considered appraisal of the significance of the Vietnam protests, which he had originally called just "safety valves". [Technology and Empire, p. 75] However, it is a mistake to think that such protest can resist technology and its political adjunct, globalization, but rather, everyone must find their place inside. This can mean a different globalization; but even if this is so, it remains to think what it means to live within such a world.

⁸¹ Foucault, Michel. Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977. Colin Gordon (ed.) (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) p. 142.

spontaneity; indeed, if technology is to be self-augmenting, there must be. He intuits this when he writes: "A whole new kind of spontaneous action is taking place here, and we know neither its laws nor its ends. In this sense it is possible to speak of the 'reality' of technique- with its own substance, its own particular mode of being, and a life independent of our power of decision."⁸² These new laws are really old ones: the repeated contest between chaos and order. One sees globalization illuminated at the moment when the police batons hit the crowds. Ellul writes: "Order receives our complete approval: even when we are hostile to the police, we are, by a strange contradiction, partisans of order."⁸³

This is only strange to one accustomed the linear, rational thought, as Ellul's hyper-rational distopia shows him to be. To mythic man though this confrontation goes perfectly well with a sense of order. The cosmos is composed of chaos and order and is born of their strain against each other. The ordering principle is called upon to reveal itself, and chaos comes out of the shadows to add its vigor to the system. All of this is included within technology. "Technique thus reveals itself at once destroyer and creator, and no one wishes or is able to master it."⁸⁴ The crowd gathers together as the bureaucrats hurry along with their work, both under the apprehension of crisis. Our attention as spectators is focussed for a moment on their meeting- the summit/ demonstration- where the powers of the technological cosmos are gathered together to create our world anew.

⁸² The Technological Society, p. 93.

⁸³ The Technological Society, p. 103.

⁸⁴ The Technological Society, p. 85.

iii) *Standing Reserve*

Both technological man and his technological cosmos are constituted in terms of their potentiality. However, to say that the UHS can be known only in terms of potential does not mean then that it is a distant goal. All of the resources on our planet do not have to be in use for the UHS to be a reality; rather, the potential of their use is enough. The UHS is a present reality because all of the resources of the globe- both human and non-human- can be put to use, integrated into a global system. Similarly, all of the people of the globe are potentially free and equal. Neither of these potentials will come into being in a determinate sense. If all the resources of the globe were put to use then the earth would explode like a small sun. If all of the world's people became free and equal then something similar might happen in global society. But now we move into science fiction, and beyond a description of our world and ourselves. Resources are available for potential use, and are left in waiting, on standing reserve as Heidegger argues. The fact that they are available for use, that their potential energy is linked to the global technological order as a whole, is enough to call the UHS a reality.

Actualities, by contrast, are devoid of reality. They are contingencies to be overcome, given 'stuff' to be manipulated, potentialities to be discovered. Our actual world for us has a provisional quality: our houses are tents along the road to mastery of the planet,⁸⁵ and our artifacts are temporary measures that can be

⁸⁵ I have taken up this thesis in my master's research essay, "A Meditation on the Home", in which I explore Nietzsche and Heidegger's argument that homelessness is a condition coeval with modernity through an examination of modern architecture, specifically the architecture and writings of Le Corbusier. Le Corbusier argues that the home is not a given for humans, but rather that the house is a machine to live in. [Towards a New Architecture]. Frederick

recycled - composted into the future. Actualities are less real because they represent exhausted potential. As such, the actual exercises little power over technological man, except inasmuch as it may contain a hidden potential.

It helps if we understand Kojève's Universal and Homogenous State in terms of potential, but once again, we have to be careful in what we mean by this. We should not think of the UHS as an ideal that is progressively- though always incompletely- realized in the world. This is Kant's understanding of history, which moves through enlightenment to progressively realized freedom, yet never reaches an entirely free state.⁸⁶ Freedom for Kant is always reserved from phenomenal reality, and never becomes identical with it, but is only hypothetically admitted. Hence the *First Critique* aims to put limits on the realm of phenomena or nature, ordered and law-bound as it is, not only to limit reason to make room for faith,⁸⁷ but for human freedom also. This freedom cannot be known, but it can be thought:⁸⁸ it is preserved outside of knowledge as an ideal. The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, including the categorical imperative, thus takes on the status of a resounding 'as if': one should treat all human beings *as if* they were free subjects. One can perhaps then imagine that real freedoms would result from such treatment. "But freedom is only an Idea, the objective reality which can in no way be shown to accord with natural laws

Etchells (trans.) (London: Butterworth Architecture, 1927)] In a very similar vein, Grant writes; "Even our cities have become encampments along the road to economic mastery." [Technology and Empire. p. 17] Like nomads, all of our constructions are built as tents.

⁸⁶ See for example "What is Enlightenment?" [Kant, Immanuel. Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals & What is Enlightenment? Lewis White Beck (trans.) (New York: MacMillan, 1990) pp. 83-90]

⁸⁷ Kant, Immanuel. Critique of Pure Reason. Norman Kemp Smith (trans.) (London: Macmillan, 1933) p. 29.

⁸⁸ Critique of Pure Reason. p. 28.

or to be in any possible experience."⁸⁹ As Kojève observes, this hypothetical status is extended to the *Third Critique* also, such that Kant's theory of judgement, "is valid only in the mode of 'as if,'"⁹⁰. Because Kojève understands humans essentially and wholly in terms of their freedom, and since this freedom necessarily realizes itself through the transformation of the given world, we cannot understand the UHS as a potential in this Kantian sense, as the incremental movement towards an ideal. The UHS must be total, and it must be real.

How can we understand this then? Though we may believe that everyone should be free, not everyone is. There are manifest inequalities both abroad and within the 'developed world' which suggest that development or the drive to human freedom from the exigencies of need is an ongoing struggle, much as Kant says it is. If we accept this, then the UHS is little different from Kant's 'Land of Perpetual Peace' - just an ideal, a utopia, a nowhere land. However, in a curious footnote to the Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, Kojève writes that although when he first thought of the inhabitants of the post-historical era- re-animalized, mythic man- he thought of them as prospects for the future "(more or less near)"⁹¹, in 1948 he realized that the UHS "was already a present, here and now."⁹² History was over, and its consequences, realized first by the vanguard who were at the front of its battles- the French revolution, the Battle of Jena, the independence of Togo, the communization of China- had only to be extended in space.

⁸⁹ Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals. p. 77.

⁹⁰ Introduction.... p. 128.

⁹¹ Introduction.... p. 160 fn..

⁹² *ibid.*

The problem with Kojève's account is that he preserves a rational understanding of space as an unbroken field, that is, as Cartesian space, as space that is homogenous and universal. According to Kojève, Space is nothing more than given Nature, and is unknowable unless it is negated, transformed into something else. The cumulative effects of these transformations surround us—together they constitute our technological cosmos. But our way of thinking about space has changed now that the history has ended. Technology has us think in mythic terms, not rational ones. Thus we begin to look at the world not as passive 'stuff' to be overcome through action, but as a beneficent order to be enjoyed as it is given to us.

So, the world is here for us. It does not matter whether one is a technophile salivating over the newest iMac design, dropped like a meteor from heaven, or an environmentalist sermonizing on the inter-relatedness of all processes and places: a change in thinking has taken place, such that space is not thought of as a passive given or an unbroken field in which local events take place. Space is no longer a given, as an extension to be traversed. Rather, technology disposes us to think that everything is connected. It is not enough to respond that corners of the globe are not covered by cell phone networks, or that many people live in abject poverty and will never touch a computer keyboard, because all of this is taken up in the open-ended potential which holds together our cosmos, and which fascinates our minds. This is not a hope for a future order, but rather the intuition of a present global technological order.

Hannah Arendt describes the end of space as given for humans. "Speed has conquered space; and though this conquering process finds its limit at the unconquerable boundary of the simultaneous presence of one body at two

different places, it has made distance meaningless"⁹³. I take her argument further by saying that, according to the technological sensibility, as in the mythic conception of space, it is possible for one thing to be in different places at the same time.

At a fundamental level, modern physics shows experimentally and theoretically proves- in Bell's Theorem-⁹⁴ certain particle pairs to be immediately connected across space. In experiment, spin-paired particles are sent in opposite directions, the spin of one particle is reversed, and the spin of its pair is observed. When the two are a great distance apart the spin of one is changed- then the spin of the other changes immediately. No time is required to pass for a 'message' to be communicated. How this happens is uncertain. But the point is made that Cartesian space- as a continuous, homogenous field that takes time to traverse- is not a given for contemporary physics.⁹⁵

More evidently, in everyday observation one sees the products of modern industry, which are not merely copies or representations of one model, but take on an iconic status, such that each one is the same one. There is identity across distance in the iconography of advertising. It does not matter that the 4th grader scribbles an imperfect likeness of the Nike swoosh! in his notebook, since it is an icon. To use another example from popular culture, there's the most vulgar of advertisements: "There's a little McDonalds in everyone." It is not as if these are unique McDonalds'- little bits of Big Macs. McDonalds is the same thing

⁹³ Arendt, Hannah. The Human Condition. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

⁹⁴ Philosophical consequences of quantum theory : reflections on Bell's theorem. James T. Cushing and Ernan McMullin, (ed.) (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989)

⁹⁵ For a layman's account of the conception of space in contemporary physics from our premier cosmologist, see Stephen Hawking's A brief history of time: from the big bang to black holes (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1988). Though Hawking has subsequently backed away from his 'Big

everywhere. A thing can be simultaneously present at two different places; this radicalizes what Arendt says about the conquering of space. Space collapses into multiple, identical centers.

* * * * *

This idea that the world is there for man, that the technological cosmos can manifest its order anywhere, is expressed in Heidegger's idea of standing reserve (*Bestand*). This is the potential that binds the world together into one whole. What's more, as a potential, it does not have to be actualized to be real, but as potential it is more real than the actual.

Standing reserve is a way of revealing;⁹⁶ specifically, it reveals the world to man. As Grant puts it, technology calls nature before man as an object to give its reasons for being.⁹⁷ Nature is revealed to man as resource. Nature is seen in terms of its potential use: not on its own terms, not according to its own given essence, but in our terms. We see the world as available to us. Hence, we take our place at the center of the world.

Heidegger argues that technology makes man the center of the world. "Man becomes the relational center of that which is as such."⁹⁸ For a thing *to be* it must be known with certainty, as an object brought before man to give its reasons. Through this, man takes his place at the center of all beings, and in a

Bang/ Big Crunch' hypothesis, his conception of space is still a 'contorted' one, and not at all Cartesian.

⁹⁶ "The Question Concerning Technology" p. 320.

⁹⁷ "Interview on Martin Heidegger" in The George Grant Reader, pp. 301-302.

⁹⁸ Heidegger, Martin. "The Age of the World Picture" in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays. William Lovitt (trans.) (New York: Harper Colophon, 1977) p. 128.

sense, as the source of the Being of beings. Of course, this does not mean that humans bring all beings into being, though many if not most of the objects we have dealings with are products of human artifice. However, for a thing to be considered real it must take its place within an order of knowledge set forth by humans. Heidegger describes the totality of such beings, collected together as objects by modern science, as constituting the modern world picture. He means by this very much what I mean by a technological cosmos: all things interrelated and belonging together as a system, gathered as standing reserve. The world is conceived as a whole, available to us because we are at its center.

This does not require that the entire world actually be made available to us. The idea of nature as resource opens the world up to us as a potential. Though this idea certainly informs our practices, the transformation of nature into standing reserve need not result in the transformation of the world into one giant strip mine. Nature reserves and oil pipelines can be used interchangeably to put nature on standing reserve. We put nature on standing reserve primarily in the way we perceive it in relation to ourselves, in looking for its potential uses.

It may not seem at first that 'standing-reserve' could serve to describe a mythic outlook. As Heidegger illustrates the idea, it seems to belong to the crudest kind of dominion over nature- strip mines and hydro-electric dams- in that it sets man against nature. There is indeed a closeness between the idea of challenging forth nature and, for example, Machiavelli's advice to control *Fortuna*- Heidegger's hydro-electric dam and Machiavelli's dykes and dams. However, Heidegger's account of technology in terms of standing reserve is not reducible to the early modern drive to the mastery of nature. Technology is not

just a tool with which man transforms nature into a resource for his use. More essentially, man himself is called upon by technology. Man's attempted mastery of nature only announces this more primordial call: "Only to the extent that man for his part is already challenged to exploit the energies of nature can this revealing that order happen. If man is challenged, ordered, to do this, then does not man belong even more originally than nature within standing-reserve?"⁹⁹ Man does not preserve his autonomy from technology; as Grant writes, "The punishment they inflicted on non-human nature, they had first inflicted on themselves."¹⁰⁰ The essence of technology is bound up with our own essence.

Certainly, the essence of technology does announce itself in the early modern call to the mastery of nature, but according to Heidegger it is a mistake to localize the essence of technology to this moment in the history of Western thought. Heidegger does not limit technology to modernity, with its emphasis on human freedom from the contingencies of nature, but sees it extending back to Plato's emphasis on eidetic stability. It is clear that Plato's focus upon the *eidos* as the source of being does not express the qualities of crude dominion and unbridled anthropomorphism inherent in modern thought. Indeed, numerous restraints against those kinds of excesses are apparent within Plato's teachings. However, according to Heidegger, there is a continuity among them.¹⁰¹ What links them, and what sets apart, for instance, a hydro-electric dam from a windmill, is the possibility of storing nature's energy, of reducing change to

⁹⁹ "The Question Concerning Technology" p. 323.

¹⁰⁰ Technology and Empire. p. 24.

¹⁰¹ The argument is much like that of an environmentalist who traces the technological subjugation of nature to God's words in *Genesis*: "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the

stillness.¹⁰² Changing, multiple appearances come to take on significance only in correspondence to an unchanging form. This form is imposed upon a world of continual becoming. Heidegger makes the startling claim that technology is a continuous imperative reaching back from Plato and on to Nietzsche, that, "Nietzsche's concept of truth displays the last glimmer of the most extreme consequences of the change from truth from the unhiddenness of beings to the correctness of gaze. The change itself is brought about in the determination of the being of beings ... as $\iota\delta\epsilon\alpha$."¹⁰³

According to this presentation, the end of technology as the end of metaphysics represents the complete closing off of human beings to the flux of being. However, it is a mistake to read Heidegger as anti-technological, since this complete concealment of Being as flux prepares the way for something new. There is a point at which instrumental rationality gives way to a new openness, and it is at this juncture that technology and myth meet. As Heidegger says,

..above all, the misunderstanding that I am against technology is to be rejected. I see technology in its essence as a power which challenges man and, in opposition to which, he is not free any longer- that something is being announced here, namely a relationship of Being to man- and that this relationship, which is concealed in the essence of technology, may come to light someday in undisguised form.¹⁰⁴

The purpose of Heidegger's thinking on technology is to establish a free relationship with technology by entering into it. This means relinquishing our

air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." [1.26]

¹⁰² "The Question Concerning Technology" p. 320.

¹⁰³ Heidegger, Martin. "Plato's Doctrine of Truth" in Pathmarks. William McNeil (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 179.

¹⁰⁴ Heidegger, Martin. Martin Heidegger in Conversation. Richard Wisser (ed.), B. Srinivasa Murthy (trans.) (New Dehli: Rakesh Press, 1977) p. 43.

will to mastery over technology, giving ourselves over to technology so that, perhaps, we can punch through the enclosure of technological rationality to a new openness to Being. This means a recovery of the original mythic openness to Being. Heidegger saw within technology the same open-ended potential that fascinates us today: in its final and complete success, technology subverts the very instrumental rationality which made it possible, and returns us to an openness to 'purposeless' flux. As we are integrated with our world, we stop thinking of ourselves as individuals, as spectators, or as subjects in control of technology, but rather as temporary focal points within a complex and changing set of forces. We become involved. We can no longer master the world, because we are mastered by it. Suddenly, through the radicalization of technology, it flips back upon itself, and perfect freedom becomes its opposite. We are held in thrall- in wonder- within a cosmos of our own creation. Most of all, what we wonder at is the pure, open potential of technology.

iv) *the New Barbarians*

The most radical critics of technology are best understood in terms of their radicalization of technology, unleashing hidden potentials within it. In so doing, they effectively purify technology of its attachments to particular classes or interests. Their violent reactions against technology reveal its essence. Heidegger's aim is to punch through technology to something on the other side. In much the same manner, substituting 'Empire' for *Technik*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that the multitude, "must push through Empire to come

out the other side."¹⁰⁵ The mythic pattern of total destruction preceding the creation of a new cosmos, undetermined by past history, is manifest as an essential characteristic of technology. What is strange is that this newfound openness to myth only arises as we are forced to accommodate ourselves to the necessities of technological life. Hence, the strategies of resistance employed by Hardt and Negri, as by Michel Foucault, arise out of the conditions given by the global technological order, and their methods, "are the very methods employed by imperial sovereignty."¹⁰⁶ The critics are close to what they criticize. In their radical critiques they reveal the essence of technology as open-ended potential, realized in an on-going contest between order and chaos.

Although there is a recurring call within 'Critical Theory' for a 'constructive' vision of the future based on sympathetic attachments between marginalized groups, among the more radical theorists, unencumbered by Enlightenment doctrine and hence truer to the character of post-modern technology, this construction means destruction. Frantz Fanon, for one, makes a call for violence as a "collective catharsis",¹⁰⁷ intended as a final solution to the problem of colonialism and its systemic legacy. This same veneration of violence is found in the radical critiques of technology, like Hardt and Negri's. They argue that there cannot be a piecemeal set of negotiations between oppressed and oppressor, but the whole history of oppression must be abolished, and the old world go under so that a new world can arise out of it. We must continually recreate ourselves and our world through affirmative violence.

¹⁰⁵ Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. Empire. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) p. 218.

¹⁰⁶ Empire. p. 216.

¹⁰⁷ Fanon, Frantz. Black Skin, White Mask. (New York: Grove Press, 1967) p. 145.

Hardt and Negri call upon the 'New Barbarians' to let loose this regenerative violence.¹⁰⁸ They will reconfigure themselves through creative auto-mutilation, and through their very strangeness create a new world as alien gods.¹⁰⁹ Hence, as the authors describe and encourage the spontaneous eruptions of struggle from within Empire, they rely upon a power of refusal to link together the many reactions against technology. Empire has many centers, and many sites of resistance:

Empire presents a superficial world, the virtual center of which can be accessed immediately from any point across the surface. If these points were to constitute something like a new cycle of struggle, it would be a cycle defined not by communicative extensions of struggles but rather by their singular emergence, by the intensity that characterizes them one by one. In short, this new phase is defined by the fact that these struggles do not link horizontally, but each one leaps vertically, directly to the virtual center of Empire.¹¹⁰

Immediate access to the center from any point requires that the center be, in potential, everywhere. There are many centers, all the same. Their sameness is not arranged through lateral communication, but arises spontaneously. In this

¹⁰⁸ In Waller Newell's words, Hardt and Negri aim to "deconstruct the West". ["Postmodern Jihad: What Osama bin Laden learned from the Left." Weekly Standard 11/26/2001, Volume 007, Issue 11.

<http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/000/553fragu.asp>

Newell's mocking criticism of Empire is grounded in his Platonic criticism of Heraclitus, a criticism that can be extended to include Heidegger. All four of Heraclitus, Heidegger, Hardt and Negri share a conception of flux as the source of being. The ontological terms used by each are: for Heraclitus- $\pi\upsilon\rho$, fire; for Heidegger- Being; for Hardt and Negri- life. They are all, in Plato's words, "motion men". [*Theaet.* 181a, p. 44 in Ruling Passion] Then and now, they "spring up like mushrooms", [*Theaet.* 180c] and treat all civil institutions as arbitrary and historically-relative. For Heraclitus social divisions are solely contingent upon πόλεμος, war [22B53]. For Hardt and Negri social divisions are contingent upon modes of production. They do not appreciate the character of permanence that pervades effective institutions. This sense of permanence, if it does shine through, is considered epiphenomenal to change- an expression of the power of the ruling class. Plato's shining sun is reduced to the flash of sunlight off Hector's helmet.

¹⁰⁹ Hans Jonas identifies the link between Heidegger and his followers and gnosticism, which he presents as a hybrid form of primitive myth and Christian teachings. See The Gnostic Religion. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991) pp. 320-340.

¹¹⁰ Empire. p. 58.

technological cosmos there are no distances- homogenous space is abolished- but every node of resistance has direct access to the highest levels of power: from desktop to mountaintop.

This immediacy is made possible partly by the creative power of violence, directed towards total reconfiguration. "Those who are against, while escaping from the local and particular constraints of their human condition, must also attempt to construct a new body and a new life. This is a necessarily violent, barbaric passage".¹¹¹ Everything that is given must be destroyed for a new cosmos to come into being, undetermined by the past. The over-determinations of technology are overcome through their total destruction. The authors quote Walter Benjamin in support of this positive barbarism:

Barbarisms? Precisely. We affirm this in order to introduce a new, positive notion of barbarism. What does the poverty of experience oblige the barbarian to do? To begin anew, to begin from the new.¹¹²

The millenarianism that is sometimes apparent in Heidegger's writings, through which he represents the end of technology as the total closure to flux and to Being, is not necessarily at odds with this return of the mythic sensibility, in two senses. First, acceptance to the necessities imposed by technology attunes human beings to continuous and purposeless flux, as I have argued. And second, the annihilation of the world may prepare the way for the birth of a new world. In Heidegger's language, also adapted by Grant, the concealment of Being is also an un-concealment, since it opens us up to the new experience. In

¹¹¹ Empire, p. 214.

¹¹² Benjamin, Walter. "Erfahrung und Armut" in Gesammelte Schriften. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhaussen (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), vol. 2, pt. 1, pp. 213-219. Quoted in Empire, p. 215.

Grant's Platonic or Christian language, the deprivals inherent in technology provoke us to think about what is Good for man. For Heidegger, this thinking cannot occur through a conservative effort to preserve traditions (as Grant modestly suggests) but through an intensification of the technological imperative:

All coming to presence, not only modern technology, keeps itself concealed to the last.... Therefore, in the realm of thinking, a painstaking effort to think through still more primally what was primally thought is not the absurd wish to relive what is past, but rather the sober readiness to be astounded before the coming of the dawn.¹¹³

Heidegger's critique of technology, like Hardt and Negri's critique of Empire, is grounded in a radical historicism through which the past is abolished in order to make way for the future. History is not an incremental advancement, but an essentially open-ended process. It is just this open-endedness, this complete lack of teleology, which makes Heidegger's historicism so radical, and allows history to wrap back on itself to "the oldest of the old",¹¹⁴ to the completely undetermined origin.

In this return, the self melts into the changing stream of Being. If the self does stand out, it does so as a momentary presencing of Being, not as a permanent, self-subsisting entity. Just as the self becomes attached to the technological system, operating as little more than a feedback or servo-mechanism, such that it becomes an unself-conscious node on a web of

¹¹³ "The Question Concerning Technology" p. 327.

¹¹⁴ Heidegger, Martin. Pathmarks. William McNeill. (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. i.

interrelations,¹¹⁵ so too does the self take on a less privileged role in the most extreme critiques of technology. Current strategies for the liquidation of the self into new forms of being- characterized by multiplicity, contingency, and constant change- are spelled out in Hardt and Negri's Empire. Curiously, the authors respond to the transformations required by our adaptation to technology with even more extreme transformations:

The will to be against needs a body that is incapable of submitting to command. It needs a body that is incapable of adapting to family life, to factory discipline, to the regulations of a traditional sex life, and so forth. ... In addition to being radically unprepared for normalization, however, the new body must also be able to create a new life. We must go much further to define to new place of the non-place, well beyond the simple experiences of mixture and hybridization,¹¹⁶

As Ellul sees it, the "aim is to create the new man, the man adapted to technical functions."¹¹⁷ Grant also describes the necessity of the transformation of man: "To conquer space it may be necessary to transcend ordinary humanity and produce creatures half flesh and half metal."¹¹⁸ Though their aims may differ from NASA scientists, the will to self-creation is the same for Hardt and Negri. The critics are not far from what they criticize; as Ellul intuitively: "Only bestiality, because it is unconscious, would seem to escape this situation, and it is itself a product of the machine."¹¹⁹ The appetite for unconscious, beast-like antagonism is itself a product of the technological system that the antagonism is against.

¹¹⁵ As Ellul writes: "The individual who is a servant of technique must be completely unconscious of himself." The Technological Society. p. 138.

¹¹⁶ Empire. p. 216.

¹¹⁷ The Technological Society. p. 139.

¹¹⁸ Lament for a Nation. p. 70.

¹¹⁹ The Technological Society. p. 140.

Because there is no strict division between the self and the world, because, "human nature is in no way separate from nature as a whole",¹²⁰ and because, "there are no fixed boundaries between the human and the animal, the human and the machine",¹²¹ in sum, because there is no separation between the part and the whole, this transformation of man necessitates the transformation of the world also. A new world and a new man to live in it, neither recognizable to us. They are as strange as myth and the first beginnings.

¹²⁰ Empire. p. 215.

¹²¹ ibid. Donna Haraway gives a good demonstration of how the auto-mutilation of human form erases the division between humans and nature as human and machine meld. [Haraway, Donna J.. Simians, cyborgs and women : the reinvention of nature (London : Free Association Books, 1991)]

Section 4: The power of language

"now I am lost and scarcely know
my own name."

Kalevala. canto VII

i) *introduction*

What is language for us, and how is it effected by technology? To begin with, there now is much chatter: our voices have become like the whine and chirp of modems, frantic digital alterations- yes, no, yes, no, no, yes... . Chatter goes nowhere, and it doesn't care to, because it sees no purpose outside of itself. Language is reduced to its simplest terms, and what ambiguity remains becomes an excuse for empty indefiniteness and endless droning on. Language is emptied of purpose as it becomes a system of signs- words in identity with their referents, like computer language (now broadly used), corporate logos, and politically correct platitudes. Technological language is 'stuff', information at our disposal.

The roots of this account of technological language are in Nietzsche's, Heidegger's, and Ortega y Gasset's critiques of mass man. All three argue that our language has been so drained of meaning that any full restoration would have to begin with silence. Nietzsche's influence is found in both Ortega y Gasset's and Heidegger's accounts of the language of mass man. For Nietzsche the public sphere is the market place, full of the buzzing of flies, where chatter is

a sign of empty self-satisfaction. "Flee, my friend, into your solitude!"¹²² The lesson taught is to remove oneself from the public sphere, to learn to be silent. Similarly for Heidegger the 'idle talk' of the 'they' makes them incapable of resolve:¹²³ their language is constantly changing and they cannot settle on a decision. The 'they' pass on in empty chatter from one thing to the next, always hungry for novelty, yet unable to commit. They are too noisy to hear the call of conscience, which requires that one be quiet. The call of conscience must be "something like an *alien* voice."¹²⁴ The call of conscience is alien to public discourse. To attune oneself to this call, both in order to act with resolve and to think openly about Being, rather than just fix oneself upon the busy work of problem solving, one must remove oneself from public and be silent. The openness required for both genuine acting and thinking, "takes the words away from the common-sense idle talk of the 'they'."¹²⁵ Silence prepares us for the full, authentic experiences of acting and thinking.

In much the same way, Ortega y Gasset complains that mass man, made too powerful by his technical expertise, thinks that he is perfect, and is ready with an opinion on everything. Mass man has no words to distinguish noble from base, but brings everything down to his level. He is the center of his own world, and does not care for what he cannot effectively grasp. The mass man is a barbarian, "when he speaks, lectures or writes"¹²⁶ because of this indifference.

¹²² Nietzsche, Friedrich. Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Walter Kaufmann (trans.) (New York: Modern Library, 1995) p. 51.

¹²³ Heidegger, Martin. Being and Time. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (trans.) (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1962) p. 218

¹²⁴ Being and Time. p. 321

¹²⁵ Being and Time. p. 343.

¹²⁶ Gasset, José Ortega y. The Revolt of the Masses. (New York : Norton, 1960) p. 55fn.

In response to this vanity, the great man must be modest: he must learn when to speak and when to be silent.

However, Ortega's use of the terms 'barbarism' and 'primitivism' are by no means unambiguous. He is a follower of Nietzsche, and so while he may argue vehemently for or against something, he sometimes does both, and it is difficult to get a clear 'yes' or 'no' from him. "The rebellion of the masses may, in fact, be the transition to some new, unexampled organization of humanity, but it may also be a catastrophe of human destiny."¹²⁷ The destructive power of the new barbarism that rejects all standards can serve to call us back to our 'real' selves, and thus serve a restorative function. Indeed, the tendency of the primitive towards submission to authority is a hopeful sign in this direction.¹²⁸ By attuning us to the full danger of our moment in history, Ortega aims to open us to this kind of submission. Unless this happens, our sense of the spontaneous beneficence of the world ordered for man by 'technicism' will cause us to descend into an empty self-satisfaction. Then, like Nietzsche's Last Men, we will have little to say, since we will find no reason to give an account of ourselves: "'We have invented happiness,' say the last men, and they blink."¹²⁹ Zarathustra's talk with the people of the marketplace ends with their senseless jubilation and a beast-like cacophony of tongue-clucking. To this the only proper thing one can say is nothing.

The more severe critics of mass man's chatter point to the silent solution: don't speak to them at all. Even if one is listened to, there is the greater danger

¹²⁷ The Revolt of the Masses, p. 59.

¹²⁸ The Revolt of the Masses, p. 74.

¹²⁹ Thus Spoke Zarathustra, p. 17.

that the chatterers will take up one's words as their own. Today, the chatter about Nietzsche and Heidegger affirms this danger.¹³⁰

What all three of these thinkers are protesting in their indictment against chatter is the loss of uniquely human language- noble language with purpose. They are protesting against Kojève's mass man, more beast than man, who speaks in signs. Kojève writes: "'The *definitive annihilation of Man properly so-called*' also means the definitive disappearance of human Discourse (*Logos*) in the strict sense. Animals of the species *Homo sapiens* would react by conditioned reflexes to vocal signals or sign 'language,' and thus their so-called 'discourses' would be like what is supposed to be the 'language' of bees."¹³¹ Tom Darby makes this same point when he says that, "in the universal and homogenous state, not only do we have a return to the first phase of Hegelian history, but also to that mode of articulation- sign- which is the first phase of both artistic and religious expression."¹³² Setting aside the question as to whether our new sign language is the first phase in a new artistic or religious development- a possibility that Nietzsche, Ortega, and Heidegger would be very much interested in- this sign language lacks a sense of historical purpose, of greatness. It is a vulgar kind of language. We use words as pry-levers on our stony problems, and as digging hoes to turn over the past through periodic re-interpretation.

Grant expresses both the sense of emptiness in technological language along with the new powers that it makes available. If we lose the power to

¹³⁰ Darby, Tom. "On the Coincidence of Our Preoccupation with Nietzsche" in Nietzsche and the Rhetoric of Nihilism: Essays on interpretation, Language, and Politics. Tom Darby, Béla Egyed, & Ben Jones (ed.) (Carleton University Press, 1989)

¹³¹ Introduction.... p. 160fn..

¹³² The Feast. p. 170.

speak, write, and think about a given reality, we gain the power to command the world.

All coherent languages beyond those which serve the drive to unlimited human freedom through technique have been broken up in the coming to be of what we are. Therefore it is impossible to articulate publicly any suggestion of loss, and perhaps even more frightening, almost impossible to articulate it to ourselves. We have been left with no words which cleave together and summon out of uncertainty the good of which we may sense the dispossession. The drive to the planetary technical future is in any case inevitable; but those who would try to divert it, to limit, or even simply to stand in fear before some of its applications find themselves defenceless,¹³³ because of the disappearance of any speech by which the continual changes involved in that drive could ever be thought as deprivals.¹³⁴

Language is attached to the world of becoming in order to gain the power of command over that world. Languages involving 'the Good' or 'God' lose their meaning in public discourse because they do not seem to refer to what is real and knowable, which is the world of our creation- our technological cosmos. All language must find its meaning within this sphere, and carry the badge of self-referentiality as its certificate of correctness. Words like the Good or God remain, but they are empty shells, since they are not given substance by our common experiences, and lose their relation to our other words. In most public discourses the words have become abstractions, i.e. they have no experiential referent for most people. They are forgotten symbols, bereft of a given context within which they could have public meaning.

¹³³ My computer's spell checker wants me to change 'defenceless'; a small point, yet still significant. That American and Canadian are two different dialects of one language is becoming harder to notice. Increasingly, as changes like this one become automatic, even such trivial differences will peter out.

¹³⁴ Technology and Empire, p. 139.

In his attention to the deprivation manifest in our language Grant is indebted to Heidegger, who writes that for speaking about Being instead of just beings, "we lack not only most of the words but, above all, the 'grammar'."¹³⁵ It is not just a matter of the loss of specific words and their meanings, but our way of thought is patterned in such a way as to close us off from Being. Our language is directed to the instrumental purposes of technical control, and any words that do not fit within this program are like orphaned children. There is something startling about the use of 'Being' or 'the Good' or even 'God',¹³⁶ but this affirms the deprivation that is widespread. In the end we ask, 'What is the use of this sort of talk?', or even more damaging, we re-interpret those alien words according to our own understanding, such that 'the Good' becomes values. What is otherwise given as the supreme purpose of human making and thinking becomes something we have made, something socially contingent. As Grant says in an address to a group of social welfare workers, "Man in his freedom makes values- they are what he does with the facts."¹³⁷ Or similarly, as Nietzsche writes, "'We have invented happiness,' say the last men, and they blink."¹³⁸ In a world in which all goods are values created by men, and all languages are the inventions of people,¹³⁹ there is no great purpose outside of speech to speak forward into.

¹³⁵ Being and Time. p. 63.

¹³⁶ Not that these words are otherwise equivalent for Grant and Heidegger. God is transcendent, while Being is immanent; yet both God and Being concern the whole.

¹³⁷ Grant, George. "Values and Technology" in The George Grant Reader. p. 392. Originally published in *Conference Proceedings: 'Welfare Services in a Changing Technology'* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference on Social welfare 1964) pp. 21-9.

¹³⁸ Thus Spoke Zarathustra. p. 17.

¹³⁹ Thus Spoke Zarathustra. p. 49.

The danger is that as language aimed at technical mastery of human and non-human nature crowds out or appropriates other more noble languages, the self-referential character of the technological cosmos and its imperatives are reinforced, because there remains no way of even suggesting something beyond this world. At the same time, the openness to potential inherent in a language directed towards the open-ended goal of human freedom makes this new language very accommodating and flexible. Even criticism finds its place, as its originality is added as fuel to a dynamic process, and confirms the self-adjusting capability of the system as a whole. I refer again to Grant's dim views, explored at length earlier in this chapter, on the abilities of protest to provide a "real alternative of action".¹⁴⁰ We are mute, our technological language nothing more than a set of instruments used for manipulating the world. Our loss of a language capable of registering a loss creates a closed, silent circle. There is noise, but it has no meaning other than itself- it is chatter. But in a sense it is powerful chatter because it is sign language, in that it shares an identity with its object, and thus exerts a power over its object.

iii) *on the powers of our language*

Along with this empty, beast-like chatter goes an incredibly powerful new mode of language: god-like language. The same identity between sign and referent that makes chatter so empty promises great power, because it brings everything within the grasp of technological language. Moreover, the identity

¹⁴⁰ Technology and Empire. p. 75. See also: letter to Kenneth McNaught, 11 February, 1966; English-Speaking Justice. p. 94; "A Critique of the New Left" (1966) pp. 84-90 in George Grant

between sign and referent allows the speaker to change the world just by changing language- a kind of word-magic, like that described by Cassirer in his study of mythic language, Language and Myth, to be considered in the next part of this thesis.

As Hannah Arendt argues, technological language requires the divestiture of our given human condition along with the unspeakable of classical philosophy, Plato's ἀρρητον and Aristotle's ἄνευ λόγου.¹⁴¹ We claim to have knowledge that only a god could have, because it would require the transcendence of the particularities inherent in our worldliness.¹⁴² According to Arendt language is rooted in particulars. She argues that one must speak from **this** perspective and not all perspectives. From this limited, though concrete basis, one gains reliable insight into the world through public speech, in which particular opinions are compared and collected into a common understanding. The language of modern science- mathematics- cannot provide meaning in this sense. Mathematics is not a public form of speech. What it does do, according to Arendt, is to project a pre-determined, anthropocentric order upon the world. These ordering principles cannot be compared to the ideal forms of classical philosophy,¹⁴³ since they are only gained from a very unnatural perspective- beyond the particularities of earthly life. They are products of the intellect, rather than given forms perceived by the intellect. Arendt relies upon the idea of an Archimedian point and the example of the space program to illustrate this

Reader: "The Value of Protest" (1966) pp. 90-94 in same.

¹⁴¹ The Human Condition. p. 20.

¹⁴² The Human Condition. p. 10.

¹⁴³ The Human Condition. pp. 265-6.

movement beyond the given and the human condition.¹⁴⁴ We perceive the world (and ourselves) from the perspective of a god.¹⁴⁵

This alteration makes the closed and self-referential system of signs that is modern mathematics less a vain projection of the mind and more a powerful mode of altering reality. Arendt suggests this power herself. She writes that, "the 'conversion' implicit in every equation corresponds to convertibility in reality".¹⁴⁶ This projected order replaces the given reality, such that man is washed over with a sense of harmony "between mind and matter, between man and the universe."¹⁴⁷ "But", Arendt continues, "it will be difficult to ward off the suspicion that this mathematically preconceived world may be a dream world where every dreamed vision man produces has the character of reality only as long as the dream lasts."¹⁴⁸ A self-referential "dream world" replaces the real world of shared meaning. Sign language replaces symbolic language.

Technology induces us to live in a kind of magical dream world, much as in myth. I say 'magical' because where there is no clear distinction between the order we have projected upon the world and the 'real' world, it becomes possible to change the world just by changing our use of language. This is magic: working upon the whole by working upon the part. In technology as in myth, there is no clear boundary between dreamed and real, between potential and actual, or between man and his environment.

¹⁴⁴ The Human Condition. p. 1.

¹⁴⁵ See Keith Tester's book, The Inhuman Condition (New York: Routledge, 1995) for an account of this god-like perspective, drawing on Arendt's account of unworldliness, Weber's idea of disenchantment, and Heidegger's 'age of the world picture'.

¹⁴⁶ The Human Condition. p. 285

¹⁴⁷ The Human Condition. p. 286.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

Ellul makes much the same comparison between technology and magic. He argues that, "Our modern worship of technique derives from man's ancestral worship of the mysterious and marvelous character of his own handiwork."¹⁴⁹ Technique is viewed not as a limited means for getting along in the world, for making the world habitable for human beings, but as possessing a great power of its own. When we wonder, we wonder at technology. This wonder is grounded in a strict materialism. Our disposition to materialism seems at odds with the mysterious aura of myth and magic. But, Ellul adds, "Because we are obsessed with materialism and do not take magic seriously, it has little interest for us, and we are unaware even today, as we study technique- the techniques that relate to men- that we are drawing on the great stream of magical techniques."¹⁵⁰

Myth, like technology, is driven by the desire for efficacy in technique. Mythic man desires total efficacy, appreciating no strict division between himself and his environment. "He is able to manipulate his surroundings so that they are no longer merely his surroundings".¹⁵¹ He gives himself over to his changing environment to enjoy full powers within it. Ancient magic, "leads to efficacy because it subordinates the power of the gods to men".¹⁵² Mythic man is strictly of this world, not oriented to the transcendent which materialism so distrusts. Like technological man, mythic man is oriented to efficacy in technique, gaining real powers for himself in the process. "Every magical means, in the eyes of the

¹⁴⁹ Technology Society. p. 24.

¹⁵⁰ Technology Society. p.25.

¹⁵¹ Technology Society. p. 25.

¹⁵² Technology Society. p. 24.

person who uses it, is the most efficient one."¹⁵³ Ellul's determining element for technology- efficiency- works here for myth as well. Efficiency is the measure of the integration of systems, specifically here the integration of man and his environment. Magic is perfect efficiency. The main difference for Ellul between ancient magic and ours is that, "our magical techniques have become really effective."¹⁵⁴

To make a strange comparison, a witchdoctor and a genetic engineer are much alike. Both work upon the whole through the part. The witchdoctor acts upon a whole human being through a part- a hair, a nail clipping, or spittle- much as the genetic engineer can know and control a human being through their DNA. DNA, a very small part of a person, is somehow identical with the whole person. A person can be identified through their DNA. A person can be copied through their DNA. We cannot presently modify DNA and so modify a person, as a witchdoctor effects a person, but we are not cut off from that possibility in principle.

Magic has its use in the social as well as the natural sciences. As Donald Phillip Verene remarks on the subject, "The need for charity of spirit towards those less fortunate or those who live in injustice is made unnecessary by the act of progressive re-naming."¹⁵⁵ Left in the hands of word-magicians of various stripes- social workers and scientists, clinical psychiatrists and medical doctors- the outcast is drawn into the community through a modification of the name of their ailment. Disease is not localized in a patient, but is represented as a function

¹⁵³ Technology Society. p. 24.

¹⁵⁴ Technology Society. p. 27.

¹⁵⁵ Verene, Donald Phillip. Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) p. 186.

of the society as a whole, including environmental effects, and so its full treatment requires more than the isolation and elimination of the cause. Treatment requires a magical ability to change the order of the whole through the creative use of language. Verene uses the example of, "The shift from <crippled> to <handicapped> to <disabled> to <physically challenged> to <differently abled>,"¹⁵⁶ but misses the point when he refers to this 'word magic' (as he also calls it, following Cassirer) as a way of hiding an untreatable condition. One cannot begin to criticize technology by saying that it does not work. Tell a witchdoctor that the spell he conjured does not work and he will cast another, more expensive spell. Efficacy is always an open question for technological man, and he is especially adroit at taking the criticism and making the necessary adjustments. Even the most politically correct social scientist would agree that changing the names of conditions will not abolish them, which is why there must be a thorough-going and integrated effort. Disease- to push my example- must be considered in its social, environmental and genetic aspects.

Word-magic is a special case of mythic language in general. Mythic language makes magic possible through a collapse of the distinction between symbol and referent. The word is identical with its thing; or put differently, mythic language is sign language.

Perhaps the most pervasive form of public discourse- advertising- is a sign language. This fact also illustrates the poverty of public discourse that Arendt so laments. Public discourse and the public spaces required for such discourse are crowded out to make way for a language of signs that does nothing else but keep the process of production and consumption going. Accordingly, language is

¹⁵⁶ Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge. p. 185.

given the most concrete function, and exercises great power, yet is ultimately meaningless.

As signs, advertisements increasingly do not refer to a good that is marketed and consumed, but rather they refer to themselves. The Nike logo is Nike. Naomi Klein makes this point convincingly in her book NO LOGO.¹⁵⁷ She documents how corporations have shifted their emphasis away from the production of goods, which they contract to third world factories, and towards the 'manufacturing' of an image. The product itself- the 'real' thing- is epiphenomenal to the logo- the image- with which it is associated. The logo adds value to the product, inflating a pair of sneakers that costs \$1.50 to produce into a \$150 commodity. The 'real' value comes from the sign, not the product. The product refers to the sign for its value and meaning, rather than the sign referring to the product. This results in a public language that is completely self-referential, ultimately meaningless, yet extremely powerful.

Advertisements are an efficient and profitable method of controlling mass behavior, better than politics perhaps. This partly explains why the corporation has become such a powerful entity, affecting both our private and public lives. Klein's argument concerning the emptying out of public discourse and the corporatization of private and public spaces has much in common with Arendt's account of the replacement of the separate private and public realms by the singular social realm. The social realm mixes the exposure of public life with the character of necessity attached to the private realm. The public realm ceases to be a free realm as it is driven by the necessities of capital, the chief function of

¹⁵⁷ Klein, Naomi. NO LOGO: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies. (New York: Picador, 1999)

which is to produce more capital,¹⁵⁸ and the private realm ceases to be hidden as private property is transformed into capital.¹⁵⁹ Genuine public discourse is imperiled in a double sense: first as the necessity of capital accumulation intrudes upon what should be a free public realm; and second as individual opinion- the hidden ground of discourse-¹⁶⁰ is replaced by mass opinion, re-produced through advertising. Technological language- in this example the language spoken by corporations to consumers- speaks to beast-like necessity, while at the same time taking on a god-like perspective beyond the particular givens of human experience. The low and the high both collapse into the sign.

iv) *on a word- technology*

George Grant insists that, "The word 'technology' is new, and its unique bringing together of 'techne' and 'logos' shows that what is common around the world is this novel interpenetration of the arts and sciences."¹⁶¹ This new word sums up what is common in our ways of making and knowing. 'Technology' is a closed circle of means and ends, in which means justify ends, and ends justify means. Because of this circular quality, technology does not admit outside perspectives, and thus transforms the world into an image of itself. This transformation begins in the West, and can be traced to the roots of the word in ancient Greek, but it is not exclusive to the West, "so that when we speak

¹⁵⁸ The Human Condition. p. 68.

¹⁵⁹ Arendt's point concerning the transformation of private property into capital is owed to Marx, a thinker whom she roundly criticizes as encouraging the development of the social [Human Condition. p. 79], yet whom she acknowledges as "a great man." [ibid.]

¹⁶⁰ The Human Condition. p. 71.

¹⁶¹ English-Speaking Justice. p. 1.

'technology' we are speaking a new activity which western Europeans brought into the world, and which has given them their universalising and homogenising influence."¹⁶² Technology is, in and of itself, a new and powerful word.

By setting apart this word as novel, Grant sets aside those non-technological languages that preceded it. Though 'technology' has its roots in the ancient Greek words τέχνη and λόγος, 'art' or 'craft' and 'rational speech' respectively, the bringing together of those words would, according to Grant and in line with the teachings of Leo Strauss (of whom he was a great admirer), have been unthinkable. In classical thought making and knowing are kept separate. By holding onto this separation, expressed by Grant as the separation of the necessary and the good,¹⁶³ we can hold out, at least temporarily, against the excesses of technological society and its deprivations. We forestall the completion of a self-referential cosmos and the incorporation of all things into a single set of processes, and cultivate a language capable of speaking about our deprivals.

Grant finds sources for such a non-technological language in Christianity and in classical philosophy. My concern here is with the latter. The conjunction of τέχνη and λόγος as τεχνολογία does not occur in the writings of Plato. Indeed, the separation of thought and action, and the warning against what would happen if they were to be combined, is central to Plato's thought. That union is not entirely unthinkable though- the dystopic vision of Book V of the *Republic* is testament to what would happen if a philosopher were to gain power.

¹⁶² *ibid.*

¹⁶³ Or, as Plato writes, "the nature of the necessary and the good really differ." [Plato. *Republic*. 2nd ed. Allan Bloom (trans.) (USA: Basic Books, 1991) 493c] In classical terms, we make what is necessary for ourselves using τέχνη, whereas we know the good through λόγος.

However, the *Republic* is a city that comes to being in speech;¹⁶⁴ it is not a blueprint for action. There is no plan set out for how to bring such a regime into being: the union of thought and action in the philosopher-king is left to chance, and is considered highly unlikely.¹⁶⁵

Likewise for Aristotle thought is kept separate from action, as the arts and sciences are given their proper spheres. In Aristotle there is a graduated hierarchy of relatively autonomous spheres of making and knowing. I say 'relatively autonomous', since, for example, household management has its own rules, and households do not need the constant guidance of a supervising intellect. Yet households do need to be guarded by the laws of the *polis* and its collective defence, and they do have their place within an overarching hierarchy, supplying what is necessary for public life. Within this hierarchy, the highest is distinguished as being for its own sake, while what is low is for the sake of something high. Aristotle distinguishes comprehension as alone in being able to grasp first principles,¹⁶⁶ and as being for its own sake. *τέχνη*, at the other end of the hierarchy, is only meaningful in terms of the goods it produces. The products of *τέχνη* are made meaningful by their place within the graduated hierarchy of means, each and all ennobled by the higher ends they serve.

Yet even in this relation between means and ends, there is a separation of making and knowing. Like Plato, who argues that artisans produce fine things, yet are incapable of giving a rational account of their artifacts,¹⁶⁷ Aristotle argues

¹⁶⁴ *Rep.* 369a

¹⁶⁵ *Rep.* 499b.

¹⁶⁶ Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Harris Rackham (trans.) (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1996) 1141a

¹⁶⁷ Plato. *Apology*. F.J. Church (trans.) (New York: MacMillan, 1948) 22c.

that the crafts are dumb, that while there may be a kind of knowledge attendant to them, it is not a kind of knowledge that expresses itself in rational speech. While that which pertains to first principles is demonstrable, and can be accounted for through rational speech- λόγος- τέχνη on the other hand must be learned by doing, as a carpenter would learn by building houses, and not theoretical instruction.¹⁶⁸ τέχνη does not have its λόγος within itself; it cannot give a rational account of itself in words.

However, given the importance of the separation of τέχνη and λόγος in classical thought, the word τεχνολογία (and its cognates) does appear in Aristotle's writings, specifically in the *Art of Rhetoric*.¹⁶⁹ Through later tradition, this compound has taken on the diminished meaning of a treatise on rhetoric,¹⁷⁰ but its full original sense is what concerns us here. Aristotle introduces the conjunction of τέχνη and λόγος as τὰς τέχνας τῶν λόγων¹⁷¹- the arts of words- then soon after joins the two words into one. Through this compound the two terms are made to appear interchangeable, as τεχνολογία is presented as both the 'the words of the art', or as Freese translates, 'the rules of the art', and 'the art of words'. Though this is clearly not technology in its full sense as we experience it, this first combination of the two roots of technology manifests some of the same qualities we see in technology, and specifically in technological

¹⁶⁸ *Nic.* 1103a35. Obviously, the same is not true of an architect today, who, as an ἀρχιτεκτον- a master builder- learns almost exclusively through theoretical instruction and only rarely and peripherally through experience.

¹⁶⁹ Aristotle. *Art of Rhetoric*. [English & Greek] John Henry Freese (trans.) (London, Heinemann, 1959). I was alerted to this first use of τεχνολογία by Carl Mitcham in his book *Thinking through Technology- The Path between Engineering and Philosophy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) pp. 128-9. However, Mitcham calls the use ambiguous and doesn't devote much attention to it.

¹⁷⁰ Liddell and Scott.

¹⁷¹ *Rhet.* 1354a10

language. τεχνολογία for Aristotle is a peculiarly self-referential kind of discourse. It is words for the sake of words, with no discernible purpose. This is the stuff that Hamlet reads: "Words, words, words."¹⁷² However, these are not simply empty words- chatter- but because they are words conflated with technique they are also extremely powerful, and dangerous. These are words that can make themselves appear real, substituting a human-made reality for given reality.

Cognates of τεχνολογία appear four times in the first book of the *Rhetoric*,¹⁷³ always referring not to Aristotle's own rational, systematic discourse on the art of rhetoric, but to the preceding treatises on the subject. He distinguishes his work as complete and rational and pertaining to the essence of the subject- its rules, demonstrable by proofs- whereas those others deal strictly with the arousal of the passions, are without proofs, and are incomplete. Similarly, Plato writes that rhetoric is not an art at all, but a knack, like cooking.¹⁷⁴ Both Plato and Aristotle aim to subjugate this most irrational and dangerous art- one that can get us whatever we desire, without informing us as to what we should desire- to reason. τέχνη is subordinated to λόγος.

There is a danger peculiar to this particular τέχνη- rhetoric- in that as an art it has no subject properly its own. Much as Gorgias is unable to answer Socrates' question about what exactly rhetoric does for its practitioners,¹⁷⁵ so too does Aristotle write that, "as an art its rules are not applied to any particular

¹⁷² Shakespeare, William. The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Tucker Brooke & Jack Randall Crawford (ed.) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966) 2.2.193

¹⁷³ *Rhet.* 1354b17, 1354b27, 1355a19, and 1356a11.

¹⁷⁴ Plato. *Gorgias*. W.D. Woodhead (trans.) in The Collected Dialogues of Plato. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (ed.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 465a

¹⁷⁵ *Gorg.* 451-453.

definite class of things."¹⁷⁶ It is a neutral tool, though an incredibly powerful one, capable of holding sway over the passions of the multitudes. It does not have the discrete limits of an art like shoemaking, for example, which by nature is kept to its small function (a laughable pronouncement now, in our age of global shoe-making empires). Because rhetoric shares in the flexibility of language, and in the violent movements of the passions, and in every other art through its general applicability, it can easily spill out of its given domain, transforming the whole world into a grotesque image of itself. Then the image replaces reality, constituting, in contemporary technobabble, a virtual reality.

This is why Aristotle's stated aim is to yoke rhetoric to dialectic- empty, formless, purposeless speech to rational speech.¹⁷⁷ The neutral tool is put into the service of a governing intellect. τέχνη is subjugated to λόγος. Certainly, this noble purpose may inspire our encounters with technique still. The difficulty for us, and one that already begins to show itself in this first union of τέχνη and λόγος, is that the two terms tend to spill into one another. In this case, the τέχνη is a kind of λόγος. What is first presented as the 'arts of words' soon becomes the 'words' or 'rules of art'. The two terms turn in on each other to form a mutually consolidating pair, a closed circle. τέχνη is released from its given limits and acquires the universality of λόγος, while λόγος is brought immediately to bear upon the world and acquires the instrumental power of τέχνη. As the two words are brought together, their meanings blend into each other: the sheep becomes like the shepherd, and the shepherd like the sheep.

¹⁷⁶ *Rhet.* 1355b40.

¹⁷⁷ *Rhet.* 1354a1.

τέχνη is released from its given, circumscribed function, and is practiced for its own sake, while λόγος is applied to specific problems as it is put to use. This confusion between the root words that occurs as their essences spill over into each other is why Aristotle does not use the word τεχνολογία to describe his own rational discourse on the art of rhetoric. Rational, systematic discourse must be kept separate from craft if it is to maintain its autonomy over craft. Aristotle coins the term τεχνολογία, then as quickly dismisses it along with the teachers of rhetoric whom he criticizes. It is as if the word itself promises a dangerous fusion of means and ends, a closed circle within which we lack the language to speak of higher purposes.

The union between means and ends is experienced by us in technology, and was intuited by Aristotle. Aristotle's first use of τεχνολογία shows his deep awareness of the dangers contained within the word, dangers we experience directly. Technological language is self-referential, empty and purposeless, but at the same time very powerful, capable of foisting itself upon us as a replacement for given reality.

Part 2: ON MYTHIC MAN

As our sacred story...governs our faith and controls our conduct, even so does his myth for the savage.

Bronislaw Malinkowski.¹

Section 1:What Myth is not

i) *introduction*

In the previous part I described the technological perceptions of time and space, along with technological language. As I will show in this part through a parallel discussion of myth, there is a likeness between the dispensations of technological and mythic man. For both technological and mythic man, time is understood in terms of process, space as an integrated whole, and language as a magical power. Taken together, these attributes contribute to the sense of enclosure that accompanies both technology and myth. Through a recollection of myth- part of our distant past- we can perhaps gain a sense of perspective on our present technological condition, on perceptions and practices so obvious to us that they are rarely questioned.

Still though, it is difficult to recognize the relevance of myth to modern life because we are burdened with misleading ideas about myth. As with technology, one cannot define myth as an object. Rather, in the terms Heidegger

¹ Malinowski, Bronislaw. Magic, Science and Other Essays. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1948) p. 100.

uses to describe our experience of technology, myth enframes the way one thinks and acts. Hence, in order to gain some perspective on our own technological condition, I ask what are the dispositions characteristic of mythic man?

Myth is a way of thinking about the world and one's relation to it. More specifically, in myth the world is conceived as an integrated whole, a cosmos, in which various processes flow into each other, and within which humans are integrated. This integration promises total, magical power of man over his environment, but comes at the expense of reflective distance.

In this part I will rely on the works of Ernst Cassirer and Mircea Eliade, two thinkers who approach myth on its own terms, who try to understand mythic man as he understood himself. To take this approach is to understand the experience of myth, rather than to attempt to investigate myth as an objective phenomenon. Both Cassirer and Eliade attempt to understand myth from the inside, rather than from the outside. They are careful not to import alien concepts into their study of myth, and emphasize the importance of refuting definitions of myth which do so.² Their refutations share a common thrust: myth cannot be understood according to an objective purpose, but must be approached as an all-embracing experience. Myth does not exist simply to maintain social stability, or to ensure a sense of control over natural forces. These types of common, reductionist definitions fail on a number of counts.

² For Cassirer, see for examples pages 1-8 in Language and Myth Susan K. Langer (trans.) (New York: Dover, 1946), and Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 2: Mythical Thought, (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1996) pp. 2-3. For Eliade see for examples Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries: The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities. Philip Mairet (trans.) (New York: Harper Colophon, 1960) p. 23, and Myth and Reality. William Traks (trans.) (New York: Harper, 1963) p. 1.

First, they depend upon a distinction between the subjective and objective aspects of myth, a division that, though central to the social sciences, is alien to myth. Myth is primarily a whole. First, there is no clear division between, for instance, between man's 'subjective' emotions and the 'objective' world of things. And second, these types of definitions import a lasting principle from outside of myth. As both Eliade and Cassirer argue, there is no set purpose to the cyclical fluctuations of mythic time- what is important is flow, the process itself, and not the ends produced.

Definitions that speculate on such ends or purposes, rather than opening up the core of mythic experience, simply impose on it rational principles. As the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski writes, mythic men do not, "want to 'explain', to make 'intelligible' anything which happens in their myths- above all not an abstract idea."³ Rather, myth is self-referential. What Malinowski does is place myth within a rich cultural and social context in order to understand it as a whole. Here we ask what is the place of man within myth? What are the dispositions characteristic of mythic man?

As points of entry into these questions, traces of the authentic mythic experience remains even within our poor definitions of myth. I will take three such common definitions and open them up to find this authentic meaning. I will do so by linking these definitions of myth to three original uses of myth- *μῦθος* (*muthos*)- in Homer.⁴ I begin with these definitions: 1) Myth is just a story;

³ *Magic, Science and Other Essays*. p. 109.

⁴ I will refer to the ancient Greek, with translation. The English translation of the Greek *μῦθος* will be bold-faced. The reason for the Greek is that Latinized phonetics do not allow for the recognition of noun stems or accents, making a sloppy half-language - a representation of a dead language- out of a vital, precise, and substantial language. However, I will use transliteration when referring to other authors who do so.

2) Myth is a lie in the interests of the powerful; and 3) Myth is a poor form of science. I end with three Homeric uses of μῦθος: 1) Myth as cosmos; 2) Myth as process; and 3) Myth as powerful words.

ii) 'myth is just a story'

In the most common sense, we understand myth as a story. This is a good beginning. In its earliest uses, in the first and last myths we have- the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*- μῦθος is used as a wanderer's story.⁵ However, this sense of myth should not be trivialized. A story is often considered to be a tall tale, something told for amusement, but without any other purpose. This is how the word myth enters the English language in the early part of the nineteenth century, as a fabulous tale.⁶ We may consider the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in this way, as irrelevant to us, though perhaps entertaining. That is, a myth may be told for its own sake, but does not refer to anything beyond itself. A myth, according to this half-true opinion is just a story.

⁵ *Od.* 3.94, 4.324. Most of my attention has been absorbed by Stanley Lombardo's recent translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997 and 2000 respectively), and my references are to his translations unless otherwise noted. I made my own translations where Lombardo's did not express a full or precise meaning of μῦθος. Lombardo developed his translations out of notes to oral performances of the stories; if they are not always accurate reproductions, they are authentic evocations of the bardic experience and moving examples of poetry. Lombardo makes Homer vividly relevant to our time. The cover of his *Iliad* is *Into the Jaws of Death*, the famous picture of the landing on Omaha Beach in World War II; his *Odyssey* cover is a photograph of *Earthrise*, seen from the surface of the moon- this is our total war and our extreme homesickness.

Murray's literal translations helped to guide me through the ancient Greek. [A.T. Murray (trans.) *Iliad*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); *Odyssey*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995)] As well, I referred to Robert Fagles' accurate translations [*Iliad*. (New York: Viking, 1990); *Odyssey*. (New York: Viking, 1996)] Samuel Butler's dated prose versions (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1952), and Christopher Logue's cinematic interpretation [*War Music*. (London: Faber & Faber, 2001)] for comparison and enjoyment.

⁶ Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*. (London: Penguin, 1985) p. 211.

This 'just' fades when we turn to Homer's myths, since they are more than just stories. In them we find the self-sustaining cosmos of the ancient Greeks. Together, his stories form a whole, in that therein all aspects of Greek life are, to use somewhat inadequate language, represented. From them, we know how the Greeks fought in times of war, and how they prospered in times of peace; we know the place of women and of men; of weak and of strong; of domestic and foreign; of land and sea; of gods and men. If a list of opposites does not express the wholeness of these works taken together, one could go on to provide a list of themes covered, or of arts portrayed; but even then, an encyclopedic effort can never take on the life which must animate a whole, drawing all of the parts together and moving them from within, as Homer's myths do.

It may be argued that these myths, while representations- even exhaustive representations- of Greek life, are not accurate representations. One could point to some curious omissions from Homer's myths, especially the absence of the god Dionysos. This kind of criticism shows the insufficiency of the language of representation to communicate the essence of myth as a whole. A representation is always just a part, because it is a subjective account of some object that stands outside of the subject. However the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are not this. Even if we do not believe Homer's words that the gods, and not himself are responsible for these myths,⁷ we can see clearly that the myths create and sustain a world even as they describe it. It is in this way that myth is a self-sustaining cosmos- a whole- in, of, and for itself, and not a mere story or a reflection of something other than itself.

⁷ *Il.* 2.522-533.

Myth perpetuates itself through instruction. It is not directed towards an accurate, objective representation of the world, but to the reproduction of the world. The myth reproduces itself whenever it is told, and in so doing, regenerates the order of the cosmos. While a myth is not considered to be an accurate account of the world as it is, it can evoke an aim or purpose in the one who hears. The wife, for example, learns from the faithful Penelope; the soldier from the words of Hector: "One omen is best: to fight for your country."⁸ The purpose is not some far-off meaning reached towards with metaphors and other devices of poetry, but it is contained within the myth and it is regenerated again and again, whenever the myth is told.

The purpose of the story is the regeneration of the story, and not something outside of the story; likewise, the purpose of the cosmos is not something outside of the cosmos, but the cosmos itself. Purpose thus considered is self-referential or circular; or if we are to express the same idea in temporal terms, myth is cyclical.

iii) *'myth is a lie'*

When we use the word myth today, we often use it to describe a public doctrine used as a disguise and justification for the interests of the powerful, i.e. a lie that excuses or conceals the abuse of power. Behind the façade of myth, those interests are seen as the real reason for myth. Roland Barthes, who I will consider in detail in Part IV, assesses myth in this way- as a justification of

⁸ Il. 12.250.

capitalist exploitation. This type of definition dismisses myth as merely superficial, and points to a real, though hidden principle behind it.

This definition cannot be used to understand μῦθος as Homer uses it. μῦθος carries three related meanings in early Greek usage. Liddell and Scott define it as a purpose, design, or plan. However, even this interpretation may be misleading, if we are to judge purpose in a teleological sense, design in a formal sense, or plan as an indication of intentionality. Rather, myth provides its own self-referential purpose. That is, purpose is experienced as the unfolding of a self-contained, immanent process, moved from within. Human desires and expectations are included in this process, as are the wishes of the gods. There is no single, lasting principle towards which myth is directed; the sense of μῦθος as purpose is, therefore, expressive of the character of myth as process.

It would be a mistake to think that a myth has an end or purpose which is merely hidden from view by obscuring moments, as Διὸς βουλή,⁹ the wish of Zeus, is obscured by the wishes of other gods, but comes to prevail in the end of the *Iliad*. Zeus' wishes change, and they change in relation to the wishes of other gods and men. μῦθος as purpose must be considered within the context of many competing desires and constant change. Zeus is affected by the entreaties of the gods and men.¹⁰ As he says to his brother,

"Earthshaker, you know my purpose.¹¹
I care for them, even though they die. ..." ¹²

Zeus cares for men and is affected by them: he is hurt by their hurt, and excited by their excitement. Even as the most powerful god, he is not in principle

⁹ *Il.* 1.5.

¹⁰ *Il.* 1. 530-562.

¹¹ The Greek is βουλή.

¹² *Il.* 20.22-3.

set apart from other gods. He is simply more powerful than any other god or man. As a result, his purposes are not transcendent, but are manifest, and are revealed (or concealed) in competition or allegiance with the wishes of other gods and men. In this same spirit Phoenix instructs Achilles that, "Even the gods can bend."¹³ Myth is a web of changes, each contingent upon each. Myth as plan is pure process: what is important is not the end product, but the unfolding of the process in time.

Consequently, Zeus' plan does not travel the straight path to heaven, but ebbs and flows like a natural process. His plan or μῦθος in the *Iliad*- to observe Thetis' request and bring honor to Achilles- cannot be understood as an external ordering principle, but arises out of his aroused passions and the passions of other gods and mortals, is considered within the contexts of competing allegiances and even his own family life,¹⁴ and is played out through a pattern of cyclical exchanges, in the advances and retreats of the two armies. Though a kind of rhythmic order is achieved in this, the purpose of the myth as a whole is found within the process whereby complex allegiances are fulfilled, and powers exchanged, rather than in an external principle. As Socrates complains in the *Euthyphro*, the gods cannot come to any consistent agreement, but are constantly at war, driven by their changing passions, moved by pity and anger, rather than being directed by a set of principles.¹⁵ As we witness the retreats and advances of the two armies at the beachhead, so too do we see the battle of the gods' wishes within the context of a complex set of shifting allegiances. Myth is always moving. Its internal order is constituted by a web of changes, each contingent

¹³ *Il.* 9.511.

¹⁴ *Il.* 1. 550.

¹⁵ *Euthyph.* 6c.

upon each. Myth as plan is pure process, within which what is important is not the end product, but the unfolding of a process in time.¹⁶

It may be argued, in our characteristically profane fashion, that the true purpose of Homer's myths is not to be found in the wishes of the gods, but in the interests of men. Myth is an excuse for the interests of the powerful, and a way of duping the masses. This interpretation ignores two important points. First, the most powerful characters in the myths are authentic believers. Achilles is especially devout,¹⁷ and the commanders take the advice of the gods (if not their priests) seriously.¹⁸ It may be answered that this is easy for them, that the authenticity of their belief is merely an indication of their personal gain. They believe because they do well by their belief. However, the constraints which myth imposes are most rigid when they refer to the powerful, not the weak. It is difficult then to view myth as propaganda, and as an instrument for the control of the weak. The weak do not need to be controlled, but those with overabundant power do. Sir James Frazer's study of the curious manner of the succession of the kingship of Diana at Aricia¹⁹ whereby the kingship was claimed by the killing of the past king- demonstrates this clearly. Frazer devotes a whole chapter to the "Burden of Royalty", and the examples he calls upon are not limited to extended afternoon teas and polo matches, but include initiatory beatings, forced seclusion, numerous taboos, and, of course, the promise of death at the end of the king's term. Achilles bears this burden through the whole course of the *Iliad*; as he tells the suppliant Trojan at his feet:

You die too, friend. Don't take it hard.

¹⁶This is also clear from the 'conclusion' of the *Iliad*. Just as we enter the action, so too do we leave it: in mid-flow.

¹⁷ *Il.* 1.70-5.

¹⁸ See for examples Hector (*Il.* 15. 273) and Agamemnon (*Il.* 12. 248).

¹⁹Frazer, Sir James George. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. (London: MacMillan Press, 1978). Chapter XVII.

Patroclus died, and he was far better than you.
 Take a look at me. Do you see how huge I am,
 How beautiful? I have a noble father,
 My mother was a goddess, but I too
 Am in death's shadow. ...²⁰

Social integration is hardest for the powerful. The best are bound to fight and die. Sarpedon explains this necessity to his comrade, Glaucus, describing their place and duty within the social order:

"Glaucus, you know how you and I
 Have the best of everything in Lycia-
 Seats, cuts of meat, full cups, everybody
 Looking at us like we were gods?
 Not to mention our estates on the Xanthus,
 Fine orchards and riverside wheat fields.
 Well, now we have to take our stand at the front,
 Where all the best fight, and face the heat of battle,..."²¹

The riffraff in back are largely left out of the *Iliad*;²² it is up front, where the battle is hot, and the danger high, that the purpose of myth must be brought to bear. It is especially the powerful who must find their place within the process.

* * * * *

The purpose of myth is not an enduring, universal principle that directs thought and action from outside myth, but an imperative that moves myth from within. Mythic man has his orientations, his felt attachments to a changing cosmos. The suitors in Odysseus' home have a plan or μῦθος deep in their hearts.²³ A myth is a plan not in the sense that it is a far off goal, but because one

²⁰ *Il.*, 21. 112-7.

²¹ *Il.*, 12.320-7.

²² One notable exception is the vulgar Thersites, who Odysseus puts in place using his power-both of words [2.266-85] and of blows [2.287-90]. But even he stands out [2.231-2], performing as an orator/entertainer in front of the Achaeans [2.233-5]. He contests Agamemnon's rule [2.242-261], and, as a panderer to the mob is a potential ruler himself.

²³ "μῦθων οὖς μνηστῆρες ἐνὶ φρεσὶ βυσσοδόμενον" *Od.* 4.676.

is oriented to it, as the suitors are oriented towards Penelope and the comforts of her home. An orientation is a turning towards and a fixing upon something. This sense of plan manifest as orientation fixes the person firmly within the mythic cosmos, rather than directing their vision to some far-off goal. Everything is contained within the process, including human desires.

iv) *myth as magic*

Myth is often viewed as a poor form of science; it is considered poor because it claims to affect the world it describes. Myth is magical, and magic fails because it contains a misunderstanding of both the world as a whole, and of the power of human speech. Myth confuses the part and the whole, and sees connections among things, people and events where there are none, while at the same time overestimating the power of human speech, in commands, spells and chants, as affecting the world. According to this account, there are no direct, substantial connections among the various parts of our world, but instead the operations of the world are governed by laws, which it is the role of science to discover. Likewise, human speech is only capable of giving partial expression to these laws, not of speaking directly of the things themselves.

According to the mythic sensibility, however, the cosmos is not a whole in the sense that it is governed by an abstract set of laws, but because it shares a common substance and power, traceable to the origin and center of all things. Speech can share in the substance of this genitive moment, through incantations, magic spells, and songs of origin. Through speech, therefore, mythic man

directly affects his world, calling some things to presence, banishing others, making the world do his bidding.

Magic is an extreme example of this property of mythic language, but a fixation upon substance permeates mythic language in general. When Homer uses *μῦθος*, he often uses it in a most general, yet also most concrete sense, as "anything delivered by word of mouth".²⁴ For Homer, myth is everywhere, wherever a word is spoken. And considering the nature of the speakers in Homer's poems, these are not empty words. The first use of *μῦθος* that we find in the *Iliad* is Agamemnon's *κρατερὸν μῦθον*,²⁵ or forceful word to Chryses, who obeys, not because Agamemnon is lawful, or because his speech represents a consistent standard,²⁶ but because he is powerful. Words have substance because they are powerful.

The definition of *ὁ μῦθος* as 'the word' shares in another original usage of *ὁ μῦθος* as, "an advice, a command, or order".²⁷ In this use power takes on progressively manifest forms. When one gives a command to another, one does so under the threat of violence- words become deeds. The two are connected as *ὁ μῦθος* shifts from command to threat, and from threat to punishment:

ἡπείλησεν μῦθον, ὃ δὲ τετλεοσμένοσ ἐστί²⁸

"he made a **threat** - it is already accomplished"

Words, commands, threats and deeds blend into one another.

²⁴ Liddell and Scott

²⁵ *Il.* 1.25.

²⁶ Rather, Agamemnon is characteristically inconsistent in his speech. This is central to Achilles' criticism of the warlord [*Il.* 9. 318], a criticism given proof by Agamemnon's 'apology' to Achilles- alleging he was under the influence of a god when he wronged the fighter. [*Il.* 19.101].

²⁷ Liddell and Scott

²⁸ *Il.* 1.388. (my translation)

From this concrete usage, wherein words are substantial, we move to the distinction between, as Socrates says in his trial, words and deeds.²⁹ μῦθος finds its opposite in τό ἔργον. Homer holds μῦθος and ἔργα much closer. Phoenix advises Achilles "To be a speaker of **words** and a doer of **deeds**".³⁰ In contrast, for Plato μῦθος takes on diminutive sense, and becomes 'mere speech', μῦθοισιν. This 'mere' calls into question the nature of the phenomenon as a whole. The story is opposed by the world which is not well-described; the design by a world without apparent purpose; the command by the subject who won't listen. All that keeps these fissures from appearing is the silence that attends obedience, as when Zeus commands Hera:

μη δὲ πάντα σ' ἐμοῦς ἐπιέλπεο μύθους εἰδήσειν³¹

never hope to know/see all my **plans**

All of the modalities of μῦθος are compacted into this one command. Myth is a story, through which we hear Zeus' hidden plan played out in words and deeds. Myth is a plan or a process that can be known only as it unfolds, not as an end that stands outside of this unfolding. And myth is, of course, the powerful word: here, the word of Zeus to his wife Hera.

A parallel use of μῦθος appears in the *Odyssey*, when to keep his plan

²⁹ *Apol.* 32a. Though by this time and in this passage μύθους had been replaced by λόγους, "the word" by "the true word". Myth had then ceased to bind together the Greek cosmos, which was coming apart even in Socrates' trial. Its function as a binding force was to be replaced by λόγος, which, according to its roots, was sought out to gather the parts of Greek experience together into a whole.

³⁰ *Il.* 9.443.

³¹ *Il.* 1.545.

safe, Odysseus orders Eurycleia to: "keep μῦθος silent".³² μῦθος does not have a clear and distinct end, but, as a process, it depends upon its uncertainty, its raw potential, exemplified here in the wile of Odysseus. An important contrast in the *Odyssey* is between the Agamemnon's straightforward homecoming and tragic end, and Odysseus' return under the shadow of deceit. Odysseus lies even to his wife, though it's uncertain whether she is really duped or just pretends to be duped.³³ Penelope too knows about endless process: she weaves by day and unweaves by night. But, it might be objected, her involvement in process is her way of holding out for an end- the return of her husband. Though the *Odyssey* does appear to have an ending- Odysseus' homecoming- this is not really the ending. Rather, as he tells his wife upon their reunion, that end- the stability of home- is a temporary respite from continuing wandering, since he is fated to leave home again.³⁴

* * * * *

μῦθος has a later use as a specifically poetic story; that is, as a story owing to either Hesiod or Homer. When Plato refers to μῦθος he has this meaning in mind. Plato is the line that divides myth from reason, μῦθος from λόγος.³⁵ We

³²Od. 19.502.

³³ See Murnaghan, Sheila. *Disguise and Recognition in the Odyssey*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) p. 137. Murnaghan cites Philip Hash ["Penelope and Odysseus in *Odyssey* XIX"] and Seneca [*Epistles* 88,8] as proponents of this curious interpretation.

³⁴ Od. 23.255-91. Odysseus recalls a prophesy, given by Tiresias in the underworld, that Odysseus should not come to his end and rest until he carries an oar inland, finds natives that know nothing of the sea, and then offers a sacrifice to Poseidon. The oar is a high-water mark. It defines the most extreme limits of an indefinite element- water. The text is not completely clear, but it sounds as if when the sacrifice is made, and Odysseus is reconciled with Poseidon, death will come to Odysseus "from the sea" [23.287]. Odysseus cannot die, and come to his definite end as a human being- since death defines us most as humans- until he exhausts the indefinite potential of the element with which he is associated.

³⁵ Karen Armstrong also takes the division between *muthos* and *logos* as essential. [*The Battle for God*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000)] She understands *muthos* to refer to the unconscious, to the origins of life, and to the foundations of culture. [xiii] In contrast, she depicts *logos* as rational,

get nearer to myth as we approach Plato, for Plato is both mythic and not-mythic. In Plato's writings, myth is broken from its unity, and its parts put into service here and there: for the education of children,³⁶ or to frighten the impious.³⁷ If myth is a process, it must give itself up to a higher purpose: myth becomes functional. If myth is advice, a command, or an order, it must find its rank and put its talent in the service of its superior. If myth is a word or speech, it must be a speech that is able to give an account of itself, and to do this it must step outside of itself. Myth becomes something other than itself.

Yet this privative sense of myth and the damage which it does to the unity of myth allows its parts to be seen as they are, whereas otherwise they are blended into a whole. The stable, separate elements are waiting to spring forth from myth to be seen, like Athena from Zeus's brow.

The fleeting juncture of the totality of myth and a discriminating rationality is expressed in Plato's substitution of λόγος for μῦθος as the true word, a substitution that we have already glimpsed briefly. We do not have the time or the space here to adequately explore the connotations of this shift, something that would require an elaboration of λόγος. However, we can point to other studies in this topic, specifically Heidegger's discussion in Being and Time,³⁸ wherein λόγος is interpreted as a "letting-something-be-seen"³⁹ through discourse. From this essence follows all subsequent interpretations, as true

scientific, and pragmatic (with too much emphasis, in my view, on practical application). [ibid.] Armstrong argues that contemporary religious fundamentalism is kindled by a falsely literal reading of myth, and a confusion of *muthos* and *logos*.

³⁶ *Rep.* 377a

³⁷ *Rep.* 330d

³⁸ Being and Time. pp. 32-34.

³⁹ Being and Time. p. 33.

discourse, as reason, judgement, concept, definition, ground, or relationship.⁴⁰

Plato's substitution of λόγος for μῦθος implies a bringing together of the two words, since in every substitution the things exchanged must be adjacent for a moment. Thus, while as Heidegger argues, eidetic stability comes to predominate in Plato's teachings, such that all things must find their being in relation to an εἶδος, which possesses a formal stability and universality, this occurs within the context of a mythic cosmos in which all parts have their proper place in relation to one another and to the whole, and within the cycles of mythic time.

This connection between μῦθος and λόγος is mirrored by our own conjunction of the two words in the term mythology. The term has its origins in the Greek μῦθολογεῖω, which refers to the act of telling myths: in Homer, to tell a story word for word and in its completeness;⁴¹ in Plato, to the making of myths.⁴² Even in Homer's use, a fracture appears between the two roots, and myth appears as an object for inquiry, and as something which can be represented accurately. By the time of Plato, Homer's works have attained an *objective* status, being preserved through writing, and memorised by poets and repeated unconsciously,⁴³ or manipulated by philosophers.⁴⁴ The word 'mythology' and

⁴⁰ Being and Time. p. 32.

⁴¹ *Od.* 12.450

⁴² *Rep.* 501e

⁴³ *Ion.* 542a. The *Ion* clearly shows the objectification of myth and subordination of myth to philosophy. Ion is presented as a representative of the Homeric tradition. Socrates gives Ion two options: either he has some kind of knowledge, or he is inspired. [542a] Ion chooses the later. However, unlike Homer, who claims to be inspired by the godly muses [*Il.* 1.1, 2.522-533], Socrates says that Ion is inspired by Homer, a man. This puts knowledge of myths within the grasp of human beings. Indeed, through the exchange in the *Ion*, Socrates shows that, although he is not himself a poet [*Phaedo.* 60e-61c], he can master the memorization of Homer's poems, perhaps even better than Ion himself. Mythology does not require divine inspiration, but can be mastered as objective knowledge.

its derivatives ('mythologize', 'mythologist', 'mythologistian') were used in the English language long before 'myth' entered the language on its own, as early as the 15th Century.⁴⁵ In accordance with Plato's legacy, myth could not be viewed on its own, but only in relation to logos: fabulous representations could only be viewed as degenerate forms of accurate representation. Eliade writes that,

From the time of Xenophanes (ca. 565-470)- who was the first to criticize and reject the 'mythological' expressions of the divinity employed by Homer and Hesiod-⁴⁶ the Greeks steadily continued to empty mythos of all religious and metaphysical value. Contrasted both with logos and, later, with historia, mythos came in the end to denote 'what cannot really exist'. On its side, Judeo-Christianity put the stamp of 'falsehood' and 'illusion' on whatever was not justified or validated by the Two Testaments.⁴⁷

Myth changes from, as Eliade calls it, a "true story"⁴⁸ to its very opposite. However, in order to understand myth, and especially the experience of man within myth, we must set aside these definitions which look upon myth from the outside. Thus we have begun our approach to myth through a criticism of common opinions which lead us away from myth, towards a purpose outside of myth, and by re-attaching myth to its original meanings. These meanings of μῦθος are: as cosmos; as process; and as powerful words. These meanings will become clearer through an examination of the mythic experience, of the vocabulary and syntax of mythic man.

⁴⁴ *Rep.* 377a- 397a

⁴⁵ *Keywords.* p. 211

⁴⁶ Xenophanes introduces familiar criticisms of myth: like Aristotle [*Pol.* 1252b], he argues that the gods of myth are merely projections of human characters [*frag.* B14, B15, & B16]; and like Plato [*Euth.* 6c.], he says that the thieving, adultery and deception that goes on between the gods is disgraceful [*frag.* b1.21-24 & B11], and that the one true god must be eternal and unchanging [*frag.* A12].

⁴⁷ *Myth and Reality.* pp. 1-2

⁴⁸ *Myth and Reality.* p. 1.

Section 2: Mythic Time- process over ends

i) *introduction*

In the preceding section I traced myth to its roots in Homer's use of *μῦθος*, showing the varied, though interrelated original meanings of the word. In the next two sections I adopt an analytic approach to myth, describing the mythic conceptions of time and space, conceptions that shape subsequent perception.⁴⁹ From the outside, myth looks like a murky soup, so this type of analysis is necessary to cast some light. These are, however, provisional distinctions. Time is, in Cassirer's words, a modality of the experience of myth. Space is another. This division and its place within his philosophy of perception reflects Cassirer's Kantianism; but whereas for Kant the sensible intuitions do not change over time, remaining clear and distinct from one another, as the x-axis is from the y- on a Cartesian graph, for Cassirer the time and space blend with one another in the compact experience of myth.

The question of which of these modalities- space or time- is primary is a fruitless one. When Cassirer reflects on this question in his book on mythical thought, Volume II of The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: Mythical Thought, he concludes that: "the expression of temporal relations develops only through that

⁴⁹ I borrow this division from Kant. In the Critique of Pure Reason he teaches that the sensible intuitions- of time and space- are fundamental to perception, since they supply it with substance, and with a context within which the categories of the understanding can be applied. The sensible intuitions of time and space supply perception with its 'stuff'. The difference is that whereas Kant's sensible intuitions do not change, following Cassirer I argue that our conceptions of time and space do change with technology.

of spatial relations. Between the two there is at first no sharp differentiation."⁵⁰ In unity there is neither extension nor duration (nor, as we shall see in section 4, metaphor), but the pure presence of a moment- one is enveloped by what is here and now.

This lack of differentiation within myth can be generalized. In his review of Cassirer's Mythical Thought, Martin Heidegger sympathetically writes that, "A basic feature of the mythic object-consciousness is the absence of a clear delineation between dreaming and waking experiences, between the imagined and the perceived, between the original and the copy, between word (signification) and thing, between wished-for and actual possession."⁵¹ The divisions that have structured thought in the traditions of the West are not operative in myth, but rather a fluid sense of being pervades. Mythic man is, as Heidegger continues, fascinated by presence, but it is not a static presence that commands his attention, but one enlivened with potential. Man is moved by his changing surroundings, and he is capable of moving them too. Within this reciprocal exchange neither the division between time and space nor between subject and object appears.

When we look specifically at mythic time, we see three main features emerge. Again, these are provisional distinctions that blend into each other.

⁵⁰ Mythical Thought, p. 107.

⁵¹ Heidegger, Martin. "Review of Ernst Cassirer's Mythical Thought" pp. 180-190 in Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics. Richard Taft (trans.) (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1962) p. 181. Heidegger is sympathetic to Cassirer's purpose of thinking through the experience of myth. Reciprocally, in their Davos discussion Cassirer agrees that Heidegger's ontological studies may supply a ground for his own studies concerning perception. ["A Cassirer-Heidegger Seminar" pp. 208-222 in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 25, (1964/1965) p. 221] In terms of their

First, mythic time is cyclical- it moves in circles; or as we say in more modern terms, mythic time is a process. Second, these processes are tied to the cycles of nature, such that mythic time is biological. Finally, within these closed circles mythic man takes his orientation not from any ends (since time has none), but rather from the origin, which gives life substance and continuing dynamism. These three themes will provide the structure for this section.

ii) *mythic time is cyclical*

The cyclical character of mythic time has been well-described by others. Mircea Eliade describes a mythic time in terms of repeated evocations of a genitive moment.⁵² Ernst Cassirer's idea of mythic time is also cyclical. He quotes from Schelling, who describes mythical time as:

...time which is indivisible by nature and absolutely identical, which therefore, whatever duration may be imputed to it, can only be regarded as a moment, i.e. as time in which the end is like the beginning and the beginning like the end, a kind of eternity, because it is itself not a sequence of time but only One Time, which is not itself an objective time, i.e. a sequence of times, but only becomes time (that is, the past) relative to the time which follows it.⁵³

Time is indivisible and self-identical because it is one whole: not a

differences on the subject of mythical thought, Cassirer is, in the end, committed to a view of myth as a stepping-stone from our past, whereas Heidegger openly evokes it as a possible future.
⁵² *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* [William Trask (trans.) (New York: Harper, 1959)] and *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* are the two books of Eliade's which I will rely on here, since they treat time in the most theoretical depth.

⁵³ Schelling, *Philosophy of Mythology*. p. 182. There is no English translation available; quoted in *Mythical Thought*. p. 106.

succession of discreet times, but one time, in which beginning and end are the same. Mythical time is the eternal now, and this is the pure moment. Mythical time only becomes pure, or to use Eliade's terminology, real or substantive, when the past is brought into the present. This bringing in is not a matter of importing 'old' ideas or customs into a 'new' context; time could never become whole if this were the case, because the old would always be set apart from the new. Rather, the present becomes the past. Eliade tells us that "*by its very nature sacred time is reversible* in the sense that, properly speaking, it is a *primordial mythical time made present*. Every religious festival, any liturgical time, represents the reactualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, 'in the beginning.'"⁵⁴

The type of example which Eliade refers to most often amongst his numerous references from comparative religion is that of the new year, an event which reproduces the original moment of creation. "Every New Year is a resumption of time from the beginning, that is, a repetition of the cosmogony."⁵⁵ The celebration is not intended to imitate the original moment, but re-visits it, or as Eliade puts it, 're-actualizes' the cosmogonic act.⁵⁶ The oldest of the old is the newest of the new, and the process of life receives its stamp again and again from the origin.

Hence the cyclical character of mythical time ensures both the unity or self-identity of myth and the substantiality of myth. Being comes from the origin. The novel and the unexplainable are thus dismissed as insubstantial.

⁵⁴ Sacred and the Profane. p. 68-9. (italics Eliade's own)

⁵⁵ Cosmos and History. p. 54.

⁵⁶ Sacred and the Profane. p. 77.

Like the defensive wall in the *Iliad* that the Greeks build without the blessings of or aid from the gods,⁵⁷ purely profane accomplishments are without substance. "The wall could not endure for long",⁵⁸ but it is washed away in a deluge of wind and water, and the field in front of Troy is restored to its pristine, original condition. Only through continuous repetition of the cosmogony can the works of man endure. In this repetition, man imitates the gods in their making of the cosmos, and becomes god-like himself.

In myth, unique times are an impossibility; there is only one time, the origin, which is repeated again and again. Time is leveled out. "The stages of time- past, present, future- do not remain distinct; over and over again the mythical consciousness succumbs to the tendency and temptation to level the differences and ultimately transform them into pure identity."⁵⁹ The past becomes available to the present, as the source of the new. This requires the leveling of the uniqueness of particular times. Eliade refers to this phenomenon as the 'abolishment of time', and notes that it requires a curious lack of memory: mythic man wishes to forget his history (understood in an objective way as the record of unique events taken together), in order to share in the creative power of the first moment.⁶⁰ Since there is no standard for time which stands outside of events, and in relation to which events can occur and be seen in their uniqueness, everything is seen as potentially equal, each event either a repetition of some past event, or a non-event which does not share in the primordial power and substance of the original. The non-events, which are unique, are ignored; the

⁵⁷ *Il.* 7. 461-477.

⁵⁸ *Il.* 12.11. (Lombardo trans.)

⁵⁹ *Mythical Thought*. p. 111.

⁶⁰ *Cosmos and History*. p. 91.

original events attract all attention. The possibility of discrete times is tied to the existence of a standard against which times can be measured: "Before God," Eliade writes, "all historical events are equal. Or if one no longer believes in God- before History...".⁶¹ And if one no longer believes in history? Then its becomes possible for man to return to the origin, to become like a god.

iii) *mythic time is biological*

...or like a beast. The cyclical time of myth can be understood also as biological time: the circle of the seasons; the cycle of birth, life and death; the diurnal course; the repetition of the daily work of production and consumption. The character of mythic time is thus felt most urgently in the continuous and powerful necessities of material existence, from which man finds no relief. Rather than bemoan his fate, mythic man plunges into this swirling eddy, and gives himself over to the rhythms of material existence and to the vicissitudes of his animal nature. In this giving over, he finds relief, as his being is smoothly directed towards meeting the demands of producing and consuming, which he meets with relish: through periods of restraint which promote production, and through release which lets forth consumption.⁶²

However, it would be a mistake to think that mythic time is therefore a façade hiding an objective material cause. Such a reductionist, materialist

⁶¹ *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*. p. 56.

⁶² This cyclical exchange of release and restraint is taken up by Bataille, who we will look at in Part IV.

approach to myth obscures the true character of myth by falsely distinguishing the purely materialistic from the sacred. For the profane is made sacred through mythic time, and the merely material is worshipped as divine and substantive. Eliade makes this argument against reductionist theories of myth. The obvious parallels between New Year festivals and the socio-economic facts of agricultural societies, "does not justify any conclusion that these rituals are simple reflexes of economic and social life: in traditional societies, the 'economic' and the 'social' bear an entirely different meaning from that which a modern European tends to give them."⁶³ We will leave aside for the moment whether what Eliade says of modern Europeans is also true of ourselves, the inheritors of modern European ideas. Regardless, mythic time and its sacred rituals cannot be explained away by referring to their material causes, because mythic man sees no division between the objective and subjective actualities of time; or to put it another way, an event (like the coming of the new crop) can be both a socio-economic 'fact' and a sacred moment, pregnant with 'value' (to use the language of another modern European). There is no division between the two characters of an event, hence neither can be said to 'cause' the other.

This only affirms what should be a straightforward premise: that mythic man has an awareness of his actions and their significance; that being mythic does not equate with being crazy. If asked whether the new year celebrations are rooted in the tribe's dependency upon nature, a member of the tribe would almost certainly answer, 'yes'. This is clear. Nothing is hidden, or can be hidden, because appearance and essence are identical. A thing or event is just as it

⁶³ Cosmos and History. p. 51.

seems.

Mythic man worships life and what sustains life. This means worshipping nature. The biological rhythms of mythic time attest to this. This explains the making sacred of all human activities: sex, birth, death, hunting, farming, eating, living, dying. The repetitive character of these rituals draws mythic man into the repetitiveness of natural cycles. Human rituals, hence human conventions, are conceived as completely natural.

Human generations are like leaves in their seasons.
The wind blows them to the ground, but the tree
Sprouts new ones when the spring comes again.
Men too. ...⁶⁴

Indeed, a closeness to nature is the most well-known, and by consequence, the most hackneyed quality of mythic peoples. However, while reformers trumpet this closeness to nature with consequentialist arguments⁶⁵, for mythic man, subordination to nature and its ebbs and flows is not a mere technique meant to procure certain outcomes. For these ebbs and flows contain human desire as well. All of the human being is submerged in these rhythms, and, therefore, nothing stands outside of the cyclical movements by which those movements can be put into the service of some end. There are times to feast, and times to starve. One does not perform New Year's celebrations for the success of the crops when it is not the new year, but one's desires for crops must be expressed at the proper moment. One asks when it is time to receive. Man's

⁶⁴ Il. 6.149-152. Lombardo (trans.)

⁶⁵ See for example, David Suzuki and Peter Knudtson. Wisdom of the elders : honoring sacred native visions of nature. (New York : Bantam Books, 1992) For all his criticism of technology and for this attempt of his to reform technology using myth, Suzuki's views are essentially technological. He simply wants better, environmentally sensitive technology- solar cells instead of gasoline engines. Suzuki and Knudtson's collection of mythic wisdom was only possible through technology, specifically the polluting jet-planes that allowed them to globe-trot from village to village.

biological nature swallows all of his energies, and in this he finds perfect satisfaction, whether in feast or famine.

Mythic man's attention is oriented unwaveringly upon the present moment. He lives in the moment, and because of this he is always open to change. Mythic man's sense of time is attuned to cycles of change that make every moment a repetition of the origin. Mythic man is absorbed in these cycles. "Thus we see that for mythical consciousness and feeling a kind of biological time, a rhythmic ebb and flow of life, precedes the intuition of a properly cosmic time."⁶⁶ Mythic man does not move outside of these cycles, into an abstract, universal time, nor does he desire to do so. His ends are attached to his means, and all his means spring from the creative power expressed as the original.

Everyday biological time is united with the primordial time of the origin. Every birth is a repetition of the birth of the cosmos itself, since, as we shall see in the next section, every living being is a cosmos unto itself. And likewise, every death is identical with the death of the cosmos as a whole, and prepares the way for a new, original birth. Time is measured, writes Eliade, biologically,⁶⁷ and the cyclical patterns of birth and death, of production and consumption, within which man is immersed are identical with the patterned change of the cosmos itself. Mythic man does not consider himself trapped by the unending demands of his material existence any more than he imagines himself trapped within the cosmos. Rather than seeing the world as a set of forces which thwart his purposes, he sees himself as a part of the cosmos. He owes his being to it, as it brought him forth, and will take him back.

⁶⁶ *Mythical Thought*. p. 109.

⁶⁷ *Cosmos and History*. p. 74.

iv) *not ends, but origins*

The cyclical character of mythic time expresses the self-referential character of power for mythic man. Eliade argues that mythic man's focus upon the sacred is identical with a focus upon power, which is what gives things being: "the sacred is equivalent to a power, and, in the last analysis, to reality. Sacred power means reality and at the same time enduringness and efficacy."⁶⁸ If power is equivalent to the sacred and to being, then power has no purpose outside of itself. Power exists for the sake of power. The letting forth of power, which has as its archetype the cosmogony, is directed towards the further letting forth of power. The continual and cyclical regeneration of power through power is time as process. The term 'nature' is another way of saying 'process'; and it is a way of saying which points to power's self-referential character, since nature exists for nature and for nature's changes. The cycles of nature confirm the unity or self-referential character of myth as a whole. Mythic man wants to immerse himself in these cycles, "to participate in reality, to be saturated with power."⁶⁹ If nature is the sum total of the powers which surround and envelope man, then these powers have no purpose other than themselves and their continual regeneration.

Profane moments mark the absence of such powers. But even in the absence of the powers which make life sacred, mythic man longs for the presence of power which will give his life substance. As Eliade emphasizes, for mythic

⁶⁸ Sacred and Profane. p. 12.

⁶⁹ Sacred and Profane . p. 13.

man, life outside the closed cycle of myth is inconceivable. When presented with such a situation, mythic man may simply lay down and cease to live.⁷⁰ In this, even the desires of man are contained within the process. Hence, desire is not the way to an end that transcends the cycles of nature, but is an expression of the power of origins. What mythic man desires most is to be part of the process, to share in that power.

Cyclical time has no end, and hence no purpose outside of itself. Mythic, cyclical time is contrasted with linear time, or history, whether history is expressed in religious terms, as in Augustine, as the straight way from out of the repeating "circuitous paths" of cyclical time,⁷¹ or in secular terms, as, "a complex of processes, in which the things apparently stable... go through an uninterrupted change of coming into being and passing away, in which, in spite of all seeming accidentality and of all temporary retrogression, a progressive development asserts itself in the end".⁷² In everyday language we know linear time as progress. Belief in progress contains the assumption that the future will be both different and better than the past.⁷³ Mythic time has no such end. In mythic time, the future cannot be either substantively different from or better than the past, though it can be the same. There is an origin, and this origin can and does reappear at many moments

⁷⁰ Sacred and Profane. p. 33. Eliade describes Australian Aborigines who wandered about using a sacred stick, their *axis mundi*, as their guide. When the stick was broken by an anthropologist who was studying them, they lay down and died.

⁷¹ St. Augustine. The City of God. XII, 14. John O'Meara (trans.) (London: Penguin, 1984) pp. 487-488.

⁷² Marx, Karl. "Marx, Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy", in Marx/Engels Selected Works (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968) p. 620.

⁷³ However, this set of assumptions is much less widely held now than in the near past. Both blind faith in progress and the stigma which this faith attaches to other 'backward' peoples are not as common as they once were.

The question which fills the mind of mythic man and compels him to move and act is not one of ends, but of origins; not what a process is moving towards, but how it comes into being and is sustained as process. Both the mythic mind and society take within themselves this origin, and replay it again and again, in so doing, allow continuous eruptions of the genitive impulse to fill life with being. Hence the types of questions which are associated with teleological purpose and which hinge on judging the present against an end or purpose have no place in a mythic society. Mythic man sees the world in terms of process, not ends. His efforts are not towards some unchanging end, but to keep the process moving by returning to the genitive power of the origin.

Mythic societies are not traditional in the sense that they seek to preserve their traditions indefinitely in an unchanged state, but they must constantly regenerate themselves in order to survive. This survival depends upon constant change. The closer the 'circles' of mythic time, the more often the myth is told, the more continuously the rituals repeated and time is thrust back to the first moment, the firmer the origin holds as the 'tradition' of its people.

Hence, mythic man "tends towards the recovery of the paradisiac, primordial situation; of the days when he could *create spontaneously*,"⁷⁴. New Year ceremonies often include a reproduction of the original chaos of the cosmos, sometimes reproduced through sexual orgies or the overturning of the social order (e.g. masters waiting on their slaves, or the crowning of a carnival king and the humiliation of the real sovereign⁷⁵). "We witness," Eliade remarks, "a 'deluge' that annihilates all humanity in order to prepare the way for a new and

⁷⁴ Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries. p. 36.

⁷⁵ Cosmos and History. p. 57.

regenerated human species."⁷⁶ The apparent stability of mythic society is epiphenomenal to a cycle of destruction and regeneration. Social stability does not reflect an unchanging idea, but arises out of this process. The closer the 'circles' of mythic time, the more often the myth is told, the more continuously the rituals repeated and time is thrust back to the first moment, the firmer the origin holds as the 'tradition' of its people. This apparent constancy depends at every stage mentioned upon change.

Eliade writes in terms of the sacred and the profane. In profane time change is known in terms of purpose, related something outside of time and change, fixed and immovable. Mythic man conceives of time in terms of the origin. Through the origin, all things come into being. "The true character of mythical being is first revealed when it appears as the being of origins. All the sanctity of mythical being goes back ultimately to the sanctity of the origin. It does not adhere immediately to the content of the given but to its coming into being, not to its qualities and properties but to its genesis in the past."⁷⁷ Rather than set, formal qualities determining the being of a being, being depends on an origin, and on the cycle of coming into and out of being.

In myth a person is not defined by their qualities or virtues, but by their origin and ancestry. Hence one does not change to become a 'better' person, one changes to regenerate one's real being. Being oneself means finding this authentic personality and thrusting it into one's daily life, thereby sacralizing the most mundane existence and making it substantive. The same is true of mythic society as of mythic man. Eliade notes that mythic man, "is powerless against

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Mythical Thought*. p 105.

cosmic catastrophes, military disasters, social injustices bound up with the very structure of society, personal misfortunes, and so forth."⁷⁸ Rather than seeking out ends which will set the accidents of history right, the mythic approach to reform is to accept the tragic necessity of the event and re-orient oneself to the origins of misfortune. So, mythic man asks: what trespass provoked this suffering? This re-orientation holds the promise of the regeneration and the reclaiming of a past, lost power. Even if nothing can be done in the sense of overcoming the misfortune (origins can never be overcome in the same way that accidents of history can), just knowing the origin holds the promise of becoming 'real' again. And when nothing can be done, even suffering on its own can make one real: "Whatever its nature and whatever its apparent cause, his suffering had a meaning; it corresponded, if not to a prototype, at least to an order whose value was not contested."⁷⁹ In suffering mythic man accepts the cyclical character of time, and subordinates his desires to its changes.

⁷⁸ Cosmos and History. p. 95.

⁷⁹ Cosmos and History. p. 96.

Section 3: Mythic Space- many centers

i) *introduction*

Mythic space is a whole, a cosmos. The concept of a cosmos is difficult to understand, in that a cosmos may seem to be no more than an ambiguous soup. All things are connected, but no single ordering principle stands out as what binds those particulars together. For example, though Homer's cosmos is governed by Zeus' wishes, Zeus does not stand apart from the cosmos, but he must be considered in his relation to mortals, and in company with the other gods. These others are not derivative of him, as correlates are of principles. How then is a cosmos held together, if not from a set principle? The answer is found within the cosmos, indeed, at its center. The center is where the powers of the cosmos are concentrated. This concentration of power exerts a compelling influence on mythic man, and serves as his orientation, in effect binding him to the whole. As Eliade describes, mythic man wants to dwell at the center of the cosmos; his humble tent pole is the *axis mundi*. Mythic space may not have any ordering principles, but it does have centers that work to bind the cosmos together.

Cassirer and Eliade use similar terms to describe what mythic space is not. Eliade writes that, "For religious man, space is not homogenous; he experiences irruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different than

others."⁸⁰ Likewise Cassirer notes that, "In contrast to the homogeneity which prevails in the conceptual space of geometry every position and direction in mythical space is endowed as it were with a particular accent- and this accent always goes back to the fundamental mythical accent, the division between the sacred and the profane."⁸¹ Homogenous space is the space of geometry, governed by an abstract set of universal laws. In myth though, power stands in the place of law. Mythical consciousness is attracted to things which set themselves apart: to the sacred, to the manifestly substantive, to the powerful.

The unity of mythic space, instead of being expressed through the concept of the origin, is spoken of as the center; though the origin and the center are related terms: the place of origin is also the center. Thus the common feature of myth, noted by Eliade, that, "A universe comes to birth from its center; it spreads out from a central point that is, as it were, its navel."⁸² Again, whatever distinctions made within myth must be provisional ones, and are easily blurred.

In this section I will draw attention to three features of mythic space. First, the idea of the center. Second, that there are many centers. And third, that mythic man wants to be at the center, to share in the focussing of powers at the center, and this makes man like a god.

ii) *mythic space is at the center*

Mythic man lives in a cosmos- an ordered whole- in which every part has

⁸⁰ Sacred and Profane. p. 20

⁸¹ Mythical Thought. p. 85.

⁸² Sacred and Profane. p. 44.

its place. This 'proper place' cannot be considered as an abstract set of relations according to which things occupy definite locales in relation to some external, common standard. The point of orientation is not distant, but near; for each thing which exists in mythic space carries its standard within itself, and hence refers to itself to find its proper place. The concept of the proper place is expressed as the center. A thing is real and has substance when it exists at the center of the cosmos, thereby having all of the powers of the cosmos focused on it: everything looks to the center, and everything looks to itself.

Hence for something to truly be- that is, to be itself- it must be in its place. A thing out of place is no-thing. It cannot be itself, because being itself means being in relation to the things around it. A thing is defined by its context, and this is known partly by place. In his book, The Savage Mind, Lévi-Strauss writes:

A native thinker makes the penetrating comment that 'All things must have their place'. It could even be said that being in their place is what makes them sacred for if they were taken out of their place, even in thought, the entire order of the universe would be destroyed. Sacred objects therefore contribute to the maintenance of order in the universe by occupying places allocated to them.⁸³

But this does not pertain merely to objects that might strike one as sacred, such as religious articles, but to all things. Lévi-Strauss raises the issues of place in order to account for the breadth of knowledge of particular 'things' (e.g. species of animals, birds, fish, and plants) which mythic man has. This knowledge extends well beyond the requirements of daily necessity, but includes all things within the ordered world. The simplest practical activity requires

knowledge of the whole, for nothing exists in isolation from that which surrounds it.

But it cannot be a mere coincidence that brings things together, or a universal law that links particulars, because in mythic space, the distance among things is annulled, and an identity created. "All species and varieties of things have their 'home' somewhere in space, and their absolute reciprocal strangeness is thereby annulled".⁸⁴ What is it that things have in common, if not a law governing them or a space containing them? Cassirer argues that it is an identity based upon shared. It is what things are made of, rather than a similarity in their form, which makes authentic identity possible. "Here there is no detached, no merely abstract form of space; instead, all intuition of form is melted down into the intuition of content, into the aspects of the planetary world."⁸⁵ According to the mythic sensibility, two things made of the same stuff and sharing a common origin are identical.

This notion of shared substance as the basis for identity contributes to the compact quality of mythic space. Mythic space is not a uniform field within which many particulars have mediate relationships, but it allows for identity irrespective of distance. Although the mythical cosmos is a whole, it is not homogenous. Rather, the mythic cosmos 'clumps' together unevenly. Cassirer writes that, "the magical powers on which all occurrences depend do not extend equally to all spheres of reality but may be distributed in very different ways.the whole world seems filled with an indeterminate magic force, ...[yet] the particular subjects share very unequally in this universally distributed,

⁸³ Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind*. (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966) p. 10.

⁸⁴ *Mythical Thought*. p. 87.

inherently impersonal force. In many individuals and in certain classes and callings the magical potency that permeates and dominates the universe seems to be present in a particularly intense and concentrated form".⁸⁶ These concentrations of potency, of power, and of substance are centers; they are the focal points that bind the mythic cosmos together.

The concept of the center and the possibility of the reproduction of the center effectively abolish space as distance. As Cassirer argues, "By virtue of this peculiar principle mythical thinking seems to negate and suspend spatial distance. The distant merges with what is close at hand, since the one can in some way be copied by the other."⁸⁷ Outward likeness between original and copy is not seen as a subjective or inessential link between two distant objects, but as proof of an effective reproduction of the original. The original is not so much copied as revisited. To go back to the original is to go back to the origin, no matter how trivial the reproduction appears. Each time a nomad sets up his tent, he sets it up the same, and in so doing reproduces his cosmos, bringing himself back from his travels to the origin. This return to the origin abolishes homogenous space, profane space as a mere extension in which spatially distinct objects can be found. "Here all spatial barriers ultimately drop- ...the small can be copied in the large, the distant in the near, and the two are essentially the same."⁸⁸ In myth there is no division between the near and the distant, the small and the large, but a weird lack of perspective holds, such that mythic man can feel himself to be at the center of the world.

⁸⁵ Mythical Thought. p. 89.

⁸⁶ Mythical Thought. p. 185.

⁸⁷ Mythical Thought. p. 91.

⁸⁸ Mythical Thought. p. 92.

iii) *there are many centers*

The center can, as Eliade says, 'unveil' itself in many places, all of which are the center. Of these, none are stigmatized as being merely an imitation of the true center. For example, though both the home and the temple are sacred places, and are both considered to be the center of the cosmos, the home is not considered to be an inferior temple- a second best resort.⁸⁹ The home and temple both must be the center of the cosmos, according to mythic man's desire to place "himself at the Center of the World and by the same token at the very source of absolute reality".⁹⁰ Absolute reality cannot be second-order. But neither is absolute reality reserved for only a select class of things; rather, anything that man values is considered to be absolutely real. From Cassirer: "The characteristic of the sacred is consequently not limited from the very outset to specific objects or groups of objects; on the contrary, any content, however indifferent, can suddenly participate in it."⁹¹ The participation depends upon mythic man himself projecting "value" into an indifferent and otherwise uniform world.⁹² Where the sacred does not manifest itself, it is provoked, so that the world can become real, hence a livable place. Wherever mythic man dwells must become the center.

In his fascination with substance and his desire to dwell in the presence of power, mythic man finds the center everywhere. A third-hand passage, quoted

⁸⁹ In *The Sacred and the Profane* Eliade gives many examples from mythic architecture that illustrate the emphasis on the center and the identity between cosmos and home: e.g. the peaked or domed roof as the sky; the hearth or cornerstone the way to the underworld; the central supporting pillar the *axis mundi*, where heaven and earth meet

⁹⁰ *The Sacred and the Profane*. p. 65.

⁹¹ *Mythical Thought*. p. 75.

from Heidegger, from Aristotle, from Heraclitus to some strangers, shows how common-place the center can be. We find the passage in Heidegger's essay, "Letter on Humanism", wherein he quotes from Aristotle's *Parts of Animals* I, 5, 645a17:

The story is told of something Heraclitus said to some strangers who wanted to come visit him. Having arrived, they saw him warming himself at a stove. Surprised, they stood there in consternation- above all because he encouraged them, the astounded ones, and called for them to come in, with the words, "For here too the gods are present."⁹³

My interpretation of the passage follows from Heidegger's.⁹⁴ The stove, or to use a more evocative and romantic term, the hearth, is the center of the home. The activities of the home are focused on it (as Heidegger mentions, bread is baked in the stove⁹⁵), and it is also the source of heat for the home. It is clear that the hearth has more than a symbolic significance: it is the power that sustains the being of the home and those in it. As I have argued in section one of this chapter, mythic man does not set apart the necessities of biological existence from the highest, or most sacred, works of man. Here, we see the sacred and the profane joined in the humble stove. "For here too the gods are present." We could begin to generalize: anywhere there is a power, rather than formless chaos, the gods are present. This is not to say that either power or the presence of the gods are vague, universalized phenomena, like ether, but any presence of the sacred is focused, and in this focus the sacred acquires an intensity as a power which attracts our attention. The stove draws Heraclitus in by its warmth. The

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ *Basic Writings*. p. 256.

⁹⁴ *Basic Writings*. pp. 257-8.

⁹⁵ *Basic Writings*. p. 257.

presence of the gods is known through their standing out; power calls attention to itself as a *ganz andere*, the 'unveiling' of the sacred which Eliade calls an 'irruption'. "The numinous presents itself as something 'wholly other' ".⁹⁶ The 'wholly other' can seem quite familiar, as in this case, the warmth of a stove is familiar, though set apart from the cold around. But because it is set apart, and because of its power (to warm the home and cook food) the stove attracts and absorbs our attention. In a general sense, wherever mythic man's attention is focussed the gods are present. This means that there must be many centers, all possessing a singular value for him.

This is the existential basis for Eliade's argument that, "The multiplicity, or even the infinity, of centers of the world raises no difficulty for religious thought."⁹⁷ More abstractly, the multiplicity of centers is non-problematic because mythic space is firstly not a given, geometric space, a plane upon which each place is unique. For a place to be real, and to be itself, it must be the center. Mythic man is oriented towards the center, and constantly works to reproduce it. The insistent appeal of the center requires that mythic man continuously repeat the paradigmatic act of creation in order to make his world real. We now turn our attention to this repetition, through which mythic man is made both the master of his world and its servant.

⁹⁶ The Sacred and the Profane. p. 9.

⁹⁷ The Sacred and the Profane. p. 57.

iv) *man as god*

The substantiality of the world is ensured through the reproduction of the center: the human power of creation shares in the power of the gods in their creation of the cosmos. Man creates his own cosmos, and comes into his power as a world creator; in this mythic man is like a god.

Mythic man does not simply happen upon the center, but the center thrusts itself upon him; it is only because of the fact that the center is forcefully set apart from what surrounds it that it can serve as the orientation for man. Mythic man looks for the center to find his way, and sees all things in relation to it. Without a center, he is lost, and so desires to find the center again; this means recreating the cosmos. In doing so, mythic man becomes a god, for only a god has the power to give substance to a world without meaning. "This is why settling somewhere-", Eliade tells us, "building a village or merely a house- represents a serious decision, for the very existence of man is involved; he must, in short, create his own world and assume the responsibility of maintaining and renewing it."⁹⁸ Village and house are not mere shelters, but are centers; they hold the cosmos together, making it a cosmos- an ordered whole. Any one village and any one house is in itself he cosmos. Each is whole and complete, and each is the work of a creator, a man-god.

The microcosm-macrocosm relation is a familiar one. One thinks of Plato's *Republic*. The movement of the dialogue from the question of justice in the soul to justice in the city denotes an identity of man and city,⁹⁹ an identity

⁹⁸ *The Sacred and the Profane*. p. 56.

⁹⁹ *Rep.* 368e-369a.

that can be extended to the cosmos as a whole. This is in fact where the dialogue ends up, with a gazing at the cosmos as a whole.¹⁰⁰ But for Plato this is a broken relation: the city of the *Republic* is only a city in speech, and man can never attain the perfection of the cosmos, except, perhaps in thought. Man, for Plato, and for the religious traditions which follow from him, can never be a god; at best, as he tells us elsewhere, he can attain only a limited wisdom, "human wisdom".¹⁰¹

In the preceding mythic tradition, however, there is neither an ontological distinction between men and gods, nor does piety permit man from being like a god. Hence there is no clear distinction between the results of human artifice and the works of the gods, or similarly, between human conventions and nature. The works of human beings, their cities, homes, and temples, are for mythic man as natural as the hives of bees or the webs of spiders. This attitude informs Homer's metaphors describing the two armies at the battle of Troy, where the uniquely human activity of war is described as the movement of waves and the ebb and flow of tides. War is no more rational or purposive than this:

*A swollen wave pushed by the West Wind
Moves closer to a thundering beach.
It crests in deep water and then breaks
Onto the shore with a huge roar and curls over
And around the jutting rocks in a spray of brine.*

So too wave after wave of Greek battalions
Moving into combat.¹⁰²

Man's identity with nature makes him like a beast. When he stands out from this identity, he does so as a god. Hence, in Homer's *Iliad*, the especially powerful act or speech indicates that a human being is in reality a god. A strong

¹⁰⁰ *Rep.* 616b-617d.

¹⁰¹ *Apol.* 23a.

¹⁰² *Il.* 4.449-55.

spear-thrust shows that a god's force is behind it;¹⁰³ a loud shout, cutting through the din of battle, is the voice not of a human being, but a god.¹⁰⁴ Gods often melt into human form, giving counsel to heroes, as Athena guides Telemachus. Gods in human form are set apart by a special power which attracts one's attention. As Oilean Ajax says to his comrade, "Gods are easy to recognize."¹⁰⁵ What makes them recognizable is their power.

In the pre-Socratic thinker Empedocles one sees the blurring of the division between gods and men, and even the possibility of their identity, of men becoming gods. Empedocles was a kind of 'show-man' doctor and engineer, given the wild credits of having kept a woman alive without pulse or breath for a month and diverting two rivers to cleanse the city of Selinus of a plague.¹⁰⁶ Empedocles claims to deliver god-like wisdom of the cosmos as a whole, specifically of its elements- earth, air, fire, and water- and of its moving powers- love and strife. This is just what Socrates says he does not inquire into, things above in the heavens and below the earth.¹⁰⁷ Socrates claims limited wisdom, human wisdom, and reserves true wisdom for the gods.¹⁰⁸ This godly wisdom is the kind of wisdom that Empedocles claims; he tells us to think of his account as having come from a god.¹⁰⁹ Gods are not only wise, but their wisdom is matched by their reputation for wisdom. Since Empedocles is himself honored by the people of many cities, he is like a god in this respect as well:

¹⁰³ *Il.* 5.911.

¹⁰⁴ *Il.* 5.836-8.

¹⁰⁵ *Il.* 13.72-6. (Lombardo trans.)

¹⁰⁶ Empedocles. fragments. in Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy.

¹⁰⁷ *Apol.*, 19b.

¹⁰⁸ *Apol.*, 23a.

Hail! I go about among you, and immortal god, no longer mortal,
honored among all, as it seems,¹¹⁰

There is no strict division between seeming and reality. His lasting reputation is not considered as a stand-in for immortality, but as true immortality. Elsewhere Empedocles calls the idea of death a convention,¹¹¹ since nothing can truly come into or out of being, but rather different combinations of elements can join together under the influence of the two moving powers. Men, wild beasts, bushes, and birds are all mixed together as different permutations of assorted matter.¹¹² So, if one is in this soupy, mythic cosmos, the idea of an identity of man and god is not so strange

Mythic man attains his real being through a periodic recreation of the world and himself. The ritualistic nature of this recreation ensures the success of the recreation: "In reality the ritual by which he constructs a sacred space is efficacious in measure in which it reproduces the work of the gods."¹¹³ Every act of production requires the presence of the gods. There is no clear distinction in myth between the standards of effectiveness and sacredness.

The ritualized reproduction of the world is extended beyond the construction of distinctively human dwellings- houses, temples, cities- to the founding of the land itself. Eliade records the acts of clearing and settling land as cosmogony: "An unknown, foreign, and unoccupied territory... still shares in the fluid and larval modality of chaos. By occupying it and, above all, by settling in it, man symbolically transforms it into a cosmos through the ritual repetition of

¹⁰⁹ frag. 31B23.

¹¹⁰ frag. B112. ln. 4-5.

¹¹¹ frag. 31B9.

¹¹² *ibid.*

the cosmogony."¹¹⁴ Any founding implies two things: first, "a superabundance of reality, in other words an irruption of the sacred into the world";¹¹⁵ and second, a formless world into which this reality can irrupt. Man is the locus of this movement. This puts mythic man at the center of the cosmos.

In the mythic consciousness, the self and the world are not clearly distinguished. Mythic man sees no limit on either his own power or the power of nature. Moreover, those two powers flow into one another as man commands nature through magic and subordinates himself to natural cycles. Since there is no limit to man's power, nor any end towards which power is ultimately directed, mythic man judges power according to its own, self-referential standard. Magic is judged good if it works, if it is efficacious, or as we say, if it is efficient. "Accordingly," writes Cassirer, "the world of mythical ideas, precisely in its first and most immediate forms, appears closely bound up with this atmosphere of efficacy, which is indeed nothing more than a translation and transposition of subjective emotions and drives into a sensuous, objective existence."¹¹⁶ Mythic man does not distinguish between his subjective state and the state of the world around him; rather, he looks for the most efficient way to translate his 'subjective' emotions into 'objective' reality. An 'atmosphere of efficacy' saturates his sense of himself and the world.

Mythic man sees himself capable of controlling his environment, but as a corollary he is determined by his environment. In his discussion of homeopathic magic, Sir James Frazer cites many examples of this dual character of magic.

¹¹³ *The Sacred and the Profane*. p. 29.

¹¹⁴ *The Sacred and the Profane*. p. 31.

¹¹⁵ *The Sacred and the Profane*. p. 45.

Because it is not a relation of cause and effect, but of like acting on like, the human being who works magic is as tied to the world he effects. Hence Frazer comments that, "on the principle of homeopathic magic the influence is mutual: ... In magic, as I believe in physics, action and reaction are equal and opposite."¹¹⁷ However, the principle of likeness which is at the core of magic seems to exclude even the differentiation between the object which acts and that which is acted upon, which Newton's Second Law requires. Rather than a world of atoms that is presented in Newtonian physics that Frazer refers to, in myth one sees with a world in which common substance, derived from the origin, moves through all things. This shared substance allows apparently separate things, including human and non-human things, to fuse.

This fusion releases human accomplishment from its limits. "Thus, in the magical world view the I exerts almost unlimited sway over reality: it takes all reality back into itself."¹¹⁸ There is no distinction between what man wishes for and what he may have: "scarcely any tension is felt to exist between the simple desire and the object towards which it is directed."¹¹⁹ As in technology, where means and ends are collapsed, and ideals confused with reality, in myth wishes are considered powerful in themselves. The only real difference is that our technology is more efficacious than magic.

Though judgements of relative efficacy may differ, in mythic as in technological thinking efficacy is the standard for judgement. Beyond this, there are no limits to what may be done, therefore, no limits to human potential. "Here

¹¹⁶ *Mythical Thought*. p. 157.

¹¹⁷ *The Golden Bough*. p. 38.

¹¹⁸ *The Golden Bough*. p. 157.

an immediate power inheres in the wish itself, a power which suffices to intensify its expression in the extreme in order to release an efficacy which of itself leads to the attainment of the desired goal."¹²⁰ According to the mythic sensibility, the magical incantation is a wish or prayer that becomes real. "In a world so conceived he sees no limit to his power of influencing the course of nature to his own advantage."¹²¹ Frazer elevates mythic man to the status of a 'man-god'.¹²²

If mythic man is capable of becoming a god, it is not because he stands apart from the world, but because he is completely a part of his world. It is this integration of man and environment that gives him the powers of a god. However, as our desires are given unlimited scope for satisfaction, so too are our desires opened up to the world to be manipulated. "Through the magical omnipotence of the will the I seeks to seize upon all things and bend them to its purpose; but precisely in this attempt it shows itself still dominated, totally 'possessed,' by things."¹²³ As the world is opened up to our desires, so too are our desires opened up to the world. In myth, as in technology, man chooses total power at the cost of total integration.

¹¹⁹ The Golden Bough. p. 212.

¹²⁰ The Golden Bough. p. 212.

¹²¹ The Golden Bough. p. 13.

¹²² The Golden Bough. pp. 119-22.

¹²³ The Golden Bough. p. 158.

Section 4: Mythic Language- what is in a word?

i) *introduction*

In mythic language the being of a word is of prime importance. This understanding follows from Ernst Cassirer, whose book Language and Myth will be at the center of attention here. In it he proposes a theory of language which goes back behind the division between word and referent. He argues that in mythic language words are in direct identity with the things themselves, and therefore share in the substance of those things. This direct relation between words and things gives man, as a speaker of words, power over the world. At the same time though, as words are conceived as signs in direct identity with their referents, language loses its symbolic dimension, its ability to move us beyond a world of things and powers through metaphor.

ii) *words have substance*

A mythic word is not an empty, transparent vehicle for carrying along the substance of something else, but it has substance all of its own. Mythic language is concrete: words are treated as things. Giambattista Vico, a source for Cassirer's theory of mythic language, writes that mythic men "take inanimate things in their hands and play with them and talk to them as though they were living

persons".¹²⁴ Words take on their own being. It is not a matter of signified and signifier, but of a calling to presence through language: a thing is present when its name is spoken. In myth, therefore, the word is not an empty cipher for an object or an idea, but in its identity with its thing it shares in that thing's substance and power. As it is humans who speak and write words, we too share in the substance and power of things when we use and are used by words.

Cassirer, in characteristically Kantian terms, describes the mythic word as a function of the faculty of intuition, by which subject and object come together.¹²⁵ But we are too early to be speaking of Kant: Kant uses the intuition to bridge the gap between subject and object and in so doing solve a central problem of Western thought; likewise, Cassirer looks to mythic language to both ground and limit the higher activities of theoretical thinking. However, when mythic man speaks, he does not do these things. Not that this is a question of intentionality, because intentionality requires an isolated subject- the individual. In myth there is not yet any individual. Subject and object are not yet separate. Words are not yet put to any use, let alone this most abstract set of uses.

Cassirer uses the term "momentary gods" to describe the origin of language. The first words are gods because they possess a power. This power holds our attention- to the exclusion of all else- calling attention to itself, "from the ever-flowing, ever-uniform stream of impressions which strike our senses or arise from the autonomous processes of the mind".¹²⁶ Because this attention is "compressed",¹²⁷ the power is not something that persists through a span of time,

¹²⁴ New Science. §375.

¹²⁵ Language and Myth. pp. 31-33.

¹²⁶ Language and Myth. p. 25.

¹²⁷ Language and Myth. p. 33.

but it *is* in its moment. The human being is "possessed" by the object of its attention:¹²⁸ it cries out to him, and this crying out is the name of the momentary god. Cassirer traces this to a cause in human hope and desire,¹²⁹ but we can look at the experience without resort to this cause. For in the presence of a power, one cannot hold any desire in reserve, and so see this power in its ulterior usefulness, but one is impressed by it to the extent that all motives are lost. One can only speak a word, a name. And this is the thing's name, it is what it calls itself, through its calling attention to itself. Anything else is a trapping that we import to the moment from later uses.

Hence, "The word, like a god or daemon, confronts man not as a creation of his own, but as something existent and significant in its own right, as an objective reality."¹³⁰ Cassirer borrows the word daemon from the ancient Greek; we know that Socrates speaks of his daimon, sharing in the preceding mythic tradition.¹³¹ His daimon speaks directly to him in opposition if he chooses the wrong way;¹³² it makes itself known and is thus present in moments of crisis, or choice; or, as in the passage referred to from the *Apology*, the daimon calls attention to itself by its absence: Socrates knows to press forward because no power is present to restrain him. Socrates can be guided in confidence by his

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Language and Myth*. p. 35.

¹³⁰ *Language and Myth*. p. 36.

¹³¹ E.R. Dodds' book *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951) accounts for the continuities in Greek thought between myth and philosophy much as Cassirer does: the powers which are infused into men by the gods form the basis of later concepts such as the psyche; these concepts arise largely through an interiorization of those powers. Similarly, F.M. Cornford argues for a continuity between the mythic and philosophic traditions, on the basis of both a common use of key words (e.g. φύσις, λόγος, νοῦς, etc.) [*From Religion to Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991)], and the similar roles performed by shamans and philosophers [*Principium Sapientiae* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952)].

¹³² *Apol.* 40a.

daimon because he knows it is something other than himself; i.e. he does not doubt that the daimon is merely a mask for his own desires, telling him to do what he may already want to do. The daimon is something other than Socrates, and yet, it is within Socrates. It speaks directly to him, and no one else can hear and interpret it otherwise. We see clearly in this example, where a philosopher borrows from myth, a presence which speaks directly to man, and which is real and substantive.

Religious language borrows from the substance of myth also. Cassirer calls attention to a passage from the Gospel of Matthew, which reads: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them",¹³³ which he interprets, "means simply, 'Where they pronounce my name in their assembly, there I am already present.'"¹³⁴ There is an expression of faith in this calling to presence that distinguishes religious from mythic language. Unlike Cassirer's momentary gods, God's name is not identical with natural powers, and does not exert magic influence over nature. However, this kind of religious language shares in the substantiality of mythic language through its evocation of presence. Words are considered to be in identity with the substance of their referents. Through this identity mythic language can have influence or power over the natural world.

¹³³ Matt. 18:20

¹³⁴ Language and Myth, p. 54.

iii) *words have power*

Words have power because of their substantiality, and because they can call this substantiality to presence by being spoken. Mythic language is not referential, but evocative. A word can not only evoke human emotions, but also can have power over what we can provisionally call the non-human world. The direct identity of word and object allows for the bringing to presence of objects by the speaking of their names. As argued in section two of this chapter, in myth, any bringing to presence takes us to the origin of all things. "As the Word is first in origin, it is also supreme in power."¹³⁵ The importance of the word in the Judeo-Christian creation stories is clear:

In the beginning there was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and God was the Word.¹³⁶

The Word is not only the origin of all things, and is with God, but, was in the beginning identical with God. The relation of the word to the origin of things is common in myth. To pose an example familiar to me because of my own origins, in the Finnish national myth, *The Kalevala*, the great singer Väinämöinen dwells in a "nameless barren headland",¹³⁷ or a "wordless land"¹³⁸ before he sings

¹³⁵ *Language and Myth*. p. 48.

¹³⁶ John 1.1

¹³⁷ *Kalevala*. Aili Kolehmainen Johnson (trans.) (Hancock: Book Concern, 1950) canto I. The *Kalevala* was collected by Elias Lönnrot, a country doctor, in his travels through the Finnish countryside in the early part of the 19th century. The book is a collection of folk stories, arranged in a loose narrative, beginning with a cosmogony, through adventures of heroes and trials of the Finnish people, and ending with the departure of the pagan gods and the entry of Christianity. The *Kalevala* was published in its complete form in 1835. Its importance to Finnish culture speaks to the power of myth to gather a people together. Before the publication of the myth, there was no common Finnish language, no Finnish national identity, and no Finnish political autonomy. The *Kalevala* supplied a common language and identity. In the wake of retreating imperial powers, Finland took its political autonomy on this cultural basis.

¹³⁸ canto II

things into existence:

With the secret spell of Birth Words, even the mouths of rivers, the ends of lakes, and angry cataracts have been stemmed. Bays have been made into mainlands in the narrowest of places with the Spell of Origins.¹³⁹

Birth Words take the watery world and give it form. However, singing the names of things not only call those things into existence, but words continue to hold power over their things; hence the singing duels in which two contestants test their powers by singing the names and origins of things.¹⁴⁰ Whoever knows the most complete story of origins has the most power over the world and his opponent. And hence also the immeasurable powerlessness and sadness which find the hero when he is in a strange land where he does not understand the language, for there he has no power over his world. As Väinämöinen remarks, stranded in the far north, "It is better to drink water from the muddy track of a birch-bark shoe at home than to drink honey from a golden cup with strangers."¹⁴¹ Far from home, he scarcely knows his own name,¹⁴² and the woods, rivers and lakes are silent to him.

The conventional term for this power of the word, following Frazer, is sympathetic magic, a phrase that is potentially both illuminating and misleading. The term is useful inasmuch as it communicates the essential togetherness out of which the possibility of magic springs, and as it portrays the power- the *ganz andere* that Eliade often mentions- which punctuates the regular rhythms of an ordered cosmos. The first principle is sympathetic; the second magical.

¹³⁹ canto IIX

¹⁴⁰ canto III

¹⁴¹ canto VII

¹⁴² *ibid.*

However, 'sympathetic' suggests an attachment to the passions, and especially to those passions associated with suffering (τά πάθα). While a union or similarity in suffering is certainly one aspect of the unity of mythic experience, it does not exhaust the depths of that experience. Also, even in the original Greek magic, or μαγάνευμα refers to a trick, a deception, a slight of hand or confusing instrument which is both trivial and which hides an essential truth. Magic is also a foreign influence, deriving from the Persian seers, the Magi,¹⁴³ unfamiliar to the experience of most Greeks. If sympathetic magic inherits these senses (as it seems to in Frazer's original use) then it will be immediately relegated to a limited and arcane status.

Here, however, we will discuss magic in more familiar, general terms. Magic affects the whole by working on the part; or conversely, it works upon the part by evoking the powers of the whole. In the case of magic involving words- the 'word magic' which Cassirer writes of- one manipulates a thing by manipulating its name. The essential identity between name and thing ensures the efficacy of this technique.

In myth there is no distinction between knowledge and power. The critical pose that post-modern intellectuals adopt when they repeat this platitude evinces their mythic conception of the world. Our technological magic, which makes knowledge and power appear identical, is comparable to ancient word magic. When the wise Väinämöinen duels with the ignorant Joukahainen, the former proves the depth of his knowledge, as opposed to the trivial platitudes of his opponent ("My deep insight tells me that we find the smoke hole in the roof,

¹⁴³ Liddell and Scott

and the fire near the hearthstone.")¹⁴⁴ Väinämöinen was present at the origin of all things, and knows their full names. By speaking these names, he returns things to their origins. He sings and the world is returned to an anxious disorder: "As Väinämöinen sang, lakes splashed over their shores, the earth shook, copper mountains trembled, heavy boulders burst, cliffs broke asunder, and rocks upon the shore cracked."¹⁴⁵ The fixed and solid is broken, and the world returns to its watery, amorphous, embryonic condition. Then the singer's powers are directed toward the young Joukahainen and his sled, returning them to their origins too: "He chanted until sprigs broke forth from the collar bow, willow bushes from the collar, and alder saplings from the traces."¹⁴⁶ He sings Joukahainen into the earth, from whence all men came, and to which all men return. We see this cycle compressed in the magic verses, as the powers of the cosmos are called upon and focused. The power of mythic language is not at all abstract and general, but concrete and particular, traceable to an immediate union with the being of things themselves.

iv) *not symbols, but signs*

Symbolic language moves from the particular to the general, abstracting from particular differences to general definitions. Mythic language, however, is a sign language: it stays rooted in the particulars, and never goes beyond the concrete. The mythic word, as a sign, is self-referential. Yet as it refers to itself it calls the world of 'objects' and 'subjects' to presence, exercising a real power over

¹⁴⁴ *Kalevala*. canto III

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*

the world. Signs have an immediate identity with their objects, and this immediacy, this shared substance, gives mythic language real power within the world.

The effectiveness of language must, therefore, be judged not according to a principle of correspondence, but in terms of its evocativeness. Words are not measured against an object which they represent imperfectly, or against a subject whose intentions or concepts they express incompletely. In myth, words can call an 'object' to presence, or similarly arouse a 'subject'. 'Subject' and 'object' are no different in this sense. Both can be called to presence through language.

For ourselves, this evocative quality of language, made possible by the self-referential and immediate character of mythic language, forces us to seriously consider the conditioning effects of language. Words cannot be appraised as empty vessels, waiting to be filled with meaning of our choosing, but they thrust their meaning upon us constantly. Signs leave little room for interpretation, if by interpretation we mean the various subjective understandings that many individuals can have. But of course, signs sometimes need interpreting in another sense, when the substance and power of a word are concealed from us. The meteor that is Pallas Athena, which falls into the land between the two armies at Troy in their momentary truce, is a sign that is hidden from the Achaeans and Trojans. Their voices clamor to give sense to the sign:

'We'll be fighting again soon.'

'This could mean peace.'

'It means war, if Zeus wants to bring it.'¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

But it is not as if their fancies could change the meaning of the sign, or illuminate its true being before it decides to show itself. The many apparent 'interpretations' are nothing more than a frenzy that opens the men up to the sign's revealing itself. Certainly, they cannot go home secure that each has interpreted the sign successfully, though differently. The sign forces them to await their commands. They must do what it tells them. This is not a simple directive- even Zeus' straightforward command ($\mu\hat{\upsilon}\theta\omicron\sigma$) is unclear. Ultimately, and as we have seen in the example of Socrates' daimon, the sign has a power which is wholly its own. The only 'interpretations' which have any power to rise above the babble of voices are those which share in the power of the sign itself; and these are not interpretations in the usual sense of the word, but evocations, which bring a being to presence and call upon the power of the word. The proper way to interpret a sign is to call the name of a god or power.

Symbols, on the other hand, can mean whatever one wants. Their meaning is nominal. Hobbes, for example, proposes such a theory of language, arguing that there is no essential connection between words and their objects, but that words are imposed upon the world to make sense and use of it.¹⁴⁷ By convention we establish meanings because we recognize the usefulness of these ciphers, to be put to work, ferrying meanings here and there, doing our bidding. But the content of our bidding, and hence of the meanings of words also, seem arbitrary. And when the word is sent, and the meaning carried over, we cannot know that it has arrived intact. One must always wonder whether another knows what one means when one speaks using symbols. But by speaking in

¹⁴⁷ II. 4.93-5. (Lombardo trans.)

¹⁴⁸ *Leviathan*. p. 109.

signs, the word remains self-referential and intact. One person does not send it to another, but in the evocation both are attracted to it. The issue is not, as it is for Hobbes, how a common power can authorize definitions to create a shared language, but rather how moving or evocative the words are. The word calls itself out through the speaker, and calls all towards it in listening.

The self-referential character of the mythic word as a sign accounts for the singling out of persons as well as their being together. For the identity of the group is the same as the identity of the person, and is held within the name. In agreement with Cassirer, I cite:

The essential identity between the word and what it denotes becomes even more patently evident if we look at it not from an objective standpoint, but from a subjective angle. For even a person's ego, his very self and personality, is indissolubly linked, in mythic thinking, with his name. Here the name is never a mere symbol, but is part of the personal property of its bearer; property which must be carefully protected and the use of which is exclusively and jealously reserved to him.¹⁴⁹

If we pause to relieve the passage of its presumptions, looking past the abstractions of subject and object, of ego, of property, of self, and of use, we see the identity of the person in the person's name. A person's being is contained within their name. This is not to say that the name is a descriptor which attaches predicates to the subject, but that the name holds within it an origin which calls us towards it as the source of our being. To take a personal example, my last name, Koivukoski, is 'birch rapids'. As in most Finnish names, there is a poetry of proper nouns, such that the name indicates where a person is from and who they are, there being a direct identity between the people and the land.

¹⁴⁹ Language and Myth. p. 50.

'Koivukoski' is the place where the powers of flowing waters are focused, and along with those powers the fish, animals and plants which gather at that place, and especially birch trees, a very domestic, hospitable, and beautiful tree. It is also the place that gathered and sustained my ancestors. This place and this name are my origin and being. One knows a thing, and a person, if one knows its origin. If one knew the whole story of my name, one would know me, perhaps better than I know myself.

The capability to render a person's being to a simple word, even if it is as powerful word as a word of origins, belies a character of myth which, unfortunately, we do not have space to treat properly: the essence of a thing is not separable from its immediate aspect, its look or appearance. From this, Malinowski concludes that all symbolic as well as explanatory interpretations of myths are useless, because, "The personages and beings which we find in them are what they appear to be on the surface, and not symbols of hidden realities."¹⁵⁰ A thing or person is as they appear. When Patroclus enters the battle in Achilles' armor, he is Achilles, and gains his powers, especially to hold the enemy in awe, and his death prefigures that of Achilles. Hence also the desire to strip the armor of a fallen enemy: by doing so one gains their powers and their essence. And also the importance of honoring the bodies of comrades and spoiling those of enemies, since men are not separable from their body. Just so, in the case of names, "things are not taken for what they mean indirectly, but for their immediate appearance".¹⁵¹

This should not suggest that names are static phenomena. As the

¹⁵⁰ Magic, Science and Other Essays. p. 126.

¹⁵¹ Language and Myth. p. 56.

appearance of something changes, so too can its name and its being change. Much as technology has us think of the self as a locus of intersecting environmental influences and the product of an ongoing process of re-invention, in myth the identity and name of a person are not static. As argued earlier, the apparent stasis of mythic being is only accomplished through a continual process of regeneration: stability is made possible by change. The same is true for names and the permanence they seem to give. Other mythic traditions display this well, especially where inheritance is the key to identity. The Norwegians have their way of naming based upon the passage from father to son, as in Hartvik-son, Johann-son, etc.. The same tradition is found in the ancient Greeks, with their way of naming sons in the genitive case of their fathers. The importance of change in names is extended beyond generational shifts, to changes within a life. Changed names mean change identity: "the mythic consciousness does not see human personality as something fixed and unchanging, but conceives every phase of a man's life as a new personality, a new self; and this metamorphosis is first of all made manifest in the changes which his name undergoes."¹⁵² The apparently stable identity of a person arises out of a process of ongoing and periodic transformations, transformations that often carry with them a change of name. This change guarantees the lasting being of the thing named by regenerating it.

Malinowski recounts an interesting story from the Melanesians, a group of South Sea Islanders who he studied, which, though it does not deal directly with the changing of names, does illustrate the association between the stable identity

¹⁵² Language and Myth. p 51.

with death, and the possibility of rejuvenation. In the nether world, after death, an individual continues to grow old, and must re-gain the ability, forgotten by mortal humans, to slough their skin. "Even so did human beings in the old primeval times, when they lived underground. When they first came to the surface they had not yet lost this ability; men and women could live eternally young."¹⁵³ Originally, humans could live eternally young through periodic transformations through which they returned to their origins. The following is the story of how we lost this ability, and were thus trapped within our own skins and our own linear histories, doomed to die.

Three women lived together, grandmother, mother, and granddaughter. The oldest and youngest went to the river together; the grandmother went to bathe out of sight, while the granddaughter remained on shore. The grandmother washed off her skin, which was taken by the current of the tidal creek. She came back, young and unrecognized, and was rejected by the granddaughter out of fear. The grandmother returned to the river, and found her skin snagged on a stick. Putting it back on, she returned to the granddaughter, who said, "A young girl came here; I was afraid; I chased her away."¹⁵⁴ To which the grandmother replied, "No, you didn't want to recognize me. Well, you will become old- I shall die."¹⁵⁵

Death is not considered here as a defining feature of human beings, the end that gives human beings a discrete history. Rather, death and the apparent finitude of human beings are, as Malinowski writes, and as technology

¹⁵³ Magic, Science and Other Essays. p. 127.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*

influences us to imagine, mere accidents.¹⁵⁶ Beneath these superficial chance happenings lies a continual cycle of regenerative change. Like the young granddaughter, we have difficulty seeing through the apparent stability of appearances to the process that underlies them and makes them possible.

Though the periodic change of names allows for a sense of stability to arise, names themselves are not permanent. The momentary identity between a word and its thing precludes a lasting identity, because it depends upon regeneration and change. The possibility of a permanent joining of signifier (the symbol) and signified (the referent) only arises when this joining takes on an arbitrary character. Hobbes elucidates the necessity of a permanent and universal association of word and object within the context of a rigidly nominative theory of language. Names are imposed upon things to allow for common speech about them, which cannot occur without this imposition. It is the work of human authority to set out definitions, and it is this same authority which is "obliged to govern"¹⁵⁷ in the proper use of words, in order to preserve meaning intact.

Only arbitrary symbols hold to the character of permanence, whereas signs give the periodic appearance of stability, only to change themselves and their meaning later. When coupled with the substance and the power of language, the essential link between signs and change points to an important aspect of myth: as language changes, so too does the cosmos change. This should not be surprising, considering what already has been noted of the connection between language and the creation of the cosmos, that the cosmos

¹⁵⁶ Magic, Science and Other Essays. p. 128.

¹⁵⁷ Leviathan. p. 102.

comes into being through language. And since this coming into being is not an isolated event, but must be periodically repeated, the changes in language which match these periodic regenerations change the cosmos on a nearly constant basis. We become new people as our words change. We change as our world changes, and as we change, so does our world.

Section 5: Mythic and Technological Man

i) *introduction*

What does myth have to do with us? While we may agree that some of the qualities of myth described seem familiar, others seem less so. Myth is both with us, and, for the moment, without us; this moment allows us to question myth and its relation to us.

From the two thinkers we have focused upon here, Eliade and Cassirer, we have two views. Eliade argues that myth remains a part of us always, though it is at times hidden from view. Following his description of the relation between the sacred and the profane, myth is concealed from us only to erupt into full presence. Modern existence, defined and conditioned by linear history, cannot but suppress this cyclical pattern of disclosure, thereby shutting us off from myth and the sacred. Cassirer also sees modern thought, in its highest expressions, as alien to myth. Though the reasoning faculties are grounded in categories supplied by mythic consciousness, they surpass those grounds. Whereas language begins with a system of signs, through abstraction from that concrete basis we can enter a new realm of freedom: language based upon symbols, which can be interpreted, and which provide metaphors for transcendent ideals. We return to myth only as a regression and a fall from freedom.

ii) *Cassirer on myth as resource*

For all of his fawning indulgence of myth, for his attempts to study myth in and of itself, as a human faculty, rather than as a collection of bizarre rituals, Cassirer's opinion on myth in its relation to modern life is ultimately pejorative. The reasoning faculties are grounded in myth, but surpass that ground. When myth does arise in human consciousness, it represents a fall from a true potential. There are two senses in which the subordination of myth to reason occurs. First, as Cassirer argues in the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms and in An Essay on Man, myth, though fundamental to human thought, provides only a bare basis by providing the substance of human experience, but cannot supply a context within which that substance can be made meaningful. Myth supplies the material that the reasoning faculties work with and upon. And second, as he writes in The Myth of the State, full-blown eruptions of myth in modern times, such as the Nazi regime in Germany, only arise as a consequence of an inability to create and maintain a world of shared, human meaning. Myth, as our most primal technique for making sense of the world, is also the technique to which we revert when our higher faculties and powers fail. Myth is a product of bad times, and a sign of those times. By understanding myth, we can put it in its proper place, and guard against its arising as a force in political life.

If this presentation of the relevance of myth to modern life is familiar, it is not especially illuminating. This is because Cassirer does not understand technology; and if one does not understand technology, one does not understand modern life, and hence one cannot understand the relevance of myth for modern life.

George Grant defines technology as the "new union of making and knowing",¹⁵⁸ and adds that, "Kant's dictum that 'the mind makes the object' were the words of blessing spoken at that wedding of knowing and production".¹⁵⁹ It is unnecessary to give a long defense to the proposition that Cassirer was affected by Kant, and especially this particular teaching of Kant's. Whether or not Cassirer was a Neo-Kantian, he is a Kantian in the sense that we are all- in some measure- Kantians, as we are all affected by technology in our knowing and making. Cassirer defines man as an *animal symbolicum*,¹⁶⁰ that is, as an animal which creates meaning for itself through a world of symbols. Man's higher faculties- his knowing- works to in-form the world. Beneath this, man's animality is described as an essential intuitive unity with nature. The language of signs described earlier in this chapter belongs to this lower order. Through the substantiality and power of the sign, man gains an intuitive connection with the objects which words designate. But he cannot long hold onto this unity; for there is an immanent movement within myth, which is transformed from within:

Myth can manifest itself only in this image world [of signs]; as the mythical consciousness advances it comes to see this manifestation as something 'outside' which is not wholly adequate to its own drive for expression. Here lies the basis of the conflict, which becomes gradually sharper and sharper, which creates a cleavage within the mythical consciousness and yet in this very cleavage discloses the ultimate depths of myth.¹⁶¹

Myth wants to be rational since the unity with nature which it finds is incomplete and unsatisfying. This is one way in which myth is relevant to

¹⁵⁸ English-Speaking Justice. p. 1. See above Part I, Section 1, sub-section iv.

¹⁵⁹ ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Cassirer, Ernst. An Essay on Man: an introduction to a philosophy of human culture. (Toronto: Bantam, 1970) p. 28.

¹⁶¹ Mythical Thought. p. 236.

modern life: it is our origin and the condition for our future progress; or to write in more practical terms, myth is a resource for our thought. Though Cassirer begins an approach to myth, he then turns away from it, such that myth becomes a convenient resource for reflection. What reflection lacks in immediate experience of the world and the given, myth gives.

In Cassirer's writings on the relation of myth to modern life we see the conditioning effects of technology upon thought, as it views itself as a process, for which all that is given is but material. This process of making the world as we know it cannot take its guides and limits from the world, from nature, but only from the mind itself. Following Kant, these guides and limits can only have the character of an 'as if' - they can be only provisional restraints. However, at the apex of our power to create the world, these self-imposed provisional restraints fade in their power, as everything comes to appear possible.

Cassirer argues that without some limit on perceived efficacy, that is, without a separation of the willing subject from the world of objects upon which the subject acts, true activity - that is lawful activity - is impossible. (Something similar could be said for knowing.) Activity for Cassirer is always done within an understanding of its own self-imposed limits. "Thus precisely the increased intensity of the I-feeling and the resulting hypertrophy of action produce a mere illusion of activity. For all true freedom of action presupposes an inner limitation, a recognition of certain limits of action."¹⁶² Without these limits, man has nothing to test himself against, nor any failures by which to measure his accomplishments. Magic replaces action. Perfectly self-satisfied man, awash in

¹⁶² Mythical Thought, p. 158.

this 'atmosphere of efficacy', cannot truly act. "Only when emotion and will no longer seek to grasp the object immediately and draw it into their sphere, only when more and more clearly apprehended intermediary links are interpolated between the mere wish and its goal, do objects and the I acquire independent values: the two worlds are determined only by this form of mediation."¹⁶³ Where emotions are produced from without as easily as from within, where will finds its satisfaction wherever it is expressed, where wish is not distinguished from reality, there can be no independent subject, nor a world of independent objects which function according to their own rules. "Accordingly, the limits of the inner world can only be determined, its ideal formation can only become visible, if the sphere of being is circumscribed in action."¹⁶⁴ Where there are no such limits to man's doing, there is no man, properly so-called. Man rules all, and all rules man.

What Cassirer describes here could as easily be a description of technological as of mythic man. Indeed, he says that, "from a purely genetic standpoint magic and technology cannot be differentiated," and, "it is not possible to indicate a definite moment in the development of mankind when the change took place from the magical to the technical mastery of nature".¹⁶⁵ This admission follows from his argument in *Form und Technik*,¹⁶⁶ wherein he divides technology into three types, mimetic, analogical, and purely symbolic (divisions which match his ordering of language as mimetic, analogical and symbolic in

¹⁶³ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Mythical Thought*, p. 200.

¹⁶⁵ *Mythical Thought*, p. 213.

¹⁶⁶ In the absence of an English translation of this essay, I am indebted to Michael Krois' précis in his paper "Ernst Cassirer's Theory of Technology and its Import for Social Philosophy" in *Research in Philosophy and Technology*, Vol. 5, pp. 209-222, 1982.

The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 1). His admission is that both magic and technology have the same end- the formal unity of subject and object. The only distinction is the degree of self-consciousness with which this effort is made. As self-consciousness becomes greater, Cassirer argues that the perceived efficacy of action diminishes, and the subject recognizes his division from the world of objects, over which he has some but not total power.

However, self-imposed restraint and modest self-consciousness are odd qualities to attach to technology. On the one hand there is the Promethean effort of technology to bring nature completely within human control, on the other a tendency to perceive technology as itself natural. Cassirer notes this: "Even after man has passed from a magical to a technical relation to nature,... for a while the implements retain for him a magical character and efficacy."¹⁶⁷ Not 'for a while', I say, but increasingly, as techniques go beyond functioning as mere intermediate relations between desires and ends, by promising a near instant union of wish and fulfillment.

Where efficacy and a blind focus upon the material world condition human thought and action, any sense of self-limitation is vague. Mythic man is not interested in it. "Originally the world consists for him solely of what in some way touches his desire and his action."¹⁶⁸ The same can be said of technological man. What is not desired or is immune to his actions is not real; his attention turns from it, and it disappears. "But", Cassirer continues, "now that a barrier is erected between the inward and outward worlds, a barrier that prevents any immediate leap from the sensory urge to its fulfillment, now that more and more

¹⁶⁷ Mythical Thought. p. 213.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*

intermediary steps are interpolated between the drive and its goal, a true distance between subject and object is for the first time achieved. Man now differentiates a set sphere of objects which are designated precisely by the fact that they have a content peculiar to themselves, by which they resist man's immediate desire."¹⁶⁹

However this division between man and his world or subject and object retains only a provisional quality: the barrier between inward and outward, between wish and fulfillment, can be understood as a lapse in technical expertise. As soon as it is considered in this way, the barrier ceases to function as an essential limit to human action, but becomes its temporary horizon, something to be overcome rather than respected. Then the possibility of the perfect satisfaction of desire arises, and with it the potential union of subject and object. Because the limit on human endeavor is posed in a technical sense- man doesn't have the tools to satisfy himself completely- this possibility is open only to technical questioning. With the goal of the conquering of the object opened up by technology, the provisional separation between subject and object in thought is diminished. Provisional separations are considered in terms of technological potential, not modest self-limitation.

The working of technology upon the non-human world is fairly evident- it is easy to see how non-human nature becomes material or resource, as we will explore in the Part III. However important these effects, something similar happens to human consciousness. Cassirer reminds us of this himself: "Never does the implement serve simply for the mastery of an outside world which can

¹⁶⁹ Mythical Thought. pp. 214-15.

be regarded as finished, simply given 'matter'; rather, it is through the use of the implement that the image, the spiritual, ideal form of the outside world, is created for man."¹⁷⁰ The world cannot be regarded as given matter because even the idea of matter itself must be formed by mediating consciousness. And from Cassirer's account of myth, it is clear that this idea is not explicitly present in mythic consciousness, but must be developed out of that consciousness. Could this development be reversed? Could the separation between subject and object be 'forgotten'? From Cassirer's book The Myth of the State we can surmise that indeed it can, that modern man can forget his limits, even as he enjoys the fruits of pure thought, realized as technology.

Nazism and the myths of the aryan race and of the hero are what Cassirer has in mind when he writes of possible futures for myth. In explaining the conditions which made that regime possible, he covers familiar territory: the end of the First World War saw Germany in the throes of inflation and unemployment. "In quiet and peaceful times," he explains,

...in periods of relative stability and security, [the rational organization of society] is easily maintained. It is easily safe against all attacks. ... [But] In all critical moments of man's social life, the rational forces that resist the rise of the old mythical conceptions are no longer sure of themselves. In these moments the time for myth has come again. For myth has not been really vanquished and subjugated. It is always there, lurking in the dark and waiting for its hour and opportunity. This hour comes as soon as the other binding forces of man's social life, for one reason or another, lose their strength and are no longer able to combat the demonic mythical powers.¹⁷¹

Myth is a constant presence in the life of man. Indeed, it must be, if myth

¹⁷⁰ Mythical Thought, p. 215.

is the source of substance in life and language. For Cassirer, substance must be given form by the higher faculties, and our sense of political identity, of shared origin and substance, must be given a rational social organization. Without this tension between myth and reason, myth goes wild. And, lacking any formal social organization- the form that reason imposes on the substance of myth- we spontaneously turn to myth for identity and social cohesion.

Although the Nazi regime may have arisen in hard times, with its political successes not unrelated to that situation, one cannot argue that it was a backward regime in a technological sense. In few other instances is the drive towards the domination of human and non-human nature so ruthless, and its success so unbridled. Though Nazism was certainly a reaction against modernity, it arose from within the heart of modernity.¹⁷² In it we see as a stripped-down expression of the essence of modernity, freed from the limitations of conventional religions, secular and non-secular, and more fundamentally perhaps, from the taboos which condition our treatment of human and non-human beings. One does not have to look far to show that this is so, and also that the mythical character of National Socialism (which I agree is prominent) is married to its technological character. The elimination of the Jews as an impediment to the success of the German people is justified through myth, but it is only made possible, even as a goal, through technology. The Nazi regime did not arise out of impotence, but from a drive to complete mastery, abetted by the techniques of modern science.

¹⁷¹ Cassirer, Ernst. The Myth of the State. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946) p. 280.

¹⁷² See for example Gene Veith's excellent book, Modern Fascism (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), which argues not only this, but also that, since modern thought remains, our political success over fascism may have disguised our own potential fascism. See also Jeffrey Herf's Reactionary Modernism Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich

While it may have been mythical, it is also essentially technological. The two are not antithetical to each other, but go together quite easily.

iii) *Eliade on our mythic future*

As Eliade describes it, we live in profane times. Profane times are times of mere duration, in which no moments stand out as significant. Events only preserve their meaning inasmuch as they are directed towards an end outside of themselves, that is, an end in history. However, even within profane time, myth is preserved, though camouflaged. Eliade points to examples of long-standing rites with legacies in myth: birthdays, building rituals from the far East, and New Year celebrations. Within these, Eliade sees both the power and substance of myth; but it is a weak power and a diluted substance. These are but signs of the enduring influence of myth, and promises of its future return.

However, not only are the examples chosen trivial, at least in their contemporary manifestations, but they confuse the outward appearance of myth with the inward essence. Myth is not tradition, nor a selection of rites chosen from tradition, preserved merely because they are old. Myth acquires its power and substance from the origin of all things; myth is only myth when it successfully recreates that moment, making it real again in the present. The forgotten and misplaced shells of mythic experience cannot be substituted for that primordial experience. Nor can it be hoped that those shells, because of some superficial resemblance and remote historical connection, can have life

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) Herf explores how the Nazi's rejected Enlightenment principles while embracing technology.

breathed into them again. If they remind us of anything, it is only that they are dead, without power or substance; they cannot, therefore, remind us of and return us to the origin of all things. All of this should follow from Eliade's method, shared by Cassirer, of studying the experience of myth,¹⁷³ for which the rites and rituals are only signs; these signs only work if they provoke that experience. Otherwise, when they lose this power, they become symbols of an experience that is distant from us.

At other times Eliade turns to examples unique to contemporary culture as evidences of the recurrent value of myth; then his hopeful visions for the resuscitation of myth are weaker still. The literary form of the modern novel, with its "strange, imaginary time" represents an attempted escape from linear, historical time, and this is at least partly mythical.¹⁷⁴ The archetypal hero which is absent from the novel appears in the comic strip, such that, "the myth of Superman satisfies the secret longings of modern man who, though he knows that he is a fallen, limited creature, dreams of one day proving himself an 'exceptional person,' a 'Hero.'"¹⁷⁵ Or, moving from the banalities of the mass media to the banalities of high art, Eliade argues that the difficulties and incomprehensibility of modern art serves to distinguish between initiates and the ignorant masses, disclosing the familiar mythic tropes of the initiate and the initiatory ordeals, which Eliade describes elsewhere.¹⁷⁶ Modern art also reveals the desire most characteristic of myth: that hidden meaning must be found

¹⁷³ The Sacred and the Profane. p. 16; Language and Myth. p. 10.

¹⁷⁴ Myth and Reality. p. 192.

¹⁷⁵ Myth and Reality. p. 185.

¹⁷⁶ Eliade, Mircea. Shamanism: archaic techniques of ecstasy. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970)

everywhere. It is, therefore, the work of the artist, "to discover a new, secret, hitherto unknown meaning for the World and human life."¹⁷⁷ Elsewhere Eliade points to the interest in his time towards depth psychology as a hopeful sign of a new orientation towards myth.¹⁷⁸ He also looks to the meeting of Western and Oriental civilizations as a crisis necessitating an authentic understanding of myth.¹⁷⁹ He carries the idea of crisis still further, arguing that it is a necessary part of myth: the crisis of modern man, as for archaic man, acts as a kind of initiatory ordeal on a civilizational scale, which can only be resolved through the desire for the sacred.¹⁸⁰

While all of these examples may accurately display some features of myth, myth is not there as a whole. All of these examples which Eliade gives represent reactions against linear time and modernity. They are myths on the margins: in the mind of the individual reading a novel; in the dreams of the frustrated youth; in the scornful self-importance of the avant-garde. They are not myth at the center, where myth belongs. Hence, they are not unifying, but distancing. The individual becomes an individual precisely through the isolation of novel-reading and through identification with a protagonist who is out of joint with her world. The youth retreats into a fantasy world where he is powerful, only to withdraw from a world in which he is impotent. The artist strives to maintain his essence by pulling his work further and further from the contaminating public eye. At the furthest reaches of this retreat we may find a re-union, when we are connected in our most desperate isolation, when fantasy becomes reality,

¹⁷⁷ Myth and Reality. p. 189.

¹⁷⁸ Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries. p. 232.

¹⁷⁹ Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries. p. 12.

¹⁸⁰ Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries. p. 243.

and when everyone is an artist. But in Eliade we are clearly not there yet, as these divisions are maintained. As a result, myth and modernity are kept separate.

There is one point of confluence between myth and modernity which Eliade presents most discretely, and with good reasons: the example both does the most extreme kind of disrespect and damage to the diversity of mythic cultures, and blurs his own distinction between cyclical and linear, or mythic and profane time. "Christianity", Eliade writes, "incontestably proves to be the religion of 'fallen man'",¹⁸¹ and, since modern man is defined by his fall from the unity of myth, Christianity alone, with its promise of a future salvation, is the religion of modern man. It must be noted that Eliade includes this not as description of modernity which takes tenets of Christianity as defining features of our age, but as a hope for modernity. In Christianity we have the best of both myth and modernity: the security of social and psychological forms based upon repetition of archetypes, and the freedom of history in which events and persons are without precedence. These two elements are joined in the Incarnation: the birth of God as a man is the hierophany *par excellence*, joining together the sacred and the profane; it is also, however, a singular event, since it "took place in a historical Time and not in cosmic Time."¹⁸² History has meaning and purpose because of this event, and likewise our lives are given meaning through this. The Incarnation itself serves as an end to myth, through which its cycles are stopped and directed towards an end. Now it is impossible to treat this opinion as severely as it deserves, if only because it arises so infrequently in Eliade's works;

¹⁸¹ Cosmos and History. p. 162.

¹⁸² Myth and Reality. p. 168.

where it might be hiding elsewhere, we can only guess. But since it is not a description of modern life, and only a hope for modern man, we can let it go easily. There are many hopes, and they are cheaply had.

Aside from this hope, Eliade offers some speculations about the character of modernity, based upon reactions from within it. How, he asks, can we "tolerate the increasingly powerful pressures of contemporary history"?¹⁸³ He asks this question within the context of the two world wars, which brought an end to the eschatological hopes of modern man. "We lived", he tells us of his time after the war in Lisbon, "surrounded by rubble, with a handkerchief in hand, ready to put to our mouths whenever a breeze raised the dust on the street. To me it was like an image of Europe itself, at the end of the Second World War."¹⁸⁴ As well as by the world wars, faith in progress was shaken by the colonialism that was supposed to advance progress, by its dubious promise of the universal liberation of human-kind. Of this Eliade asks, "how it would be possible to tolerate, and to justify, the suffering and annihilation of so many peoples for the simple reason that their geographical situation sets them in the pathway of history; that they are neighbors of empires in a state of permanent expansion."¹⁸⁵ Both situations call historical progress and hence linear time itself into question. If man cannot look to the mechanisms of history to save him, nor, amid the necessities of material renewal, turn to the unearthly hopes of Christianity, where should he turn?

Eliade sees some answer in the regenerative power of myth. He sees this

¹⁸³ Cosmos and History. p. 141.

¹⁸⁴ Eliade, Mircea. Autobiography. Vol. II. Mac Linscott Ricketts (trans.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) p. 109.

¹⁸⁵ Cosmos and History. p. 151.

answer articulated in "the beginnings of certain new reactions against this historical linearism and a certain revival of interest in the theory of cycles".¹⁸⁶ He sees these reactions and this revival in examples as diverse as theories of business cycles in political economy, historical cycles in Toynbee and Spengler, and Nietzsche's history of the eternal return.¹⁸⁷ It is clear from these examples at least- Nietzsche most important among them- that the regeneration of myth in modernity is not a casual picking about in the junk-bin of history, but it is an original myth. For myth to be myth, it must be original. I use the term as Eliade uses it, in its full sense. The oldest of the old is the newest of the new. Original means new, but a new birth can only take place through a return to origins. Indeed, while both are new, originality is not identical with novelty. Novelty surprises and titillates us; it is wholly unfamiliar, and because of this, novelty is trivial. That which has no precedent can have no importance, because we have no way to judge it. From whence do we get the power to judge, and the substance which will make this judgment last? The power and substance are derived only from the origin. The novel and trivial fall among the detritus of time, fall with the happenstance and the incidental. The openness of modern man to the original, and his exaltation in his own power to bring about this new birth define the renewed possibility of myth in modernity. Whereas cyclical theories of history existed in medieval times, as Eliade notes, these cycles remained mortgaged to a singular purpose. Hence the cycles were used to account for small changes, while a transcendent model persisted and remained

¹⁸⁶ Cosmos and History. p. 146.

¹⁸⁷ The author assures us that the subtitle of his book- Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return, does not owe to Nietzsche, who he sees as a modern interpreter of the phenomenon which he is investigating in its more original sense [Preface, vii].

permanently accessible to human consciousness.¹⁸⁸ Only in late modernity is this transcendent model brought into doubt, and the possibilities of both the complete destruction of the world as it is known and its subsequent rebirth opened up to human consciousness.

We will turn to a discussion of this condition and its possibilities soon, conditions and possibilities well-described as technological; here we are laying the foundations for that inquiry, and setting out a language in which it can meaningfully be undertaken. Still, we should divert our attention momentarily to a thinker who endeavors to describe those conditions and their possibilities in order to anticipate the full joining of the two studies: on mythic man and technological man. And so, we return to George Grant. Grant is in partial agreement with Eliade when the latter describes late modernity as being unbridled by a definitive *telos* or end.¹⁸⁹ Of this, Grant writes:

In the official intellectual community this process has been called 'the end of ideology.' What that phrase flatteringly covers is the closing down of willing to all content except the desire to make the future by mastery, and the closing down of all thinking which transcends calculation. ... We now move towards the position where technological progress becomes itself the sole context within which all that is other to it must attempt to be present.¹⁹⁰

This 'end of ideology' is also the end of linear history. For both Eliade and Grant the end of history liberates technological man from any purpose and inspires him to limitless self-creation. When there is a definite end to history, the works of man must be judged in relation to this standard, and by their position,

¹⁸⁸ *Cosmos and History*. 146-7.

¹⁸⁹ Grant was in agreement with Eliade on the question of myth, or as Grant phrases it, "archaic man", for which he expresses his "profound dependence" [*Philosophy in the Mass Age*. William Christian (ed.) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) p. 126]. Eliade was aware of this extension of gratitude, [*Autobiography*, Vol II, p. 211], though he does not seem to be aware of Grant's teachings on modernity and technology.

must always fall short. "For the modern man can be creative only insofar as he is historical".¹⁹¹ What then could provide the power to create for post-historical man, if he is to create at all, and not merely consume the products of his past creations (a process which can only endure for so long)? In the same essay from which I have quoted, Grant argues that the creations of post-ideological/ post-historical man are driven by a "continuing dynamism" in which the "primal spirit" of our encounter with the land survives.¹⁹² Our ability to create is a by-product of the first set of creative acts which made us who we are as moderns; any remaining creative power is a leftover: it is modernity spinning its wheels. Eliade's version of things is both more hopeful, and more frightening. Man free from progress and linear history is also "free to annul his own history",¹⁹³ and in so doing set forth the possibility of re-creating himself. Eliade goes on: "In this respect, it is justifiable to speak not only of freedom... or deliverance... but actually creation; for what is involved is creating a new man and creating him on a suprahuman plane, a man-god, such as the imagination of historical man never dreamed it possible to create."¹⁹⁴

Describing such a being is the work of fiction, which gives substance and power to our dreams. When we do not have the technical means to make our dreams real, fiction must do. Eliade's short story titled "Rejuvenation by Lightning"¹⁹⁵ tells of the creation of a new man-god. The protagonist, whose name changes throughout the story, is struck by a bolt of lightning while on his

¹⁹⁰ Technology and Empire. p. 40.

¹⁹¹ Cosmos and History. p. 156.

¹⁹² Technology and Empire. p. 26.

¹⁹³ Cosmos and History. p. 157.

¹⁹⁴ Cosmos and History. p. 159.

way to committing suicide. He should be killed, and for a long while appears as if dead; but what should have killed him prepares the way for a new birth. In his convalescence he is not only restored to health, but is made new and better. Instead of his former sixty years, he now has thirty-five. His new self knows Oriental languages that he never learned before. He knows books he never read. And yet the dreams of a frustrated scholar do not make for a new species. What distinguishes this new man is not youthful power and an incredible memory. As the protagonist insists, "Do not compare me to an electronic computer. If correctly supplied, it may recite the *Odyssey* or the *Iliad* like myself; only, each time I speak the lines differently."¹⁹⁶ This new man is an original, and his originality is possible because he transcends linear history: he is not an event caused by preceding events, as an operation of a computer is caused by earlier operations. Rather, he is new in an essential sense- he is original. And his originality is possible only within cyclical time. "I'm a 'mutant', he reflected after waking up. I'm anticipating the existence of post-historical man."¹⁹⁷ His mutation, delivered by the power of modern life, electricity, knocks him out of time: his age is different; he falls in love with a reincarnated Buddhist monk; at the end of the story, upon his return to his birth place, he finds himself suddenly thrust back thirty-five years, to 1938, and he is old again. So time is wrapped back upon itself, and both the possibilities of the future and the faded actualities of the past are made real and present.

Post-historical man has a potential power unknown to historical man,

¹⁹⁵ Eliade, Mircea. *Mystic stories : the sacred and the profane*. Ana Cartianu (trans.) (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1992)

¹⁹⁶ "Rejuvenation by Lightning" p. 259.

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*

because the later had to measure his thoughts and actions against a standard in the distant future, whereas the former does not. Living in the moment gives man power. As the protagonist complains, he can no longer tell his dreams from reality, but the two flow into one another. Thus reality is a product of the imagination. Dream and reality are joined. Man who lives at the moment of the summoning of past actualities and future possibilities is "the eschatology of electricity".¹⁹⁸ As another character says, "both the end and the salvation of man will be achieved by electricity."¹⁹⁹ Electricity both shocks and connects, disturbs as it integrates. Post-historical man is shocked from a discreet moment in linear time, and is connected with the power of the origin.

In Eliade's story post-historical man is mythic man. Technology, when pushed to its furthest extreme, returns us to the senses of cyclical time and enclosed space, and the power of magical language that are characteristic of myth. Myth, for Eliade, is our origin and our future. In the next part, we will look at three others who argue the same.

¹⁹⁸ "Rejuvenation by Lightning" p. 295.

¹⁹⁹ "Rejuvenation by Lightning" p 294.

Part 3: ON TECHNOLOGY AND MYTH

The comparatively barbarous ages had a poetry of the ideal; they had visions of beauty, order, and perfection. This age of material elaboration has no sense for those things. Its fancy is retrospective, whimsical, and flickering; its ideals, when it has any, are negative and partial; its moral strength is blind and miscellaneous vehemence. Its poetry, in a word, is the poetry of barbarism.

George Santayana¹

Section 1: Introduction

The connection I have drawn between technology and myth in the two preceding parts has good precedent. One finds similar comparisons in Giambattista Vico, for whom a 'barbarism of reflection' was the natural end of modern thought; in Alexandre Kojève, whose now famous 'End of History' results in the end of historical man and either our 're-animalization' or a new life as gods; and also in Marshall McLuhan's media theory, which has electronic technologies 're-tribalizing' our lives and eroding our capacity for understanding. All three, in pushing technology to its limit, see it converge with myth. They warn of the danger that technology is to us: to our *senus communis* (Vico), to our humanness (Kojève), and to our understanding (McLuhan).

¹ Interpretations of Poetry and Religion. (New York: Harper, 1957) pp. 168-9.

Section 1: Vico's 'Barbarism of Reflection'

i) *preface*

Vico was a critic of the first clear expressions of technological thinking in Descartes' "Rules for the Direction of the Mind".² Technology, as Vico's interpreter Donald Phillip Verene argues, is the application of Descartes' "Rules for the Direction of the Mind" to the world. Ideas and reality blend together, as the mind makes the world. The mind (*cogito*) abstracts itself from the given world, breaks the world down, and then builds the world back up again in its own image.

This function of Descartes' resolute-composite method is caustic to the *sensus communis*, which consists at least partly of unquestioned opinions. When every person becomes a thinking 'I', a critical, atomistic subject, what results is the breakdown of social order, a re-barbarization in which everyone becomes the center of their own little world. This 'second barbarism', which Vico also calls the 'barbarism of reflection', is distinguished from the 'first barbarism', also called the 'barbarism of sense'. As an alternate term for 'second barbarism' or 'barbarism of reflection' I suggest 'technological barbarism'.

The first barbarians were, according to Vico's own myth, a race of giants. Each giant was so strong and independent that he felt himself to be at the center of all things. The giants saw nature as their own extended body, and understood their desires as external effects, rather than as inward causes. In this condition

²Descartes, René. "Rules for the Direction of the Mind" in Descartes: Philosophical Writings, translated and edited by Elizabeth Anscombe, and introduced by Alexandre Koyré (London: Nelson, 1969). Koyré, from whom Kojève inherited his famous Hegel seminar and some of his ideas, has an introductory essay to this volume [vii-xliv], in which he praises Descartes as a crucial turning point in the progress of philosophy. Koyré emphasizes the importance of freedom and mastery in Descartes, saying that both begin with an act of negation- a turning away from the given [xxiii].

there is no distinction between man and his environment. Vico saw something similar in his modern times. In our technological barbarism we too live "like wild beasts in a deep solitude of spirit and will,"³ physically thronged together yet each of us isolated in our own separate worlds.

i) *the first barbarism*

In Vico's myth, the first barbarians existed in a primordial, undifferentiated condition; they knew only themselves, yet saw themselves extended into all things. Man saw himself at the center of the cosmos, and inseparable from it. This is a pre-political condition superficially resembling, yet ultimately unlike Hobbes' state of nature.⁴ Hobbes' argument that man in the condition of nature is reluctant to produce due to his insecurity⁵ attributes a calculative, analytic rationality to these first humans. In Vico's mythic account of the origin there is no antagonism among individuals; even more fundamentally, there are no true individuals. This is so because these proto-humans lack the analytic ability to differentiate themselves from their world.

Vico accounts for his mythic condition not through reductive psychology, but through a myth of his own. His myth is related in various places throughout the New Science.⁶ Vico's myth is an amalgam of many sources, focusing on the ubiquitous feature of the flood. In his telling of the ancient myth, the world

³§1105.

⁴Vico makes this distinction from Hobbes. New Science, §179. Stephen Taylor Holmes argues the contrary, suggesting that Vico's imaginative universals are functionally equivalent to Hobbes' contract or Locke's property rights. ["The Barbarism of Reflection", pp. 213-222 in Vico: Past and Present. Giagio Tagliacozzo (ed.) (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1981)] Though they may perform similar functions, Vico's imaginative universals (which will not be a focus here) are as dissimilar to Hobbes' contract as Vico's first barbarism is to Hobbes' state of nature.

⁵Leviathan, p. 186.

⁶§62; §369-373; and §1097.

begins out of the indeterminate unity of the flood. Water covers all of the land, even the highest mountains, so that nothing stands out on its own, and everything is connected via one flowing substrate, upon which Moses and his family floats. As the flood subsides and land appears, the three sons of Moses reject their father's rule resulting in confusion. They wander at will, each independent of the others, enjoying perfect liberty. They take women freely and by force, and copulate in the open. Likewise, mothers abandon their children, who grow up unaided by others, invigorated by nature's tests. These children evolve into a race of giants, scattered over the earth, and bound to the cycles of nature. These giants are like Homer's Cyclopes, "Lawless savages who leave everything/ Up to the Gods."⁷ Without any ordering principles to set them apart from the natural cycles of production and consumption⁸, these proto-humans were *autochthones*, or *indigenae*, "sons of the Earth,"⁹ as Vico calls them, existing in an indeterminate unity with nature, seeing nature as their extended body.

This indeterminate unity is evidenced in the "infamous sharing of things in the bestial condition",¹⁰ such that one cannot tell what is one's own from what is another's. When these primitive communists came to build cities, they did so without walls.¹¹ And as the cities had no walls, so too did they lack laws. Law was originally conceived in spatial terms, as the boundary that set one pasture off from another, such that νόμος referred to both a law and a pasture, and

⁷ *Od.* 9. 105-6.

⁸ Vico suggests this in his discussion of the nitrous salt cycle, whereby the children of the earth fertilize the soil with their waste, and reciprocally absorb the salts back into their bodies [*New Science*, §369]. Why nitrous salts? One can only guess that Vico had some passing familiarity with then-contemporary biochemistry; but what is significant is that man consumes his waste. There is a cyclical exchange between man and nature that links both into a unified whole.

⁹ *New Science*, §370.

¹⁰ *New Science*, §9482.

¹¹ *New Science*, §76.

δίκη to both the just and to a boundary-marking stone.¹² But in myth, such definite boundaries do not exist. Likewise, in Vico's second barbarism- our technological barbarism- everything is opened to change by indifferent, critical reflection. All the old laws are brought into question, and are forgotten,¹³ just as the three sons forgot the laws of their father Moses.

In myth, the veneration of earthly powers substitutes for the law-bound religion of the father. In myth, heaven is no higher than the mountaintops.¹⁴ There is no clear distinction between gods and men, because both shared in the power by which the world comes into being and is sustained in its being. The gods mix with men and beasts: they have sex with humans and as animals,¹⁵ and like the first men they do not respect the sacred bounds of marriage.

Out of this watery unity, in which all things were fluidly connected, and no strict divisions possible, came an interruption. According to Vico's myth, as the earth dried up, "it could send up dry exhalations or matter igniting in the air to produce lightening."¹⁶ Shocked by the lightening, the first men, "raised their eyes and became aware of the sky."¹⁷ The lightening lights up the darkened sky and shows things in their outlines, distinguishing among earthly things, and setting the sky apart from the earth. In this moment, the indeterminate unity of the mythic cosmos is broken. Man begins to reflect when he is set back from the immediate unity of myth.

But these proto-humans did not abandon their barbarous ways straightaway to become philosophers; rather, since they saw the whole world as an extension of themselves, they let the lightening move through their bodies.

¹² Liddell and Scott.

¹³ New Science. §1002.

¹⁴ New Science. §64.

¹⁵ New Science. §80.

¹⁶ New Science. §377.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

They shook and bowed before this new power, and they gave over some of their own powers to it. From this came the first religion and the first god, Zeus, who Vico argues is found in some form in all of the world's primitive religions: "For every gentile nation had its Jove".¹⁸ Reflection naturally produces religion, by projecting the source of power from man to a god outside of man. While mythic man still feels his gods to be extensions of himself, as evidenced by his mimetic form of worship, this is the first step towards a formal standard for civil society.

Out of this experience came the first mores, which would become the foundations for civil societies. For the bodies of the giants were lit up in that first dark night, even as they lay openly with the women they had taken, and they felt a new sense of shame, and retreated to caves. These caves would become their homes, and the women they took would be their wives. Out of this came the conventions of private property and the family, which would be the basis for larger communities.

While Vico presents reflection as a stepping back from the immediate unity of myth, reflection only retains its significance inasmuch as it reflects upon myth. Reflection can make nothing itself, but it must rely on the substance given to it by myth. It is not enough for reflection to rely upon sense, because sense already carries within it the analytic distinctions which are characteristic of reflection. Sense, as presented by Descartes, for example, is always mediated experience, and this thrusts a sense of doubt between the perceiver and the perceived. Descartes in his study can never be certain that the people he sees in the street are not machines covered with coats and hats.¹⁹ Vico turns to the

¹⁸ New Science, §380.

¹⁹ "Meditations" in Descartes: Philosophical Writings, p. 73.

conditions that underlie sense and constitute the givenness of the world, and he finds those conditions in the immediate unity of myth. The potential for understanding through reflection is grounded in the ignorance of myth:

So that, as rational metaphysics teaches that man becomes all things by understanding them (*homo intelligendo fit omnia*), this imaginative metaphysics [Vico's own] shows that man becomes all things by not understanding them (*homo non intelligendo fit omnia*); and perhaps the latter proposition is truer than the former, for when man understands he extends his mind and takes in things, but when he does not understand he makes things out of himself and becomes them by transforming himself into them.²⁰

This is Vico's *verum factum* principle. The principle is referred to in similar terms at §331 and at §349. Mythic man sees himself as the center of the world. "Because of the indefinite nature of the human mind, wherever it is lost in ignorance, man makes himself the measure of all things."²¹ The first man is ignorant because he is lost within the indeterminate unity of the cosmos. He knows neither himself as a discrete individual nor the world as something external to him.

For Vico knowledge depends upon this ontological identity between man and his environment. Man's spontaneous creativity, exercised in his unreflective, mythic state, joins man and world and provides reflection with its substance. Mediate knowledge depends upon immediate experience. Knowledge, therefore, depends upon ignorance, and reflection upon myth: for as Vico writes,

²⁰ *New Science*. §405.

²¹ *New Science*. §120.

echoing Aristotle²², "wonder is the daughter of ignorance"²³ and the "mother of knowledge".²⁴

This is more than epistemological. It is also ontological. Out of the spontaneous creativity that was given to man in his mythic condition came the content for all future civil societies. Vico traces all three of his universal and eternal principles to roots in myth. His universal principles are:

- i) All civilizations have some religion.
- ii) All have solemn marriages.
- iii) All bury their dead.²⁵

These principles were not imagined out of thin air, nor instituted for some conscious reason, but arose spontaneously and out of ignorance, as the first race of giants bowed before the lightening and scurried off to their caves to copulate. So, reflection looks for form in the substance given to it by myth.

One can see this exchange and this interdependence most clearly in Vico's theory of language. He argues that the tool of reflection, language, owes its being not to the higher faculties, but to myth. Much as Cassirer argues in his Language and Myth, Vico writes that the first men "spoke in signs".²⁶ That is, their words were perceived to be identical with their referents. This is possible because in myth words are not given arbitrarily to things, but things call out their own names, and humans, in speaking the names of things, are drawn close to those things. "They believed that Jove commanded by signs, that such signs were real words, and that nature was the language of Jove."²⁷ The first word was

²²"And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of wisdom, for myth is composed of wonders);" *Metaphysics*. W.D. Ross (trans.) 982^b17-18.

²³ New Science. §184.

²⁴ New Science. §188.

²⁵ New Science. §333.

²⁶ New Science. §379.

²⁷ New Science. §379.

the lightening bolt, and men responded to it by shaking and shuddering.²⁸ They perceived that they were being spoken to, that the god was saying its own name, and they replied by repeating the name, restoring their identity with the world through speech even as that unity was disrupted by the brilliant flash and roar. Mythic language exhibits a bodily exuberance that points to the world. Words are not considered as abstractions from a corporeal reality, but as expressions of the power of material things to attract human attention. Likewise and reciprocally, words give human beings a power over the things of which they speak, since the words and the things are identical, and if one is changed, so is the other. Vico describes this magical conception of language as a product of the barbarian's ignorance, and compares it to the attitude of children, "whom we see take inanimate things in their hands and play with them and talk to them as though they were living persons".²⁹ Mythic language, rather than a medium for reflection and a means to either transcend the material world in thought or describe that world in metaphors, attaches man firmly to the world.

ii) *the barbarism of reflection*

This is the proper relation between myth and reason, or barbarism and reflection, whereby myth provides reason with substance. Through reflection man steps back from his creations, to see what form may be in them. God's divine providence is the middle term. Mythic man's spontaneous creativity

²⁸This account of the origin of language is in partial agreement with that presented by Socrates in the *Cratylus*, wherein it is argued that the seemingly arbitrary words and names used in 5th century Athens are rooted in barbarian languages. In those languages words achieved a direct agreement with their meanings through a kind of onomatopoeia. However, unlike Vico, Socrates argues that the origin of words must be a rational onomatopoeia, such that words not agree merely with the sound of the thing named, but with its essence. [423c] Hence, for Socrates the barbarians become forgotten philosophers, uncontaminated by the fashions of Athens.

²⁹*New Science*. §375.

opens him up to the guiding hand of God. The divine providence that guides spontaneous creation is perceived by the reflective intellect. Myth and reason do for one another what the other cannot, and together allow for God's plan to come to fruition in civil society, first irrationally conceived, but in the end rationally understood.³⁰ Many commentators emphasize this exchange or tension between myth and reason as the central teaching of the New Science.³¹

However much Vico's tale of the three ages may seem to resemble Hegel's argument in the Phenomenology, whereby the Spirit of History comes to self-consciousness in man and is embodied in the laws of nations,³² for Vico reflection cannot be looked at simply as the height of human accomplishment. As reflection is our way up, so too is it our way back down. While reflection allows us to distinguish universal principles, if taken to its extreme its analytic powers will detach form from substance, such that the laws which bind societies

³⁰ New Science, §1111.

³¹For example, Allain Pons writes that, "...activities of knowledge and those activities properly called practical develop at the same time and according to the same rhythm. The whole of humanity is manifested in each moment in history, in a manner that is indissolubly theoretical and practical at one and the same time." ["Prudence and Providence: The *Practica Della Scienza Nuova* and the Problem of Theory and Practice in Vico" in Giambattista Vico's Science of Humanity, p. 442]

³²Near the end of the New Science one finds a paragraph that could have come straight out of Hegel: "It is true that men have themselves made this world of nations..., but this world without doubt has issued from a mind often diverse, at times quite contrary, and always superior to the particular ends that men proposed themselves; which narrow ends, made means to serve wider ends, it has always employed to preserve the human race upon this earth. [Vico goes on to provide examples.] ... That which did this all was mind, for men did it with intelligence; it was not fate, for they did it by choice; not chance, for the results of their so acting are perpetually the same." [§1108] It is this similarity which causes Hannah Arendt to remark that:

For Vico, as later for Hegel, the importance of the concept of history was primarily theoretical. It never occurred to either of them to apply this concept directly by using it as a principle of action. Truth, they conceived of as being revealed to the contemplative, backward-oriented glance of the historian, who by being able to see the process as a whole, is in a position to overlook the narrow aims of acting men, concentrating instead on the higher aims that realize themselves behind their backs (Vico) [sic].

["The Concept of History" in Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought. (New York: Viking Press, 1963) p. 77.]

together will be looked upon as strictly formal structures with no concrete basis. Where no laws are perceived as having any substance, human beings are set free into the same indeterminate freedom as the first race of men. Hence Vico adds a second barbarism to the first; this is the barbarism of reflection.

Vico prefaces his discussion of the barbarism of reflection in the Conclusion of his work with the remark: "Today a complete humanity seems to be spread abroad through all nations,... If there are still some barbarous peoples surviving, it is because their monarchies have persisted in the vulgar wisdom of imaginative and cruel religions".³³ The situation he describes is very much like the one we know, where there is a common understanding of human beings as essentially free and equal, and where the exceptions within this otherwise consistent understanding are considered to be vestiges from an earlier religious age which only need time to be modernized. Thus we both seem to live at a time of universal agreement about things political, a perception reflected in a concentration of political power in a few large power units.³⁴

Yet even as the idea of a 'complete humanity' spreads over the globe, the concrete basis for a global *sensus communis* is undercut. Reflection and barbarism go together. Vico blames this partly on the academies, bastions of abstraction and indifferent skepticism: "This was the order of human things: first the forests, after that the huts, thence the villages, next the cities and finally the academies."³⁵ In Vico's time, the academies had, "descended to skepticism. Learned fools fell to calumniating the truth. Thence arose a false eloquence, ready to uphold either of the opposed sides of a case indifferently."³⁶ Vico rightly sees modern philosophy as having its foundation in skepticism. As

³³ *New Science*. §1089.

³⁴ *ibid.*.

³⁵ *New Science*. §239.

³⁶ *New Science*. §1102.

evidenced in Descartes' *genie malign*, modern thought begins with a rejection of what is given to human beings. Modern thinkers are 'learned fools' because they neglect what is common to and essential for all human life. The sacred rites of religion, marriage, and burial are seen as mere conventions. It would be as well, as contemporaries have suggested, to compost our dead into fertilizer,³⁷ to live in 'open' relationships, and to worship only our potential as individuals. Vico sees this current in modern thought as ultimately directed towards human freedom, and nothing else, and predicts that it will be the ruin of civil society. Because this drive is in essence without bounds, the teachings of learned fools find their way into the streets, and their abstractions are heard even on the lips of the vulgar, who, Vico remarks, even in his day knew "how to count and reckon".³⁸ "Thus [modern philosophers] caused the commonwealths to fall from perfect liberty into the perfect tyranny of anarchy or the unchecked liberty of free peoples, which is the worst of all tyrannies."³⁹

Vico describes two ways by which an ordered civil society can be restored: a strong monarch may arise from within,⁴⁰ or a stronger nation may conquer from without.⁴¹ Both are unlikely options, just because the barbarism of reflection has spread everywhere, eroding the ground for resistance both inside and outside. To these two options Vico adds a third, which I will quote at length:

³⁷One of the strongest proponents of this view is a Swedish scientist, Susanne Wiigh Masak. Her methods for composting human bodies have been approved by the Church of Sweden, and appear to be moving towards legalization in that country at least.

³⁸New Science. §378.

³⁹New Science. §1102.

⁴⁰New Science. §1104.

⁴¹New Science. §1105.

But if the peoples are rotting in this last civil illness and
 cannot agree upon a monarch from within, and are not conquered
 and preserved by better nations from without, then providence for
 their extreme ill has its extreme remedy at hand. For such peoples,
 5 like so many beasts, have fallen into the custom of each man
 thinking only of his own private interests and have reached the
 extreme of delicacy, or better of pride, in which like wild animals
 they bristle and lash out at the slightest displeasure. Thus in the
 10 midst of their greatest festivities, though physically thronging
 together, they live like wild beasts in a deep solitude of spirit and
 will, scarcely any two being able to agree since each follows his
 own pleasure or caprice. By reason of this, providence decrees
 that, through obstinate factions and desperate civil wars, they shall
 15 turn their cities into forests and the forests into dens and lairs of
 men. In this way, through long centuries of barbarism, rust will
 consume the misbegotten subtleties of malicious wits, that have
 turned them into beasts made more inhuman by the barbarism of
 reflection than the first men had been made by the barbarism of
 20 sense. For the latter displayed a generous savagery, against which
 one could defend oneself or take flight or be on one's guard; but
 the former, with a base savagery, under soft words and embraces,
 plots against the life and fortune of friends and intimates. Hence
 peoples who have reached this point of premeditated malice, when
 25 they receive this last remedy of providence and are thereby
 stunned and brutalized, are sensible no longer of comforts,
 delicacies, pleasure and pomp, but only of the sheer necessities of
 life.⁴²

⁴² New Science, §1106. Line numbers are my own.

Vico's presentation of this extreme remedy is mythic. Here we see the familiar trope of the destruction of the world in order to make way for an entirely new world. Destruction of the old order is necessary because the capacity for transcendence is alien to mythic man. He is isolated within the circle of his own desires, and cannot see beyond himself. There is no reason then why any number of individuals should come to agreement which would rescue them from their condition (ln. 2), since they cannot imagine a standard apart from the necessities which govern their own lonely lives. And since the condition which Vico describes has been laid out as an all-embracing whole, there is nothing outside of it to disrupt it from its course, no strong, foreign nation which could startle a corrupt nation from without (ln. 3). Or, as he writes elsewhere, "Nations in their barbarous condition are impenetrable".⁴³ Therefore, the old order must go under in order for a new one to arise out of it (ln. 4).

Vico takes us to our extreme. He describes human beings ruled wholly by their private passions, all of their 'acts' mere reactions to material causes. Man finds his way back to myth through the excesses of reflection, which cuts him off from an external standard, and thereby isolates him within his own reflections. This isolation is worsened as the liberal restraint upon the interference with others becomes 'the extreme of delicacy' (ln. 7) which takes offence at the slightest suggestion of impropriety. No man can judge another. Everything is equally good. Man is swamped by an overwhelming sense of contingency, for which his only response is to accept the necessity of this contingency.⁴⁴

⁴³ New Science, §303.

⁴⁴ Holmes also notes this collapse of the distinction between the contingent and the necessary as a unifying feature of mythic and technological societies. He writes that modern societies, "leave man as much a victim as a master of the newly exposed contingent character of the world." ["The Barbarism of Reflection" p. 219.]

This sense of fatalism, registered alongside of increasing human freedom, is strong in Vico's own writing. It is difficult to project oneself out of myth. His three 'solutions' to the barbarism of reflection express this difficulty. One option is for a king of superlative strength to master and lead us towards a sense of the common good using force. If this does not occur, we hazard being conquered by a more vital nation. Should neither of these possibilities occur, we may dive into the necessity of myth in order to relieve ourselves of it. Like a swimmer caught in a whirlpool, which will lift him to the surface for air, only to pull him under again, it may be best for us to take a deep breath and dive down, rather than struggling vainly for the surface. Then, perhaps, we may catch a current below, which will move us down-river. In giving ourselves over to fate we give ourselves over to providence, which has an "extreme remedy" at hand for our "extreme ill". (ln. 4)

These are all extreme and, frankly, unlikely possibilities. The difficulty of a solution to the problem of the barbarism of reflection speaks to its entrenched character. Vico writes that the second barbarism is worse than the first, that it is somehow deeper and more ingrained in our thought, and less prone to rehabilitation through a new religion (ln. 17). This is because, whereas the barbarism of sense encouraged a vigorous isolation, the barbarism of reflection maintains the appearance of holding us together in society while in reality isolating us from each other. We only put up with one another for our own small purposes. In the privacy of our own reflections though, we are full of malice and incapable of true friendship. There are only casual interdependencies, neutral 'relationships', entered into out of convenience or necessity. Stephen Taylor Holmes observes that it is only in a scientific age that one can regard one's wife as a hypothesis.⁴⁵ In this spirit, Kant defines marriage as a contract for

⁴⁵ "The Barbarism of Reflection" p. 219.

the mutual and exclusive use of the genitals.⁴⁶ Even as society takes on the rigid form of contractual union, it loses that which gives that form content: the sense of awe and wonder which forced the first men into caves with their wives. Society is both wholly arbitrary, because it is thought to originate not from gods, but from men, and it is wholly necessary because it is deprived of any unifying sense of the good other than the dictates of material existence- endless cycles of production and consumption. All that Vico can hope for to disrupt this closed set of cycles is that humans will be shocked by the depravity of their existence, and thus hold themselves out to a divine power to relieve them.

iii) *our technological barbarism*

It does not seem that modern society is moving towards the calamitous collapse that Vico hoped for. Vico thought that bereft of a *sensus communis* human beings would be unable to live and work together at all. However, it appears that this is exactly what technological society is best at: going about the daily business of production and consumption without regard to a shared conception of the common good. Set free from common customs, our earthly powers have been liberated. This is Verene's reading of Vico's barbarism of reflection. Verene describes technological rationality as a practical, worldly application of Descartes' methodology.

Reflection, as Vico uses the term, means the process by which we abstract from the particulars of our given situation. We step out of ourselves in order to see the world with perspective. Ultimately, Vico sees unchecked reflection

⁴⁶ Grant uses a similar phrase to gloss Kant. [*English-Speaking Justice*, p. 29] Grant does not give a clear reference, though the question of marriage is discussed in the same cold, contractual terms in *The Metaphysics of Morals*.

giving rise to philosophical skepticism.⁴⁷ We have seen how Vico argues that this type of thought is caustic to the *sensus communis*, the common sense and to the common good. However, the resolute component of Descartes' method is only the first step: the next step is re-composition. Reflection first allows us to abstract ourselves from our given communities, then is used to compose new social orders. Verene argues that reflection becomes the basis for technical procedure and for technological society; he "takes it as a given" that we live, "in an age dominated by the barbarism of reflection",

...and that the particular modality of our barbarism is fixed in the phenomenon of technical procedure. The abstract concept when transformed into the technical procedure becomes the unifying element of all economic, social, and mental activities. Our ability to transform all human activity through technique replaces the *sensus communis* as the basis of social life.⁴⁸

Technical procedure, a phrase related to Ellul's *technique*, embodies a reflexive awareness, an ability to step out of one's place in order to see how a task may be most efficiently accomplished, irrespective of traditional ways and binding ethical mores- the so-called *sensus communis*. Verene's description of the technological method is straight out of Descartes "Rules for the Direction of the Mind". This is not to say that technology is simply an application of modern philosophy to contemporary practical problems, because modern philosophy in this early account points towards its own application. Thinking is described as an almost mechanical process. Descartes lays out a set of rules for managing and directing this process of thought. Verene identifies Descartes' four principle rules as: "(1) to begin only with what can be taken as evidently true, (2) the division of initial difficulties into parts, (3) the movement from simple to complex, and (4)

⁴⁷ *New Science*. §1102.

⁴⁸ *Vico's Science of Imagination*. pp. 196-7.

the achievement of completeness by continual review and enumeration-".⁴⁹ Technological thinking begins by only accepting what is evidently true, thus it eschews 'subjective' value judgments and prefers the objective measure of efficiency, a standard which satisfies Descartes' criteria of clarity and distinctness.⁵⁰ Technological thinking works by breaking problems down into their component parts, solving problems piece by piece within specialized fields of knowledge. It continues by adapting the results from one science to another, and from the sciences to the arts, to form a unified whole in thought and action. And it folds back on itself through the continual reflection on whether all assumptions are well-founded, all systems are broken into the smallest parts, and all potential applications are sought out. In this way, reflection comes to form a self-referential whole and a self-perpetuating process in which thought and action are united.

Society is not autonomous from this technological ordering. Elsewhere Verene writes that, "What is important in technological society is management science, policy studies, behavioral studies, law enforcement and corrections, vocational guidance,"... etc..⁵¹ The control of the given, which is made possible through the union of the arts and sciences, is extended to the social realm. Everything must give itself up to this dynamic impulse. Even our reactions against technology are expressed in the language of technology: we want to make technology serve social ends, yet even in this we move towards the integration of technology and society.⁵² What is paradoxical about this is that

⁴⁹Vico's Science of Imagination, p. 200. Verene gives a very similar presentation in his later book Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge.

⁵⁰Meditations on First Philosophy, "Second Meditation" p. 70.

⁵¹"Technology and the Ship of Fools", in Research in Philosophy & Technology, Vol. 5, 1982, p. 289.

⁵²In a number of essays Verene suggests that all that we can do in response to technology is laugh, since only laughter can open a free space for humans where all serious thought is so easily taken up for application. ["Technique and the Direction of the Human Spirit: Laughter and Desire", in Essays in Humanity and Technology David Lovekin and Donald Phillip Verene

the more fully we exercise our autonomy **within** technology, the less autonomy we have **from** technology. To become masters of the 'machine'- and by machine I mean anything from a toaster to a public school to an economy- we must make the machine a part of us. Once this is done, we can no longer think about ourselves as whole human beings without thinking about technology. Technology has become our environment.

This self-enclosed whole, so difficult to escape, is Vico's barbarism of reflection, or in contemporary terms, our technological barbarism. Man lives without principles, without gods, heroes, or lawful customs. His thoughts and actions are directed completely by the vicissitudes of material existence. No set custom holds human society together, since such customs would be an impediment to the flexibility required to cope with an always changing world, and since all customs are considered as mere formal, provisional arrangements meant to secure what is necessary for human beings to live. We create rules when we need them, and leave them when they are no longer useful. This ability to create the semblance of civil society is what distinguishes the second barbarism from the first. Like the first race of giants who lived alone, each in identity with nature, we see ourselves as isolated individuals, hence the "deep solitude of spirit and will" which Vico speaks of;⁵³ but unlike them, we 'throng together', joining our bodies in a kind of civil union. We do what is necessary for our bodies, while our minds and spirits are in no way joined by a common set of principles or customs. In our bodies, we are like beasts; while in our minds, each of us is our own god.

(ed.) (Dixon: Sauk Valley College Press, 1978); "Technology and the Ship of Fools"; and "Philosophical Laughter: Vichian Remarks on Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*", in New Vico Studies, Vol. II (1984). I wonder though if he doesn't mean something nearer to irony; he cannot be serious when he writes that Allan Toefler's book Future Shock is "side-splitting". ["Technique and the Direction of the Human Spirit: Laughter and Desire", p. 88]

⁵³ New Science. §1106.

Vico thought that this condition could not endure, that this schism within the modern condition would rob us of our creative powers, and that without these powers we could not create a civil code which could sustain itself. This strange hope for the collapse of modern civilization has not been realized. Paradoxically, the individual and the mass man are mutually sustaining. As Verene writes: "The correlate to reflection, in modern life, is the belief in the reality of the individual, coupled with the paradox of the uniformity of the social mass."⁵⁴ Technology creates a formal, self-sustaining unity, directed by an internally justifiable and self-evident standard, while at the same time isolating individuals from one another. Technology makes it possible for us to believe that we are gods unto ourselves, but it also teaches us to keep our religions private.

⁵⁴ Vico's New Science of Imagination. p. 153.

Section 2: Kojève's Re-Animalization -- *the silencing of Man*

i) *preface*

This section has two arguments. The first concerns Alexandre Kojève's concept of the essence of man as freedom: as the negation of given nature. I argue that in describing human essence thusly, Kojève is describing technology. I will make this argument by comparing Kojève's discussions of the essence of man as negation with George Grant and Martin Heidegger's definitions of technology.

My second argument is that at the end of history technological man, as described by Kojève, is not human in a strict sense. That is, he does not struggle against nature, engage in bloody wars or revolutions, or even speak. Rather, as Kojève writes somewhat elliptically, post-historical man can take two paths: either 're-animalization' or 'Japanization', which I interpret to mean becoming either beasts or gods. This is an essentially mythic formulation, which can result only when the boundaries which distinguish man from his world are either not clear or do not exist. In such an environment, what was hitherto known as man is caught between being fully conditioned by his surroundings and being fully in control of them. He is of the world, and sees the world as his own creation. Lacking any distance from which to reflect upon his world, he necessarily ceases to think as an individual set apart from the world,⁵⁵ and becomes incapable of meaningful speech about it. This is why our elaboration of Kojève's description

⁵⁵Introduction... p. 168.

of post-historical, mythic man- the beast/god- is so difficult; it is also why Kojève himself lapses into silence at this point, or starts joke-telling.

ii) *man as technology*

Kojève's description of man's essence is essentially technological; or put more simply: man is technology. The essence of both man and technology is the negation of the given, that is, the transformation of what man is given by nature, and the creation of a new human order. This applies to both human and non-human nature, such that man is free in the fullest possible sense, not only from external impediments as Hobbes states it, but also from any internal ordering principles. Stated simply, man is nothing other than this process: "Man is negating Action, which transforms given Being, and, by transforming it, transforms itself."⁵⁶ So writes Kojève. This transformation is done without any guide or standard existing outside of man's freedom. Technology is the transformation of what is given to man so that the given comes to correspond to a human idea⁵⁷, which has no purpose other than human freedom. This is circular, which by now should be no surprise.

According to Kojève, the given- nature- does not have an order of its own; and even if it did, that order would be inaccessible to human beings as self-conscious knowledge. Nature can be 'known' only through contemplation, through which the self is annihilated in an immediate union with nature.⁵⁸ To know the world while retaining his self-consciousness man must first mediate the world; and mediation is what Kojève means by 'work'. To work is to transform the given or nature, both human and non-human. In other words, we

⁵⁶ Introduction... p. 38.

⁵⁷ Introduction... p. 48.

⁵⁸ Introduction... p. 37. But Kojève is not at all interested in this possibility.

can know nothing of a thing itself. We can discover only by seeing how things react when subjected to certain measurable forces, perceivable to human beings. This is a radically anthropocentric account of human knowing, which has the human as the source of all value and order, and the givens of nature as malleable impediments to be transformed by human will.

This view of man in his relation to nature and to his own history is consistent with Grant's and Heidegger's definitions of technology. In Technology and Empire Grant defines technology as "the mastery of human and non-human nature".⁵⁹ Heidegger gives a similar account of technology as an expression of the will to mastery, and as a calling forth of beings as 'standing reserve' to be used by man. Kojève's radical anthropomorphism reaches back to the origins of modern thought in Machiavelli and Hobbes. Like them Kojève shifts the emphasis for thinking and acting from ends to means, or to technique. Cut off from the possibility of understanding the given cosmos within which man is only a part (if a privileged part), modern man looks to master nature by transforming it.

However, if one were to leave technology as this opposition between man and nature, one would go no further than the early moderns, who see humans as stuck in a never-ending contest with capricious nature. Machiavelli insists that nature or *Fortuna* must be controlled, but recognizes limits to this control. Luck still has its influence on human affairs.⁶⁰ Similarly, for Hobbes although the mechanism of the State is designed to overcome the deficiencies of man's nature and make him sociable, his anti-social nature always remains. In a dark alley, unseen by any authority, human relations are the same as they are in

⁵⁹ Technology and Empire. p. 23.

⁶⁰ "I think it may be true that Fortune governs half our actions, but that even so she leaves the other half more or less to our control." [The Prince. chp. XXV]

the state of nature.⁶¹ Grant's definition of technology as the mastery of human and non-human nature illustrates this early technological disposition towards the mastery of nature by man, but it is not adequate to account for the essence of technology as a whole and as we experience it. What is missing from this definition is progress.

Grant has another definition of technology that completes the definition based on mastery. In English-Speaking Justice he defines technology as the "new union of making and knowing".⁶² In this definition, one moves beyond the simple mastery of nature, or in Kojève's language, the negation of the given, to a progressive unfolding of negation, ending in complete mastery. Even animals have something like technique, Kojève writes,⁶³ but theirs is distinguished by a lack of progressive change. Animal 'work' is circular,⁶⁴ and thus goes nowhere. Human beings, *qua* human, are historical. What allows Kojève's man to move forward is expressed in Hegelian terms as cumulative negation, through which self-consciousness is extended into the world, and man comes to see himself in all things.⁶⁵ In negating what is given, we do not simply destroy it, but the opposing sides are taken up together and retained. The contradiction, in being overcome, is not forgotten, but is retained in a resulting synthesis. This synthesis requires that our ideas about the world cease functioning as ideals- that is as impossible models for reality- and are used instead to actively shape the world. The tendency towards the realization of ideas, and correspondingly, of the rationalization of techniques, completes an understanding of technology.

⁶¹ "Therefore notwithstanding the Laws of Nature, ... if there be no Power erected, or not great enough for our security; every man will and may lawfully rely on his own strength and art, for caution against other men." [Leviathan, pp. 223-4]

⁶² English-Speaking Justice, p. 1.

⁶³ Introduction... p. 52. This passage, with its spider's web metaphor, prefigures the famous additional note to the note [p. 169fn.] which discusses post-historical, post-human activity.

⁶⁴ Introduction... p. 138.

⁶⁵ See G.W.F. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, J.B. Baillie (trans.) New York: Harper & Row, 1967) pp. 96-7.

Technology is essentially progressive, and its progress can be measured according to the narrowing division between ideas and reality.

However, if man is defined by his negation of the given, once his mastery of human and non-human nature is complete, there seems to be little one can find that is properly human. The end of history is also the end of man, properly so called, says Kojève.⁶⁶ Of what replaces man, Kojève has little to say. We will return to Kojève's silence in the last part of this section. But now we will look to see what we can find in Kojève's description of post-historical man, both in terms of what he is not, and what he is.

iii) *man outside the city*

Most interpreters of Kojève take notice of the footnote concerning the "disappearance of Man at the end of History,"⁶⁷. Even though it is only a footnote, it is so shocking that it demands attention. While there are many studies which focus on Kojève in the context of his reading of Hegel, there is little written that focuses on this strange note.⁶⁸ However, I will mention Hegel only briefly, since it is clearly established that the Introduction is not a piece of Hegel scholarship,⁶⁹ but rather an independent work of philosophy which can, therefore, be judged on its own, rather than by correspondence to an original.

⁶⁶ Introduction... p. 158.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 158fn. The long footnote, with its note to the note, carries on to p. 162.

⁶⁸ One exception is a chapter on the topic by Tom Darby, titled appropriately, "The Unsaid Side of the Dialectic", pp. 170-188 in The Feast.

⁶⁹ Michael Roth writes that Kojève's Introduction... is "barely disguised as a commentary on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*." ["A Note on Kojève's *Phenomenology of Right*" *Political Theory*, Vol. 11, No. 3, August 1983. pp. 447-450.] I also point to Dennis Goldford's essay, "Kojève's Reading of Hegel" [*International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 22, 1982. pp. 275-294.], Kelly Armstrong's "Notes on Hegel's Lordship and Bondage" [Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays, Alasdair MacIntyre (ed.) (New York: Doubleday, 1972) pp. 189-217.], and Patrick Riley's "Introduction to the Reading of Alexandre Kojève" [*Political Theory*, Vol. 9, No. 1, February 1981. pp. 5-48.], all of which criticize the correctness of Kojève's reading of Hegel.

In other words, Kojève's work is one of interpretation, not commentary. While commentary is and must be faithful to its text, interpretation is not faithful to the text. Interpretation is not faithful in that it goes beyond or transcends what it interprets, and to do so it must do violence to the text. So now we look closely at Kojève's description of post-historical man, and pose the question of what we may be if we are not human.

In understanding ourselves as moderns, it is necessary first to understand classical philosophy, because our being as moderns is defined in large part in terms of the rejection of classical thought. However, some of the ancients did anticipate elements of modern existence. Aristotle's answer to the above question is that if we are not human, then we are either beasts or gods. In the *Politics*, he defines man as "an animal intended by nature to live in a polis",⁷⁰ and says that a being (one must presume a being like man) that lives outside of the city must be either lower or higher than man. He suggests that such a being would soon descend into war (and one assumes, death), there being nothing to bind him to others whom he meets. He argues further that, "The man who is isolated- who is unable to share in the benefits of political association, or has no need to share because he is already self-sufficient- is no part of the polis, and must therefore be either a beast or a god."⁷¹ The statement is not as strange as it may first appear. Part of man's nature is to be an animal, so a human who, by accident, hasn't been supplied with the necessary conditions to become a full human being capable of living in a city, is retarded at the status of a beast.⁷² Correspondingly, one who by nature (as opposed to by accident) is self-sufficient

⁷⁰ *Pol.* 12523a9.

⁷¹ *Pol.* 1253a30.

⁷² Feral children would be a good example of man/beasts. See The Wild Boy of Aveyron by Jean Marc Gaspard Itard, George and Muriel Humphrey (trans.) (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962); and also Wolf-children and feral man by J.A.L. Singh, (Conn.: Archon Books, 1966).

outside of the city must not be human at all (even though he may look human otherwise). As the corollary of this thesis, in Book III, chp. xiii, Aristotle suggests that the pre-eminent man of exceptional virtue may be sent into exile from the city.⁷³ Too close to being a god, such a man deprives others of the benefits of participation in political life; hence perfect politics means no politics.

If man is not man, properly so called, then he is either a beast or a god. The second possibility is not as impious as it first sounds, or it is justified by even greater impiety, written a few lines earlier: "We make the lives of the gods in the likeness of our own- as we also make their shapes."⁷⁴ Aristotle restates the popular criticism of the Homeric gods, arguing that they were the projections of human types. But this should not come as a surprise, since in myth men and gods are not as radically different as they are in the monotheistic religions. Aristotle is restrained from identifying gods and men for practical rather than pious reasons. Aristotle sees no way for humans to become completely self-sufficient, except perhaps in moments of contemplation. As he writes later in the *Politics*, the only condition on which he can imagine the lasting self-sufficiency of individuals, and, therefore, the absence of relations of dependency between superiors and inferiors, is the existence of self-moving, inanimate instruments which fulfil human desires by command or "intelligent anticipation". Masters would not need slaves nor slaves masters. He invokes Homer's authority to describe the wonderful works of Daedalus and Hephaestus:

Of their own motion they entered the conclave of Gods on
Olympus,

as if a shuttle would weave of itself, and a plectrum would do its
own harp playing.⁷⁵

⁷³ See Newell, W.R.. "Superlative Virtue: The Problem of Monarchy in Aristotle's *Politics*." pp. 191-211 in Essays on the Foundations of Aristotelian Political Science. Carnes Lord and David K. O'Connor (ed.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991)

⁷⁴ *Pol.* 1252b.

⁷⁵ *Pol.* 1253b.

If we had such mythical, self-moving instruments of intelligent anticipation, we would be self-sufficient. And if we are self-sufficient then slavery would not be necessary. Thus, book 1 of Aristotle's *Politics* would not be necessary either, since its subject is the necessity of household production and reproduction. With the household replaced by a collection of self-moving instruments, it is unclear whether politics would be necessary either, since politics begins out of insufficiency, and depends upon the distinction between superiors and inferiors. Without insufficiency and without this distinction, it is possible to imagine something that may resemble political life, something like compromise and co-operation among neighbors. Indeed, some of those who are most hopeful about the potentialities of technology, such as Murray Bookchin, have such an image in mind when they think about the future.⁷⁶ However, detached from its concrete foundation of the household, it may be that true politics ceases to be. And since it is politics that defines man in his full sense, as a *zoon politikon*, without politics there is no man.

The strange conditions that Aristotle describes are present in what we call technology. These same conditions are used by Kojève to justify his statement that man is now either a beast or a god, or both. We are whole, complete, and self-sufficient, hence gods or beasts.

⁷⁶ This view is best laid out in Murray Bookchin's Post-Scarcity Anarchism. (Berkeley: Ramparts, 1971) Curiously, and as we will see in Part IV, Bookchin chooses Aristotle's *zoon politikon* as a (loose) model for his naturalized politics.

iv) *how to tell a god from a beast*

Aristotle tells us that a man who is without a polis is either less than man or greater than man.⁷⁷ Kojève's famous footnote gives an account of these two types. The footnote announces the end of man, properly so called, and the entry into existence of another type; or as the note to the note suggests, two other types. Kojève distinguishes between 're-animalized' man and 'Japanized' man. The one is post-historical man as a beast, the other, I argue, as a god. Both types are alike in that they represent an image of man that is in principle perfectly self-satisfied, and of a society that has, therefore, no essential (i.e. non-technical) internal contradictions, and is more or less stable. Man as a beast fulfils his desires completely, and in so doing abolishes them as desires, whereas man as god is capable of completely submitting the desires to arbitrary form, thereby annulling them and himself. The one amuses himself to death, the other, more straightforwardly perhaps, commits "a perfectly 'gratuitous' suicide".⁷⁸ One is man as pure substance- the legacy of man as slave-, the other man as pure form- the legacy of man as master. As Tom Darby argues, "The re-animalized man and the japanized man are posthistorical archetypes of victorious slaves and nonreconstructed masters."⁷⁹ In the simplest terms they are man as beast and man as god.

Since it may be hard to believe that there are gods on earth, examples and illustrations may help. Before we can see these clearly and concretely, and not in terms of fantasy, we have to clear away the wild depictions of a technological order that artists have made. I am thinking of the widely read dystopian fictions:

⁷⁷*Politics*. 1253a4. Aristotle makes the distinction in terms of relative strength.

⁷⁸*Introduction...* p. 162fn.

⁷⁹Darby, Tom. "On Spiritual Crisis, Globalization, and Planetary Rule" in *Faith, Reason, and Political Life Today*. Peter Augustine Lawler and Dale McConkey (ed.) (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001) p. 43.

Aldous Huxley's Brave New World,⁸⁰ George Orwell's 1984,⁸¹ and Eugene Zamiatin's We.⁸² These depictions have been made in political terms, such that the reader understands technology as a personified force that rules. They saw technology tending towards totalitarianism. Their judgment was effected by their experiences of totalitarian states, specifically the USSR and Nazi Germany. While it is true that those regimes would not have been possible without technology, technology does not necessarily result in totalitarianism. Though governments may be bureaucratic and tied to industry, they are not totalitarian. And though technology is concerned with the efficient ordering of human resources, the models for this efficient ordering are not parades and assembly lines.

The most obvious example of a totalitarian, technological government was Nazi Germany. Its aim was to remake the human beings, to efficiently allocate human resources, and to create a race of Aryan supermen, a genetically superior type designed to rule over inferior human beings. Politically this project failed, and biologically it made no sense. Our own attempts to remake ourselves as gods through technology are not impeded by ideology or racism. In contrast with the Nazi's momentous effort at engineering a new species of man, our own efforts in this direction seem banal. But then, this fits the banality of our time, in which political action is replaced by play.⁸³ Gods are being made of men today, without bogus class- or race-based theories. One sees this is elite sport.

A not-so petty controversy surrounds amateur sports concerning the use of illegal drugs and training methods, especially the physical or chemical

⁸⁰ (London: Penguin, 1932)

⁸¹ (Middlesex: Penguin, 1949)

⁸² Gregory Zilboorg (trans.) (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1924) This last one was not so widely read in North America, nor in its native Soviet Union where it was censored, but it was the inspiration for Orwell's 1984, and the first novel to project a technological dystopia.

⁸³ Tom Darby writes that, "like the gods on timeless Olympus, Kojève merely plays." ["On Spiritual Crisis,..." p. 39.]

manipulation of blood, or 'doping'. The controversy is animated by the apprehension, quite correct, that these techniques trespass upon the limits of human being, properly and strictly considered, and further, that these trespasses, if allowed, will make any determination of what constitutes a proper human being, and hence an eligible athlete, impossible. A similar controversy arose over sex-testing, though it was more easily settled because examples of each type were available for the test. In this case, however, a mortal god is not available at the outset to measure changes against.

The techniques for the manipulation of human beings listed as illegal together form a rough schema that delimits the human being. Of course this schema is imperfect and somewhat arbitrary, since these boundaries were drawn out *ad hoc* in reaction to perceived threats to fairness. So, for example, some cold medications are listed among the banned techniques. However, the crudeness of such attempts by corrupt bureaucrats to define what constitutes a human being should not distract us from the fundamental nature of the transformation effected upon the hitherto-human athletes.

These athletes are mortal gods. There is little continuity between their perfect form and the natural talent and effort of early athletes. They are the products of a complex set of integrated, controlling techniques, and more than gifted humans hardened by training. Exceptions do exist, but the difficulty that the honest athlete experiences only confirms the reality of the system within which he is an exception. Potential athletes are sorted out from the rest through a system of leagues which joins the highest echelons to children's games. They are subjected to rigorous lab testing which determines whether they are good material for further manipulation. Their given nature is understood as material to be processed. The technological athlete has, therefore, only technological

limits, and those imposed upon him by governing agencies. The latter limits are not essential, however, but only force these gods into hiding among men.

The technological athlete stands apart as a god among men. If one watches, for example, the fastest skier at the 2002 Olympics, Johann Muelegg, one recognizes immediately that one is watching something other than a human being. Muelegg sets out in a 50 kilometer race at the same pace as he would over 100 meters, and keeps that pace throughout. White froth spouts from his mouth. To go faster, his chest cavity would have to be enlarged to allow for larger lungs, which is technically infeasible at the present time. As it is artificial blood flows in his veins, even as chemicals (these ones legal) shut down the flow of blood to the non-essential function of the brain so that the muscles can work unimpeded and more efficiently. All of the top skiers use these technologies: blood testing reveals consistent abnormalities, but these usually cannot be linked to known drugs.

But drugs are only transformations in capsule form- most alterations are more systemic. To further alter their blood and being, these athletes live in altitude houses, closed environments in which the air pressure and oxygen content are controlled to mimic conditions at high altitude.⁸⁴ This is the earthly Valhalla, the vaporous region of the mortal gods, in sight, yet inaccessible, where

⁸⁴ This is how one of the Canadian national team members, Sara Renner, describes her experience with the altitude tent- an oxygen and pressure controlled environment- in which she sleeps. She is supervised by a lab technician, who:

...has to check us every half an hour while we snooze away. We wear a little sensor on our finger that measures saturation of oxygen in our blood and our heart rate. It takes differing amount of limited oxygen to reach the perfect oxygen saturation in each athlete. Part of our success is that the program is individualized. [<http://www.SkiFaster.net>]

This is purely technological sport, and it trespasses on the limits of human being. The individual becomes a variable in a system of control and modification.

Athena, Ares and Apollo dine on ambrosia fed to them effortlessly through intravenous tubes.

If these new beings are not humans, properly so called, then are they either beasts or gods? I have depicted them as mortal gods, but it is hard to distinguish between beasts and gods without a perspective in between the two. Aristotle distinguishes beast from gods in terms of their relative strengths, from the perspective of man: beasts are less than human; gods are greater than humans.⁸⁵ Here, however, without a properly human perspective, this criterion doesn't work. For the super-athlete could be made stronger through the use of animal hormones, for example. Or, to extend the issue beyond the athlete example, is a human being with a pig's heart less than or more than human? Similarly, is a body enhanced with bionic limbs or organs less than or greater than the human being? Hitherto, most uses of animal transplants into humans, prosthetic limbs and organs, and psycho-pharmaceutical adjustment have used given human nature as a standard. They have been used with the idea in mind of making humans with defects 'more human'. Now, however, given human nature is not understood as a standard for manipulation, but as an incidental condition. Blood manipulation makes super-athletes faster than human athletes. Prozac makes 4th grade boys better behaved than boys are by nature. The use of artificial respirators makes patients live longer than they would by nature. These trespasses awaken us to the question, 'What is it to be human?', but the question comes too late, as we are already on our way to something else. Just what we are becoming is impossible to say. Maybe we are becoming beasts, maybe gods. As in myth, even this boundary is not clear. In myth gods can take the form of animals, and animals are often worshipped as gods. Referring to post-historical life, Darby writes, "Thus we have a misty world of the sacred intermixed with the

⁸⁵ *Pol.* 1253a4.

profane where gods roam the earth in the form of sacred animals."⁸⁶ Beasts, men and gods blend together.

Homer tells us this, that "gods are easy to recognize",⁸⁷ but doesn't give any criteria to help us do so. This suggests that it was a natural ability for Homeric man to be able to distinguish between gods and men- and this meant that the two types met frequently. Any especially outstanding act or speech could be attributed to a god- hence the gods were everywhere. (Though Homer still finds it necessary to remind his readers of this; perhaps things were slipping for myth already.) For us, as for Homer, the line between gods, men, and beast is fuzzy.

The question of how to distinguish between gods and men becomes even harder when it refers to mortal gods, the kind Kojève describes. We can say that gods are complete, and so suffer no desire; or if they do have something like desire, it is different from human desire. For the latter is the opening up of an essentially needful soul, while the former results from contingent and temporary attachments- whims that the mind can direct at will. We can say then that for the gods, desire is not fundamental. For gods desire is strictly arbitrary (whereas for beasts it is strictly necessary). Gods can be without desire, even be content without it, since all that this pseudo-desire does is provide excitement and the appearance of action.

v) *the end of self-consciousness*

For Kojève man is self-consciousness, but self-consciousness is not possible at the end of history, because such self-consciousness requires

⁸⁶ The Feast, p. 173.

⁸⁷ *Il.* 13.76.

contradiction: it requires a subject who stands apart from the world of objects. As a beast, man masters the world of objects and so becomes an object himself; as a god he masters himself as subject so completely that he can turn away from the objective world with a sneer or a sigh. Self-consciousness is possible only when the self is incomplete, when it has desires and seeks to fulfil them. This is the reason for Kojève's later addition to the 1946 note, since it falsely suggests that the activities associated with human desire- art, love, play, etc.- can go on at the end of history. The sentiment of the 1946 note is comparable with Marx's vision of the worker's future in The German Ideology as a time when men are free from the continuous demands of labor and can devote themselves to higher, more properly human activities, among which Marx lists a pastoral mix of hunting, fishing, and husbandry in the day, and study by evening.⁸⁸ Man overcomes the natural divisions of labour and enters into an undifferentiated state- or better, process- of continuous self-creation, free from necessity. Indeed, Kojève refers to Marx's division between the "Realm of Necessity" and the "Realm of Freedom" in the first note.⁸⁹ However, as he writes of this reference in a letter to Carl Schmitt,⁹⁰ what is man to do with his freedom? If he is truly free, he can have no goals, because he lacks anything to overcome. Man is essentially his freedom, but as soon as he comes into his essence in full he is no longer properly human.

What appears in the place of man looks much the same. Human beings will 'go to work' even though they produce nothing; they will make art even

⁸⁸ Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick. The German Ideology. (New York: International Publishers. 1976) p. 53.

⁸⁹ Intro., p. 159fn.. Patrick Riley has called attention to this reference as a misappropriation of Marx by Kojève, namely because of the false attribution of value to recognition. [p. 17 of "Introduction to the Reading Alexandre Kojève "] But we can say much the same thing about Kojève 's reading of Marx as we have of his reading of Hegel: there are better Marx scholars than Kojève, but as a rule, they are not better thinkers.

⁹⁰ Letter of 05.16.1955. (manuscript) translated by Eric De Vries. p. 23.

though they do not have an idea of beauty; they will have sex even though they are not moved by love. In short, work, art, and sex will be perfected and freed from their errors, which were in the past registered by their incompleteness. These activities and other familiar ones will be continued out of habit, and because there is no reason to stop them, but they will lose all of their meaning even as they achieve perfection.

Sex is a good example. Viagra and the Joy of Sex are techniques for achieving unlimited orgasms, and thereby overcoming the incompleteness of human love. One is free to practice unsatisfying sex if one prefers, maintaining a tortured distance from one's partners and oneself, but then one enters into the realms of either fetish (which is self-conscious) or psychosis (which is un-self-conscious). Post-historical, 'well-adjusted' human beings "indulge in love like adult beasts"⁹¹, free from modesty or restraint, expressing themselves fully. They are overexposed.

As sex is perfected, so too is language. "Animals of the species *Homo sapiens* would react by conditioned reflexes to vocal signals or sign 'language,' and thus their so-called 'discourses' would be like what is supposed to be the 'language' of bees."⁹² Technological man's language is perfect, complete. There is no incompleteness in 'expression', as much as anything is 'expressed'. Language has no definite purpose, as anything expressed must. Nothing comes out of the word. No metaphor flies from it. It is merely an automatic conditioned reflex. And as with our language, so too with our music. At the end of history, these human-like animals "would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas".⁹³ Isn't this our music now? Our electronic music at least is nothing more than the rhythmic noise of machines with natural sounds

⁹¹ Introduction... p. 159fn.

⁹² Introduction... p. 160fn.

⁹³ Introduction... p. 159fn.

and human voices sampled in- electronically reproduced and manipulated. The first mythic men listened to nature and heard music. We listen to our machines.

* * * * *

The annihilation of self-consciousness, and all that follows from it, fulfils the tragedy/comedy which is Kojève's teaching. His teachings are often portrayed as a comedy, especially after the influence of Fukuyama, who misinterprets Kojève and paints a picture of the UHS as the perfect world order with America at its center.⁹⁴ Fukuyama likes America and what it has to offer; for him, the connotations of tragedy are replaced by the technical questions concerning the maintenance and extension of American hegemony under difficult circumstances. For him, the possibility of the annihilation of man properly so called is a problem that can be solved with video games- modes of release for last men with nothing left to do. This is pure comedy, but it is black.

vi) *laughter among friends and silence among others*

This dual character of Kojève's teaching, moved as it is towards human freedom, but ending in the annihilation of human beings, has been taken by some to indicate a turn in his thought. Beginning in 1948 with his "voyages of comparison" between the United States and the U.S.S.R.,⁹⁵ Kojève began to see the end of man not as a future possibility but as a present reality. Along with this realization develops a sense of irony in his dwindling writings. Michael Roth is the strongest proponent of this view, as laid out in his book The Ironist's

⁹⁴ Fukuyama, Francis. The end of history and the last man. (New York : Free Press, 1992)

⁹⁵ Introduction... p. 161fn..

Cage,⁹⁶ but Stanley Rosen covers similar territory when he suggests that the integrity of the Introduction is compromised by the later addition.⁹⁷ I do not think this is so. Kojève may be even more ironic in his later writings than his earlier ones, but this is because he doesn't see anything worth saying beyond his repetition of the (corrected) wisdom of Hegel. So, instead of lapsing into silence (which Kojève says he finds disagreeable),⁹⁸ he begins to play. And he plays like a god; in an interview, he comments,

Who plays? The gods: they have no need to react, and so they play. They are the do-nothing gods. ... I am a do-nothing. ... Yes, I am a do-nothing and I like to play... at this moment, for example.⁹⁹

That is, what he is saying just then is purposeless: it is not intended to react against the given or put forward a plan of action. Kojève could as well then be silent, but since he doesn't like silence he plays instead. He gives the interview, and answers the questions.

Why his dislike of silence? The history he describes arises out of self-consciousness. Self-consciousness, unlike what Kojève calls contemplation, must be able to give an account of itself through discourse. Kojève's commitment to an account of self-consciousness keeps him from slipping into silent mystic reverie, even as the history of self-consciousness comes to its end. With self-consciousness goes philosophic discourse. All that is left is the ongoing labour of the alignment of the provinces- bureaucratic dealings.

This is labour and not work because it is cyclical and hence never-ending. The labour of bureaucrats like Kojève¹⁰⁰ in organizing associations such as the

⁹⁶ (New York: Colombia University Press, 1995)

⁹⁷ Rosen, Stanley. Hermeneutics as Politics. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) p. 102.

⁹⁸ Although Kojève's disinterestedness in publication does express his tendency towards silence.

⁹⁹ *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, no. 53 (1-15 July, 1968), p. 19. p. 106 in Hermeneutics as Politics. Tom Darby also paraphrases this exchange in The Feast, p. 187.

¹⁰⁰ Kojève became a bureaucrat after the war, with no employment, and his small fortune gone in the 1929 stock market crash. He did so on the invitation of two of his students, Robert Marjolin and Olivier Wormser. [Lilla, Mark. "The End of Philosophy" *Times Literary*

WTO and the EU can go on indefinitely, with no conclusion. It is housekeeping on a planetary scale.¹⁰¹

Aside from this labour of housekeeping, all that is left to do is laugh with like-minded friends- members of a new pantheon of deities. This is how Kojève conceived of intellectual life: as purposeless, serious joke-telling. In his last published letter to Strauss, Kojève complains about a lecture he gave during which he, "tried to be as paradoxical and shocking as possible. But no one became indignant, no one thought of protesting. Everything was quietly written down."¹⁰² Everyone accepts the shocking with studious disinterestedness. No one laughs. All opposites are brought together, all are content, and the many, the beasts of the post-historic era, are ready to take down anything as the words of a god. The ludicrousness of what they hear is taken by them to be proof that the speaker is a god, because no one else could say such things. But all the while,

Supplement, April 5, 1991, p. 3] To give an idea of the company Kojève would keep, Marjolin was involved in the Marshall Plan, the European Customs Union, GATT and was the Secretary General of the OEEC from 1948-1955 (a position which he opined ought to be his permanently) [from interviews in 1964 and 1971: <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/orallhist/marjolin3.html>], while Olivier Wormser was a governor of the Banque de France [http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/en/books_art/fiches_t/politique_eco58-68.htm]. This is different company from French intellectuals like Bataille and Bréton. With his philosophy career ended by his own conclusions, becoming a bureaucrat must have seemed like a fine thing to Kojève. He wouldn't have to listen to the ensuing intellectual fall-out from his teachings, he could negotiate trade deals while dining at the finest restaurants, and all the time he could say he is only playing.

¹⁰¹ For a slightly different view, see Tom Darby "On Spiritual Crisis, Globalization, and Planetary Rule" pp. 57-8. Darby also use the term 'housekeeping' to describe the administration of planetary affairs, [*The Feast*, pp. 165-84] adapting the term from Arendt's 'collective housekeeping' [*The Human Condition*, p. 29], who in turn borrows it from Gunnar Myrdal. However, Darby suggests that the Universal and Homogenous State will come fully into being sometime in the future, once all contradictory resistances- difficult children- have been taken up into this household. He points to the "WTO mess in Seattle" ["On Spiritual Crisis,..." p. 58] as a sign of this forestalled end. Terrorism is another good example. However, the anti-globalization movement is growing, not shrinking; and terrorism is not turning out to be an easy enemy to wage war on, since it does not have definite boundaries. Rather than some indefinite future reconciliation, what we can more reasonably expect is an ongoing, cyclical exchange between the powers that would destroy the UHS and those that would keep it together. Within this exchange there is neither revolution nor war, but rather policing, domestic and foreign alike. This policing is the disciplining arm of global housekeeping.

¹⁰² Letter of 3. 29.1962, in Strauss, Leo. *On tyranny: including the Strauss-Kojève correspondence*. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (ed.) (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2000) p. 308.

the god is touched by disbelief, and laughs at himself. That he can get away with what he says confirms his own ridiculous conclusions. Best to keep talking then, since silence can be interpreted as a sign that one takes oneself seriously, which should be avoided.¹⁰³

However, a kind of serious silence can be found in Kojève's thought. Soon after the passage in the letter of March 29, 1962, quoted above, Kojève writes that he, like Strauss, is becoming more inclined to silence, to speaking to the few rather than the many, to writing, "as little as possible", though he then ironically announces the (unfortunate) publication of his long book on pagan philosophy.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, it is remarkable how little Kojève published in his lifetime, though he was a prolific hobby-writer. Kojève's Esquisse d'une phénoménologie du Droit,¹⁰⁵ was published post-humously, though it appears to have been regarded by its author as complete manuscript.¹⁰⁶ Similarly Le Concept, le Temps et le Discours was not published until 1990.¹⁰⁷ His most famous work, the Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, was collected as notes and transcripts of lectures by his student, Raymond Queneau. Though the lectures were influential, Kojève participated very little in post-modern intellectual scene that he helped to generate.¹⁰⁸ It seems as if Kojève's

¹⁰³ Letter to Strauss, 4.6.1961, in On tyranny, p. 305.

¹⁰⁴ Kojève, Alexandre. Essai d'une histoire raisonnée de la philosophie païenne. (Paris: Gallimard, 1968)

¹⁰⁵ (Paris: Gallimard, 1982) The *Esquisse* has recently been translated into English: Outline of a Phenomenology of Right. Robert Howse and Bryan-Paul Frost (trans.) (Lanham: Roman & Littlefield, 2000)

¹⁰⁶ Roth, Michael S.. "A Note on Kojève's Phenomenology of Right" p. 447.

¹⁰⁷ (Paris: Gallimard, 1990) This book was originally conceived as an introduction to an 'update' of Hegels' *Encyclopedia*, of which the book on pagan philosophy was also a part.

¹⁰⁸ The extent of Kojève's influence is described in Vincent Descombes' Modern French Philosophy. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). An exception to Kojève's aloofness from the post-modern scene is a lecture Kojève gave to Bataille's group, the College of Sociology, in which Kojève dismisses Bataille as a "sorcerer's apprentice". Kojève seems to have thought that Bataille's impulse towards transcendence experienced in mythic ritual was vain and silly- he is a sorcerer's apprentice without a sorcerer to apprentice under, a man with an appetite for magic in a rationalized world. The lecture has been lost, though we have Bataille's response to Kojève, "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" pp. 233-234 in Georges Bataille:

participation in that scene was more for his own amusement than for any real purpose, philosophic or practical.¹⁰⁹ But if it was play, then it was serious play; as Aron reports Kojève saying: "Human life is a comedy; one must play it seriously."¹¹⁰ Kojève seems to be all things at once: playful as well as serious; talkative as well as silent.

Kojève tended towards silence in speech as in writing. On the topic of public lectures, he tells Strauss that, "It is a matter of utter indifference to me what the philosophical gentlemen think or say"¹¹¹, indicating that he wishes not to speak to such a gathering; and likewise to Schmitt he writes that, "Personally, I put no value on a large public."¹¹² Not wishing to speak to either a small group of gentlemen nor a large audience of the general public, the sage retreats from public. This is certainly a change of mood for the normally talkative Kojève, the inheritor of a system of a wise man, who, if provoked by a single question, will inevitably go on to give a discourse which covers all possible knowledge.¹¹³ It is not surprising that, at the end of such a speech, one should be tired, and prefer an elliptical joke to being started up again. Like Socrates, the Wise Man seems sometimes reluctant to begin speaking. But this is also due to the fact that, unlike Socrates, Kojève sees no pedagogical project, but only the real work of making wisdom real. And as workers know, talking only interferes with getting things done.

Visions of Excess Selected Writings, 1927-1939. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) wherein Bataille willingly takes up that title.

¹⁰⁹ In his review of Dominique Auffret's biography [*Alexandre Kojève: La Philosophie, l'état, la fin d l'histoire*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1991)], Mark Lilla observes that "Kojève adored Paris and the *vie mondaine*, and while ironical about French intellectuals he clearly enjoyed the buzz of their conversations." ["The End of Philosophy" p. 4]

¹¹⁰ Aron, Raymond. *Memoires: 50 ans de réflexion politique*. (Paris: Julliard, 1983) p. 99, quoted by Robert Howse and Bryan-Paul Frost in their Introductory Essay to the *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right*, (Lanham: Roman & Littlefield, 2000), p. 23.

¹¹¹ Letter of 3.29.1962, in *On Tyranny*, p. 307.

¹¹² Letter of 12.24.1956. "Kojève-Schmitt correspondence "

¹¹³ *Introduction...* p. 75.

Perhaps another reason for his silence was that Kojève could only speak to other mortal gods. These mortal gods consisted of other thinkers such as Strauss and Schmitt, and, one might guess, Kojève's students, who through their learning had made the realization of the reality of the end of history, and would, of course, come to respond to this realization in various ways.

Strauss' reason for the philosopher's refusal to enter into public life- that he would not then have enough time for philosophizing- does not apply to Kojève. He seems happy to do philosophy on weekends¹¹⁴, and as a satisfying sort of hobby¹¹⁵. Similarly, he writes in a letter to Schmitt that his philosophical writings are a "project" for which he has little time.¹¹⁶

This inclination towards silence, the unspoken sign of perfect satisfaction, is evident throughout the Introduction. Just as there was Nature before and after Man¹¹⁷, so too is there silence before and after discourse. Any outburst from within this silence is the speech of a madman, and must be considered criminal.¹¹⁸

vii) *the 'lazy' Latin empire*

As silence is to speech, so too is inactivity to action. In a rare instance in which Kojève writes of contemporary politics he takes a surprisingly classical position on the relation between thought and action. In his "Empire Sketch", the *Esquisse*, which was unpublished in his lifetime,¹¹⁹ Kojève writes that the creation

¹¹⁴Letter to Strauss of 10.29.1953, in On Tyranny, p. 261.

¹¹⁵Letter to Strauss of 7.8.1956, in On Tyranny, p. 264.

¹¹⁶Letter of 1.4.1956, "Kojève-Schmitt correspondence" p. 17 in mss.

¹¹⁷Introduction... p. 159.

¹¹⁸Introduction... p. 136fn.

¹¹⁹"*Esquisse d'une doctrine de la politique française*" Sections of the original appeared in *La Règle du Jeu* (May 1, 1990). The version to which I am referring is a translation of the original by Eric De Vries, to whom I am thankful. The page numbering is that of the original.

of a Latin empire would require the "conversion of De Gaulle", and this "would result only from a series of prolonged dialogues, conducted in isolation from public rumor."¹²⁰ While we have no indication that Kojève ever made such a trip to Syracuse, yet he writes, echoing Plato's words in his 7th Letter,¹²¹ that "there is nothing to suggest that such dialogues are currently possible, and nothing to prove that they would effectively lead to the desired result."¹²²

The political and philosophical aims to which he refers are the pacification of Western Europe by a middle power between the two great empires, and perhaps even more importantly, the introduction of the Latin (=Mediterranean=Catholic=French) sense of leisure to the UHS. Taken together, the purpose of the creation of the Latin Empire between the USA¹²³ and USSR is "to complete these two powers- and civilizations- with a subdued, peaceful, synthetic third one,"¹²⁴. If however, a functional union between the USA and the USSR is already achieved in and through technology, of which the two rivals are but two styles (one rich and the other poor¹²⁵), then what is the point of this third term? We should learn how to be inactive well, that is, how to live without politics. The Latin countries can instruct all the rest of us in this, because they know what to do when there is nothing to be done. They know how to be lazy. By contrast, the USSR and the USA are for Kojève both dangerous latter-day political units because both are driven by action, by their common impulse to change the world, making it either socialist or capitalist. Man needs to know when and how to stop acting, or he risks destroying himself and his planet.¹²⁶

¹²⁰*Esquisse...* p. 42.

¹²¹ 325c-326b.

¹²²*Esquisse...* p. 42.

¹²³In the essay Kojève calls this the Anglo-Saxon Empire, and the other the Russian, thus framing the issue in more cultural terms. However, if this is remembered, the USA and USSR are functionally equivalent.

¹²⁴*Esquisse...* p. 12.

¹²⁵*Introduction...* p. 161fn.

¹²⁶*Esquisse...* pp. 12-13.

Hence the need for a synthetic third term- the Latin Empire- and a renewed appreciation for inactivity. Perhaps then we can finally become like gods, doing nothing, drinking fine wine, copulating, and laughing with friends.

viii) *a flip note*

So, back to Kojève's strange footnote in the Introduction.... Though the note may be consistent with the rest of the text, in the sense that it radicalizes his earlier argument, it still seems strange. Why does Kojève describe the most radical consequences of his teachings in a footnote, as marginalia? The note has the character of a 'by the way...'; it is said in passing. Kojève is being flippant; yet he goes even further by writing an additional, and even more 'flip-note' to the note. The main note refers to a passage from the main text on Nature. Now Kojève's boldest violation, or, if you will, improvement upon Hegel is his removal of the discussion of Nature. Nature, Kojève argues, cannot be understood conceptually- that is dialectically,¹²⁷ because it does not change. Nature is space, and space just is- we cannot say anything about it. Meaningful discourse can refer only to the unfolding of partial 'truths' used to account for particular historical contradictions, and to the totality of such 'truths' taken together. Discourse needs change, and it is itself an unfolding of the whole truth over time. Nature, taken as space, however, does not change, because it has no built-in power through which it can overcome itself, and for this reason it must remain itself unless transformed from without. Hence too, any representation of Nature must somehow participate in its stasis. This would not then be a conceptual, i.e., discursive or dialectical understanding, but an empty, purely formal one. Kojève writes in another note that, "This reality [Nature]... would be

¹²⁷Introduction... p. 146 and 212fn.

revealed to man only by the articulated silence of algorithm."¹²⁸ One cannot speak of Nature: either one speaks, and thrusts oneself out of Nature and down the long road to freedom, or one remains in silent wonder before, or better, within Nature. Mathematical silence is like the mythic wonder found in contemplation, in that both annihilate the self to achieve union with the object contemplated.

Indeed, we all know that the man who attentively *contemplates* a thing, who wants to see it as it is without changing anything, is '*absorbed*,' so to speak, by this contemplation- that is, by this thing. He *forgets himself*, he thinks only about the *thing* being contemplated; he thinks neither about his *contemplation*, nor- and even less- about himself, his 'I,' his *Selbst*. The more he is conscious of the *thing*, the less he is conscious of *himself*. He may perhaps talk about the thing, but he will never talk about himself; in his discourse, the word 'I' will not occur.¹²⁹

If Nature is before and after Man, as Kojève says it is,¹³⁰ then the silence of mythic man staring slack-jawed at the stars is essentially identical to the silence of a physicist's numbers: both non-discourses confirm an identity between man and Nature, within which man must be mute. The instruments of the dominion of Nature become the snares that bind us to it. Self-conscious discourse is replaced by silent wonder.

Kojève observes that Hegel attempts a dialectical understanding of Nature, but fails to produce anything but a "'magical' physics"¹³¹ which cannot be reconciled with modern science. It is better then to keep silent on such matters, and devote oneself to what can be spoken of, at least for awhile- the struggle of man against man and against nature.

Only an eternal god could know Nature. For Kojève man can be a god, but only a mortal god. He writes, "Now, if a being that *becomes* God in time can

¹²⁸Introduction... p. 147fn.

¹²⁹Introduction... p. 37.

¹³⁰Introduction... p. 159.

¹³¹Introduction... p. 146.

be called 'God' only provided that it uses this term as a metaphor (as a correct metaphor, by the way), the being that has always *been* God is God in the proper and strict sense of the word."¹³² Man cannot be God in the strict sense because he has not always been God, and God, by definition, is eternal, that is, outside of time. Kojève's reasons for denying the existence, or more precisely, the impossibility of the knowledge of the existence of such a being, are laid out in the "Note on Eternity, Time and the Concept" chapter of the Introduction.... He criticizes Spinoza for his system of absolute knowledge, which, unlike Hegel's, does not include an account of how Spinoza can give the account he does, which is the same thing as not giving an account of the relation of time to eternity. Put simply, Spinoza must be outside of time in order to have the absolute knowledge he claims to have. In other words, he must be an *eternal* god, not a *mortal* god, like Hegel. "In short, the *Ethics* could have been written, *if it is true*, only by God himself; and let us take care to note- by a nonincarnated God."¹³³ When Kojève calls man a god, he means a mortal god, a metaphorical god, not God in the true, i.e. eternal sense.

Kojève uses this distinction between a true and a metaphorical god in his critique of Hegel's philosophy of Nature. He argues that Hegel could have a dialectical understanding of Nature only if he had a part in its beginning.¹³⁴ If this were so, then Hegel would have to be the creator God, and live eternally. Obviously, Hegel is not an eternal being. Although Kojève has no trouble calling Hegel god (or Marx god, or himself god, or his students gods), this is not what he means. A man could believe such a thing only if he were mad.

There are things that demand that we keep silent. For Kojève, this is not so much a matter of prudent judgment as it is of necessity. Kojève doesn't

¹³²Introduction... p. 120.

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴Introduction... pp. 146-7.

moderate Hegel by striking out his discussion of Nature, rather Kojève radicalizes Hegel. Man is time, and Nature is space. Man can change Nature, but he cannot comprehend it as it is given, at least while remaining human he cannot. Man would have to abandon a discursive account of Nature and enter into a silent contemplation of Nature. All discursive accounts are really accounts of time, since they must unfold in time. Man can account for this unfolding, and for himself, but he cannot account for changeless Nature. Throughout history, according to Kojève, it has been possible to have all types of philosophies of Nature, but these were really only moments of Man's extension of his self-consciousness into the world. Now, however, all that is over, completed in Hegel's (corrected) system. Yet even with that account complete we still cannot speak of Nature, because Nature is wordless and changeless, unless we speak of it or change it ourselves. Only historical beings account for themselves and their world. If, however, our accounting for time and for ourselves is done, we enter into the silent stillness of Nature that is before and after History, essentially unchanged. Here we enter into the silence of myth.

Kojève's teacher indicates that he will be properly silent about myth at the very beginning of the Introduction to his Philosophy of History. His last words on the subject are that:

Myths, folk songs, traditions are not part of original history [the first of the two types that Hegel deals with in this work]; they are still obscure modes and peculiar to obscure peoples. Here [by contrast] we deal with peoples who really knew who they were and what they wanted. Observed and observable reality is a more solid foundation for history than the transience of myths and epics. Once a people has reached firm individuality, such forms cease to be its historical essence.¹³⁵

Myth is not part of history; it is pre- or post-historical, and so of little interest to Hegel and Kojève. It has had little or no effect upon history because it

¹³⁵Reason in History. pp. 3-4.

has hidden its people from the world. I say 'its people' because they do not clearly distinguish themselves from their story. Rather, they see themselves as identical to it. Similarly, their story is identical with the cosmos in that the story or epic is a complete account of the cosmos. Moreover, the telling of the story is required to sustain the cosmos in its being. Because mythic men do not see themselves as distinct from the world, they cannot properly desire. In myth desire is replaced by un-self-conscious satisfaction.¹³⁶

Man who desires wants *this* particular thing. One must desire some-thing and for some particular thing to be one must be conscious of it. Desire localizes and thereby separates its object from what surrounds it, and holds onto it through time. The change that issues forth from human desire is thus directional change, in that it moves towards an end. Myth, however, has no end, but moves constantly and purposelessly. This transience is shared by mythic men, who do not see a clear boundary between themselves and their changing environment, but move with it, following the animals and turning like sunflowers to catch the sun. They are not individuated as a group or singly, but rather blend in. What can one say about such peoples, except to repeat their myths?

Hegel's answer is that nothing rational can be said, but as we have seen, Kojève goes somewhat further, saying little no-things: no-speech; no-action; no-consciousness; no-self. Quiet nothings. If Hegel writes at the end of history, then Kojève writes sometime after that, with man in decline all around him. Maybe Kojève himself is a sign of this decline. This is supported by Descombes' general argument, showing how Kojève's Hegel is an irrational Hegel, and how this influenced French post-modernism.¹³⁷

¹³⁶Introduction... p. 78 fn.

¹³⁷Descombes, Vincent. Modern French Philosophy. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980)

If the present can be used to justify the past, as Hegel argues, then what justifies what comes after? Kojève would respond that we enter into the eternal present, in which nothing essential changes, and so no justifications are necessary. However, in the absence of such necessity for giving an account of ourselves and of the possibility of change, we slip into the dumbness of self-satisfaction. Then, lacking any individuated self-consciousness, there is nothing to re-start the history of self-consciousness, and reclaim man as man from the brutishness of silence. So, man dissolves into myth- some as gods and some as beasts- even as the self-consciousness that could judge this transformation as a gain or a loss is itself lost. To quote Kojève quoting Hegel: "the very consciousness of this giving-of-oneself and of this annihilation is annihilated."¹³⁸

¹³⁸Introduction... p. 168.

Section 4: McLuhan's Re-tribalization-- *electronic narcissism*

i) *preface*

The loss of self-consciousness brought on by technology is first among Marshall McLuhan's concerns, and animates his media theory. His use of the term 'media' is equivalent to what others such as Heidegger, Grant, and Ellul call 'technology': both words describe an all embracing phenomenon which conditions human thought and action. Much as Heidegger, Grant and Ellul argue that technology is not a neutral tool to be used as desired, so does McLuhan famously argue that 'the medium is the message', that we are distracted by the content of media and do not notice their effects upon our psyches and societies. And as technology is not limited to tools and machines, but can include everything from educational systems, bureaucracies, and economies, likewise, according to McLuhan's account, media are not limited to books, radio and television programs, but include all human artifacts. These artifacts mediate and affect our experience. When one drives through a city, for example, it is hard to imagine the experience without the car one drives in and the roads one drives on. The being of the city is essentially altered by the fact that a car mediates one's experience of it. Media- as a form of technology- are all-enveloping, and what they envelop is us. So, if we are blind to media then we are blind to ourselves.

McLuhan argues that technology results in what he calls a 're-tribalization': the creation of an interconnected system he calls the 'global

village', which marks the return to a mythic sensibility with emphases on empathetic attachments, depth awareness, and process-oriented thinking. Correspondingly, these new affinities replace the old capacities for objectivity, for distinguishing appearance from essence, and for distinguishing means from ends. We are in danger of losing our capacity for understanding the world with perspective as all things within our world- including ourselves- come into an immediate and instantaneous interconnection with one another. Paradoxically, the extension of self-consciousness into the world via technology ends with a reversal whereby we find ourselves incapable of setting ourselves apart from the world, and so are locked into a closed loop of alternating self-satisfaction and violent rejection. Unless we understand media as extensions of man, as McLuhan suggests, we will not recognize this danger of losing ourselves.

ii) *the global village*

Though the technological order we inhabit may have its roots in earlier forms of rationality- for example the instrumental rationality of Hobbes- it now requires a different kind of thinking to be understood; and to an extent it also produces this new kind of thinking. As McLuhan writes, "The current congeniality between the primeval and sophisticated attitudes was not a foreseen consequence of an ever improved mastery over the material world."¹³⁹ A reversal has occurred, such that the hyper-rational returns us to the pre-rational or the mythic. Thus, while our political institutions may be partly the legacy of Hobbes' endorsement of the nation-state as the sole justifiable sovereign, today

the nation-state exists within a global context that cannot be understood by using Hobbes' reductive method. His old universe was composed of atoms joined by forces; our new cosmos consists of a single field of interrelated forces, more like waves than atoms. As we know from contemporary physics, sometimes waves do evidence themselves in such a way as to appear like particles, but this is a moment of resolution within an atmosphere of change. Marshall McLuhan contends that electric technology is reshaping our world and us with it, speeding up what were previously mechanical and sequential relations among isolated parts to the point where they cease to be distinct parts, and become one organic whole. "Myth is contraction or implosion of any process, and the instant speed of electricity confers the mythic dimension on ordinary industrial and social action today."¹⁴⁰ Whereas both print and its predecessor, writing, separated thought from action, the instantaneity of electricity collapses this division. Everything and everyone becomes joined within a seamless process.

Hobbes' plan for the mastery of nature, as it comes to completion, loses its provisional character and absorbs the individuals for whose benefit it was made. I mention Hobbes because he best represents the kind of analytic, mechanical rationality which McLuhan sees electric technologies undermining. In The Gutenberg galaxy McLuhan traces analytic thinking (Hobbes' s resolute-compositive method), the concept of the individual (as an atomistic, self-interested being), and the success of the nation-state (as an amalgam of self-interested individuals) to the printing press.¹⁴¹ Hobbes' success in creating a

¹³⁹ McLuhan, Marshall. Counter-Blast. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969) p. 78.

¹⁴⁰ Understanding Media. p. 25.

¹⁴¹ McLuhan, Marshall. The Gutenberg galaxy: the making of typographic man. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962)

uniform consensus on the necessity of state sovereignty is dependant upon the printed word.¹⁴² However, as this process is accelerated, and as the electric word replaces the printed one, this composite uniformity is replaced by a singular uniformity. The sense of self-interestedness that Hobbes argues is the foundation of political association is replaced by fluid and alternating senses of empathy and violent hatred. Caught in a web of instantaneous interconnections, we feel empathetic attachment when we are, to use an acoustic metaphor, 'in tune' with our environment, and violent repulsion when we are 'out of tune'. These alternating passions are the basis for community in the global village. McLuhan's global village is our technological cosmos, complete and interconnected, though potentially violent. Our involvement in our technological cosmos threatens to be total, to the detriment of our capacity for objective, critical analysis. As he writes, whether this is 'a good thing' is a "question that admits a wide solution."¹⁴³

McLuhan is broadly sympathetic to the values he connects with the printed and written words- individual autonomy and reflexive awareness respectively. However, the historicism that is embedded in his media theory does not allow him to prefer one medium over another, beyond his own historically contingent reasons. Rather, he seems inclined to encourage an easy transition from old media to new (whose development he sees as inevitable), neither abandoning ourselves to new social and psychological structures wholeheartedly, nor retreating into old media. Understanding media can ease

¹⁴² I am indebted to my friend and colleague David Tabachnick for this connection between McLuhan's media theory and Hobbes' *Leviathan*.

¹⁴³ Understanding Media. p. 4.

the violence of their change and "moderate the fierceness of this conflict" between media old and new,¹⁴⁴ if only by allowing us to temporarily rise above the currents which move us, keeping our heads above water. Like Poe's mariner in "The Descent into the Maelstrom", to whom McLuhan frequently refers, one survives the whirlpool by understanding it and riding it out. The "wild bewildering sense of the *novel* which confounds the beholder"¹⁴⁵ is overcome when it is accepted as fate; then awe replaces terror, and resolve replaces indecision. Understanding technology requires the acceptance of technology as our fate.

In McLuhan's media theory change in media- progress in technology- is privileged not for any end produced, but in the sense of a critical juncture, a unique perspective for thinking. The shift from one media to the next is privileged because it releases a 'hybrid energy' between the two, unavailable in each alone. 'Hybrid energy' is McLuhan's term, and refers to the *metaxy* between old new media. Hybrid energy is released when new media replace and mix with the old. This exchange gives us perspective on each, allowing us to compare past and future. One can understand media only in the transition from one medium to the next. At other times, media are unnoticed, as water is to fish. The potentially wild and disorientating moment before one enters into the maelstrom is also a time for understanding, if one can steel oneself to look about. Our understanding is like the rainbow which Poe describes hanging over the maelstrom, "that narrow and tottering bridge" that "is the only pathway between

¹⁴⁴ Understanding Media. p. 16.

¹⁴⁵ Poe, Edgar Allen. "A Descent into the Maelstrom" in The Illustrated Edgar Allen Poe. Willfried Satty (illustrator). (New York: Warner Books, 1976) p. 116.

Time and Eternity."¹⁴⁶ McLuhan's historicism express the dual sense of loss and gain, bound together for a moment in understanding: "[W]ide awake this time... we re-enter the tribal night. It is our contemporary consciousness of the Unconscious."¹⁴⁷ These two opposites come together, though only for a moment in time.

There is a simultaneous sense of comedy and tragedy to McLuhan's writings, especially those written in the 60's. After this the comic feel is muted, and replaced by ironic detachment. McLuhan is always a bit of a jester, though as with Kojève his jokes are serious. They are meant, McLuhan says in a book that is both very funny and sad, to create an unfamiliar environment in order to develop perspective on our present one.¹⁴⁸ Matter-of-fact seriousness keeps us from recognizing the novelty and the urgency of our situation, and this means a lost opportunity for understanding our world while we still can, and perhaps also for making our world a better place in which to live. In a passage which sums up McLuhan's media theory generally, and his idea of re-tribalization specifically, he writes:

Modern technology which began with a visual recovery of the past in print has now come to the point of acoustic and visual recovery which installs us once more in the heart of primeval consciousness and experience. ...we have all of us pounded on the doors of perception until they admitted us to a world which is both an end and a beginning. In our time we are reliving at high speed the whole of the human past. As in a speeded-up film, we are traversing all ages, all experience, including the experience of pre-historic man... This gigantic flashback may sound like a collective version of that movie of a man's past life that is said to flash on when he is drowning. We may be drowning. But if so, the flood of experience in which we are drowning is very much a part of the culture we have created. It is a self-invasion of privacy. And so it's

¹⁴⁶ "A Descent into the Maelstrom" p. 124.

¹⁴⁷ Understanding Media. p. 35.

¹⁴⁸ Counter-Blast. p. 5.

not catastrophic. We can turn it off if we choose, if we wake up to the fact that the faucets of change are inside the ark of society, not outside.¹⁴⁹

There is an ambiguity in McLuhan's thought which can make his work appear both tragic and comic. At times he seems very conservative, seeking to preserve the good values he associates with print media: he compares technology to "the greatest enemy"¹⁵⁰ and he decries the deprivations to community and self which go along with total involvement. Along the same lines, though he is generally not upset by the diminishing autonomy of nation-states, he does reserve special affection for Canada as a place somewhat sheltered from progress. As he writes to Pierre Elliott Trudeau as part of an ongoing correspondence:¹⁵¹ "I have always felt that one of Canada's greatest assets was its being a kind of 'backwater'. Never having been totally involved in current trends it has been able to enjoy a flexibility that is now rare."¹⁵²

However, at other times McLuhan's vision of the world seems informed by a Catholic hope, ensured by providence, for a complete reconciliation between the peoples of the world. More moving than stated equivocations, this vision has been the most influential aspect of his teachings, inspiring his cult-like following. I argue that this perverse success speaks to the truthfulness of his description of our world and us, and to the momentary opportunity for

¹⁴⁹ Counter-Blast. p. 115.

¹⁵⁰ Understanding Media. p. 18.

¹⁵¹ Though the two were friends, McLuhan assumed the role of an advisor to Trudeau, both before his election and during his time in power, a role for which he was paid. [Letter to Trudeau, April 14, 1969, p. 365 in Letters of Marshall McLuhan. Matie Molinaro, Corrine McLuhan & William Toye (ed.). (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)] However, his role was not so much that of a philosopher advising a tyrant, as that of a seer, like Agamemnon's Calchas- his advice to Trudeau is even more aphoristic than his popular writings. He signs off one of his letters: "Medium-mystically yours," [Letter to Trudeau, October 17, 1968, p. 357 in Letters.]

understanding which we are given. As reflective, analytic thinking is replaced by the 'depth awareness' and sensory involvement characteristic of technological/ mythic man, this chance will pass.

Part of this has to do with the power of technology and myth to bring together what to the rational mind are irreconcilable opposites, in this case conservatism and progress. McLuhan observes that among the most radical 'progressivists' the attitude towards myth has shifted from a critical to a reverential one.¹⁵³ We can think of the 'New Primitive Movement'¹⁵⁴ and the widespread respect (however shallow) for 'traditional knowledge and ways' as examples- dream-catchers on rear-view mirrors, or throat singing sampled into electronic dance music. It does not matter that technology seems to be at odds with the 'primitive' societies it turns us towards, as libertarianism is contrasted with traditionalism; rather, perfect freedom is close to strict necessity.¹⁵⁵ Technology returns us to myth. This reversal and return through accelerated rationality back to myth overturns many of the categories that we use to understand our world. "Involvement that goes with our instant technologies transforms the most 'socially conscious' people into conservatives."¹⁵⁶ Like the

¹⁵² Letter to Trudeau, April 16, 1968, p. 351 in Letters.

¹⁵³ Deleuze and Guattari agree with McLuhan in this: "The modern world can provide us today with particularly well-developed images of these two directions, in the way of ecumenical machines, but also a neo-primitivism, a new tribal society as Marshall McLuhan describes it." [Nomadology, p. 16]

¹⁵⁴ A center of this phenomenon is the Burning Man festival, a yearly event begun in 1986 that mixes libertarianism with tribalism. In 2002 Burning Man attracted more than 25 000 participants. The Burning Man itself is a giant effigy in human shape which is burnt at the climax of the festival. The Burning Man festival that surrounds this ritual is a celebration of post-humanism, and of spontaneous and limitless self-creation.
<http://www.burningman.com/whatisburningman/>

¹⁵⁵ This is not a new realization, but has been known for a long time, since Plato observed that tyranny comes out of anarchy, "the greatest and most savage slavery out of the extreme of freedom." [*Rep.* 564 a]

¹⁵⁶ Understanding Media, p. 34.

categories of left and right, the divisions that we have used to understand our world no longer work in a world united by electric speed.

The acceleration of technology ends in a reversal, such that hyper-rationalism produces what is ultimately an irrational state, and progress thrusts us back to our origins in myth. Whatever the cautionary, conservative, or ameliorative programs McLuhan enacts, it is this violent reversal that he describes as the trajectory of technology. Speed up the assembly line and it becomes one continuous process, the units of production disappear, and its separate stages flow seamlessly into one another. Then the anxiety which we see portrayed in Chaplin's *Modern Times*, of a worker caught in the gears of industry, unable to keep up with his tasks, is resolved; now we can just watch enchanted as the electronic figures flow by.

ii) *the myth of Narcissus*

As an illustration, let us look at a myth told wrongly by McLuhan- Ovid's myth of Narcissus. It is no surprise to find the characteristically glib McLuhan willfully misrepresenting his sources. Like Kojève, he is a bit of a jester, and often cares less for the intended meaning of an author and more for making his point. In Understanding Media he even misquotes *Romeo and Juliet* to make Romeo say something about television.¹⁵⁷ One of McLuhan's consistent misrepresentation is his portrayal of the myth of Narcissus. Let's begin though

¹⁵⁷ McLuhan, Marshall. Understanding Media: the extensions of man. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964) p. 9.

with what McLuhan has right about the myth. In Ovid's telling,¹⁵⁸ which McLuhan relies upon, Narcissus falls in love with his own image reflected in water. The myth shows the kind of circularity that attends media, how we can become lost in our own image, caught in a closed circle of self-love. There is clearly a loss of consciousness at stake in the extensions of ourselves in media, and this is what McLuhan worries about. As he writes in Understanding Media, Narcissus has roots in the Greek *narcosis*, or numbness;¹⁵⁹ this is the danger we face when viewing our extended images of ourselves. This sense of numbness associated with death is prominent in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, where Narcissus is named as the flower picked by Persephone¹⁶⁰ which transports her to the underworld of Hades. In Ovid's telling of the story, Narcissus ends up as a flower. Self-adoration is numbing.

This much McLuhan has right. However, his response to Ovid's story is mis-leading. In a recorded conversation, McLuhan rebukes Bruce Powers (co-author of The Global Village) when the latter says that Narcissus fell in love with his own image: "'No,' said Marshall, 'that's the popular conception.' ... 'He fell in love with something else.'"¹⁶¹ He repeats this interpretation in Understanding Media, where he writes, "The youth Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for another person."¹⁶² For emphasis he adds,

...the wisdom of the Narcissus myth does not convey any idea that Narcissus fell in love with anything he regarded as himself. Obviously he would have had very different feelings about the image had he known that it was an extension or repetition of

¹⁵⁸ Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Mary M. Innes (trans.) (London: Penguin, 1955) 3.337-511.

¹⁵⁹ Understanding Media, p. 41.

¹⁶⁰ *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Gregory Nagy (trans.) (2000) <http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/demeter.shtml> ln. 7.

¹⁶¹ McLuhan, Marshall and Powers, Bruce. The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) p. xii.

¹⁶² Understanding Media, p. 41.

himself. It is, perhaps, indicative of the bias of our intensely technological and, therefore, narcotic culture that we have long interpreted the Narcissus story to mean that he fell in love with himself, that he imagined the reflection to be Narcissus!¹⁶³

If this is our technological bias- to see everything in terms of ourselves, then it was not unknown to Ovid. His Narcissus is not unconscious that the image is of himself:

'Alas! I am myself the boy I see. I know it: my own reflection does not deceive me. I am on fire with love for my own self. It is I who kindle the flames which I must endure.'¹⁶⁴

Even more, he is aware that this means that he is caught in a closed loop of self-satisfaction, and that this can only be broken through the most drastic and counter-intuitive means:

'What should I do? Woo or be wooed? But what then shall I seek by my wooing? My very plenty makes me poor. How I wish that I could separate myself from my body! A new prayer this, for a lover, to wish the thing he loves away!¹⁶⁵

This is a wish and a prayer for our time also, for people trapped in over-determined bodies and bound by love to objects that cannot properly be loved. We feel this conflict with urgent intensity. Contrary to the sense of numbness which McLuhan emphasizes, Narcissus is sharply aware of his situation, to the extent that he wishes himself away in a gesture of automutilation. In the end he does not die by falling into the water, but just ceases to will to live, and fades away.

¹⁶³ Understanding Media. pp. 41-2.

¹⁶⁴ Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Book III Mary Innes (trans.). p. 86.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*

Now McLuhan must know all of this, as he knows the lines of Shakespeare's plays. We should be alerted when he writes that, "Obviously he would have had very different feelings about the image had he known it was an extension of himself."¹⁶⁶ *Obviously's* are always rhetorical, and often underhanded. McLuhan's purpose in Understanding Media: the extensions of man, and in his writings generally, is to show how all media are extensions of ourselves. He hopes, and perhaps believes, that if we understand this then we will be able to claim autonomy over our images and ourselves. This autonomy will be realized through self-imposed restraints upon our self-love. However, as we see in the original story, this is not necessarily so. Bereft of some object to love by the realization that the content of media are themselves old media, that all the world is an image, including our sense of ourselves, autonomy ceases to be meaningful.

A curious part of the Narcissus story is that the youth had been courted by Echo, a nymph doomed to repeat only the last words of other speakers. However, Narcissus was not attracted to the sound of his own voice as he was to his image in water. McLuhan only mentions this in passing, saying that his numbness prevented him from hearing,¹⁶⁷ though actually in the myth Narcissus turns away from Echo even before he sees his own reflection. What is the significance between this failed union between sight and sound? Spoken words are ambiguous in a way that images are not. One can imagine chasing echoes around wildly, whereas clear seeing requires us to remain still. This is part of the reason why Socrates decides that the lovers of the sound of truth cannot be

¹⁶⁶ Understanding Media. p. 41.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

philosophers, because they are caught up in the changing flow of things, whereas the lovers of the sight of Truth can remain steady and fixed.¹⁶⁸ Owing to Heidegger's connection between technology and Plato's stable *eidos*,¹⁶⁹ post-modern thinkers have emphasized and venerated the ambiguity and changeableness of the spoken word- discourse- as a response to the overdeterminations of a visually-oriented society. This has meant a veneration for the Dionysian impulses that Plato sought to control in public life (though perhaps preserving them as mysteries for a select few¹⁷⁰). This veneration of the Dionysian undercurrent can be traced back behind Heidegger to Nietzsche. In terms of the Narcissus story, this kind of response suggests that the tragic youth was too focussed, and could have been saved had he been more involved in his surroundings, listening to the sounds around him. As Plato teaches, whereas the lovers of the sound of truth have their ears under contract to listen to everything they hear, the lovers of the sight of truth can fix their attention.¹⁷¹ It is this fixation and his ignorance of the sounds that bathe his ears that kills Narcissus. As the post-modern response to the fixations of technology goes, Narcissus should have been more integrated into his environment, and less focussed upon himself.

However, it is not certain whether this is an adequate response to the Narcissus story and to our own situation, since attention to both senses could merely deepen the fixation. Indeed, towards the end of the story, Narcissus

¹⁶⁸ Plato. *Republic*. Allan Bloom (trans.) (Basic Books, 1991) 475e.

¹⁶⁹ The clearest concise presentation of this reading of Western metaphysics is found in "Plato's Doctrine of Truth", translated by Thomas Sheehan, in *Pathmarks*. WilliamMcNeil (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁷⁰ *Rep.* 378a.

¹⁷¹ *Rep.* 475d-476b.

perceives his echoed words to come from his image in water, at which point his immersion is complete, and he dies.

Just understanding that technology is made in our own image- that media are extensions of man- is not enough to disrupt its attractive power over man. What is needed is a third term outside the loop. McLuhan begins The Global Village with an invocation to the archangel Michael, thereby placing his hopes not in man's powers of understanding but, like Vico, in divine providence. For those without this faith, we will now turn to four radical responses to technology.

Part 4: RADICAL RESPONSES TO TECHNOLOGY

*All conflicts, all crises, and all dissensions
effectively push forward the process of
integration and by the same measure call for
more central authority.*

Haardt and Negri¹

Section 1: Introduction

In the sections to follow, I present some responses to the convergence of technology and myth that I have described. I draw my examples from: Roland Barthes, a Marxist literary theorist; Murray Bookchin, a social ecologist; Leni Reifenstahl, a German film director and photographer; and Georges Bataille, a French intellectual. This should not imply that this is an exhaustive list of possible responses to technology. I chose these radical responses because they, in different ways, reveal the essence of technology in that they take us to its roots. All four agree that there is a convergence of technology and myth. Roland Barthes argues that technology naturalizes or mythologizes itself and the social classes that it gives rise to. He aims to instigate class divisions and de-mythologize technology in order to restart a stalled history. Contrary to Barthes, Murray Bookchin sees technology leading to more organic social organizations, free from hierarchy and in harmony with nature. For him this occurs inevitably- either by conscious, collective decision or environmental and social crises. In Leni Riefenstahl's films, photographs, and memoirs we see an

¹ Empire. p. 14.

aestheticized politics, a moving image of beauty. Her aestheticized politics portrays forms of social organization that are both contrived- hence technological- and organic- hence mythic. This moving image of beauty is consistent for Riefenstahl, from her Nazi propaganda films to her photographs of African warrior tribes. Georges Batailles' response to life in our age is to radicalize Kojève's end of history thesis. If the UHS is whole, and any whole by definition must include everything, including its opposite, then so too must the UHS. The opposite of the rational whole is the wholly irrational, and it is the irrational that Bataille embraces. Through Bataille's failed attempts at visceral transcendence through automutilation, we see how the rationality of the UHS is undergirded by the irrational, the technological by the mythic.

What this part aims to show is how radical attempts to change technology in effect radicalize technology, and in so doing move technology (and us with it) towards its essence. To master technology, one must be mastered by it. The sheep become like the shepherd, and the shepherd like the sheep. Inspired by the promise of absolute freedom, and thrilled by the prospect of complete mastery, we take on technology as our essence.

Section 2: The Marxist- Roland Barthes

Roland Barthes is a Marxist without faith in progress. He sees technology coming to a false conclusion in myth, in endless cycles of production and consumption. Progress is derailed even as technology is celebrated as the guarantor of man's dominion over nature. Instead of praising nature, as the first mythic men did, we praise technology and immerse ourselves in its cycles. The language of our praise is a language of signs, of empty tautologies, dumb expressions of bourgeois smugness and self-satisfaction. In the terms of this essay, instead of symbols that need to be interpreted to give meaning, capitalism gives us signs that need no interpretation: buy this and you will be happy. The ruling classes use myth to naturalize social conditions and preserve the existing order through the mythologization of production and consumption in propaganda and advertising. Even more alarming, technology tends to naturalize itself. The world we have made casts itself as a mythic whole, while covering over its own internal contradictions.

Barthes' writing form is the short, literary essay. Most of his essays focus on specific cultural artifacts- the Eiffel Tower, or a new Citroën design, to take two examples. Barthes does have one extended theoretical account of myth, of technology and of the relation between the two. It appears as the concluding essay to his book Mythologies.² This will be the main text examined in this section.

² Barthes, Roland. Mythologies. (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957)

For Barthes, to mythologize is to make something appear natural,³ that is, to appear timeless, universal and inevitable. Behind this appearance he sees a true, historical reality. To truly understand something, one must look for it in its particular, historically contingent facts, the results of particular modes of production and of particular social contradictions. Barthes holds onto a linear history in which events and people can be understood in their uniqueness, against an apparent appetite for the ahistorical and the universal. Within this effort lies the hope for true freedom, something which only can be achieved through historically conscious action. Without a sense of history, the present becomes a reflex of the past, all things become the same, and the inevitable crowds out the free act.

We will approach Barthes' attempts to recover linear history from myth shortly. First, however, it must be noted that although myth is often described by Barthes as a strategy of the bourgeois class, and as a foil for glossing over the contradictions which underlie their privileges, myth is more than just a tool used by the ruling class. Rather, history seems to be drawn towards myth. Technology and myth converge upon one another. "The bourgeois class has precisely built its power on technical, scientific progress, on an unlimited transformation of nature: bourgeois ideology yields in turn an unchangeable nature."⁴ As it is increasingly successful in its transformation of nature, technology comes to take the place of nature. The technological system as a whole, including its institutions and the culture to which it gives rise, comes to seem natural in itself. There is a shift from- to use Barthes' terminology-

³ *Mythologies*, p. 11.

⁴ *Mythologies*, pp. 141-2.

technology as *anti-physis* to technology as *pseudo-physis*.⁵ The proletariat engages in the actual transformation of nature, experiences the struggle which is involved in this transformation, and therefore holds closer to technology as *anti-physis*. By contrast, for the bourgeoisie who enjoy the fruits of this transformation without effort, technology is seen as a better version of nature: the beneficent supplier of what is necessary to live well.

Technology replaces nature, producing a self-justifying 'empire of signs', to use the title of Barthes' work on Japanese civilization.⁶ Within this empire, everything is as it is, perfect and complete, yet, consequently tautological. Myth, "abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves."⁷ That is to say, everything means only itself, and everything is as it should be. Myth is a sign of perfect self-satisfaction.

Given both the smooth self-referentiality of myth's images- its signs- and the transformative power which would turn everything into such signs (the scope of Barthes' essay in both Mythologies and The Eiffel Tower⁸ is evidence of this, along with his stated reasons), how should we pull ourselves away from myth? The difficulty of this task points to an essential connection between

⁵ Mythologies, p. 142.

⁶ Barthes, Roland. Empire of Signs. Richard Howard (trans.) (New York : Hill and Wang, 1982) Barthes' perspective on Japanese civilization matches Kojève's: for both it represents a static formalism where things are just as they appear, and no crisis presents itself.

⁷ Mythologies, p. 143.

⁸ Barthes, Roland. The Eiffel Tower, and other mythologies. Richard Howard (trans.) (New York : Hill and Wang, 1979)

technology and myth. The difficulty consists in the tendency of technology to put itself forward as natural.

Barthes' aim is to keep history going, to reveal hidden contradictions and to reactivate them. This is an avowedly ideological aim, possessing an almost Christian fervor. The vigor of Barthes' attack on myth is reminiscent of Christian attacks on the same. The Marxist and the Christian critiques share similar reasons, both having to do with history. Both Marxism and Christianity correctly see myth as ahistorical. Thus the historical purposes of Marxism and Christianity, whether directed towards a worker's paradise on earth or the believer's paradise in heaven, are threatened by the power of myth to abolish history, and to absorb the historical self into the eternal present. A purpose in history is obviated by an attunement to the continuous, repeating cycles of birth and death, production and consumption that one finds in myth. The Marxist and the Christian both call us to a purpose outside these daily concerns. Myth, as Barthes argues, informs us that our daily lives are natural, that there is nothing beyond this world, and that an acceptance of the present will help us to cope with the inevitable. Within what is in reality a jumble of contradictions, "a type of unity is magically produced; man is born, works, laughs and dies everywhere in the same way".⁹ But this mythic reconfiguration of reality into a unified image is purely formal. "Birth, death? Yes, these are facts of nature, universal facts. But if one removes History from them, there is nothing more that can be said about them; any comment about them becomes purely tautological."¹⁰ Without history there is, as Kojève argues, no speech, no discursive understanding of the world, but rather a self-referential system of signs.

⁹ Mythologies. p. 100.

And where there is neither history nor discursive language events and individuals cannot stand out in their uniqueness, but are compressed together into these compact, yet meaningless tautologies to which Barthes refers: "*The Earth is a Mother who never dies, Eat bread and salt and speak the truth, etc.*" This is the reign of gnomic truths, the meeting of all the ages of humanity at the most neutral point of their nature, the point where the obviousness of the truism no longer has any value except in the realm of a purely poetic language."¹¹ A single shroud of empty verse is cast over the many historically unique events and individuals.

How does one escape this poetry of the present, and how does one keep one's own attempts from being drawn back into the eddying swirl of an arrested history? It is easier to be a Marxist when one lives amidst manifest contradictions. Barthes must go looking for a proletariat, looking for him hidden behind the signs of bourgeois self-satisfaction. Barthes takes this hunt to places beyond the realm of bourgeois smugness. He looks abroad, to the former colonies (Algeria is a favorite source). It seems, however, that history is slowing down, that the crises of immiseration are not accelerating as expected at home, and that the proletariat abroad wants very much to become like the bourgeois class at home, albeit dressed in different clothes and maintaining different customs.

Yet in rejecting the static end towards which technology seems to move, Barthes must also distance himself from any end or purpose in history. His is not a cry for a just and equitable resolution of contradictions, but as he admits, more

¹⁰ *Mythologies*, p. 101.

¹¹ *ibid.*.

of a sarcastic outburst from within an otherwise closed system.¹² The effect of this outburst seems to be opposite what was intended. By focusing attention on the process of history- the hidden contradictions and their latent power for introducing change- Barthes in effect admits that there is no universal end towards which the process of history is moving. Lacking this, his aim is simply to keep the process going. But this aim is not at all at odds with the mythic sensibility.

When a Marxist turns his back on technology, one had better take notice, because it is akin to a Christian turning his back on God's providence. Now there is no hope for a future salvation in technology, but even that hope, expressed as the effort to keep the process of history going, is drowned in a purposeless course of events. *History as progress becomes time as process*. Only thus liberated of any determinate teleology does technology become strictly self referential, hence mythic. This is not the "dead, motionless world" which Barthes describes,¹³ but a rhythmic frenzy of production and consumption that doesn't require any outside purpose.

¹² Mythologies. p. 12 & 157.

¹³ Mythologies. p. 153

Section 3: The Activist- Murray Bookchin

Barthes' Marxist response to technology seems curiously conservative compared to the now more fashionable anarchist theorists. Murray Bookchin is one of those. Bookchin's version of social ecology¹⁴ anticipates the collapse of the long-standing division between human beings and nature through the adoption of a new ecological sensibility. Bookchin expects "a reharmonization of nature and humanity through a reharmonization of human with human."¹⁵ Part of his work is a description of the possible configurations of such a society, characterized by localized sustainable agriculture, smaller cities, and solar power production. His work also consists of a critique of existing uses of technology to justify and support social hierarchies and the domination of nature by human beings. In terms of his conclusions, Bookchin looks towards a hopeful (we may say utopian) description of how a meeting between man and nature is possible within the context of technological development.¹⁶

Overall, Bookchin sees the growth of organic societies as a natural extension of the drive to freedom. Only in an organic, or in the terms of this essay, mythic society can we be truly free, since otherwise the domination of nature by man will be extended to social hierarchies which artificially limit

¹⁴ This teaching now has its own, very established school of like-minded, anarchist social theorists with some connections to the natural sciences, the Institute for Social Ecology. However, in my experience their hierarchy is as guarded as any. Professor Bookchin himself cannot be reached directly, but one must proceed through a public relations firm to contact him.

¹⁵ Bookchin, Murray. The Ecology of Freedom: The emergence and dissolution of hierarchy. (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991) p. 11.

¹⁶ This potential is taken up more fully in his book Post-Scarcity Anarchism. (Berkeley: Ramparts, 1971).

human freedom. Bookchin's motive is to overcome these artificial limits to freedom, and bring into being a natural, hierarchy-free society in the process. And if these ends are not realized, there is the suggestion that an "immanent world spirit"¹⁷ will force this natural conclusion: "In its massive tendency to colonize the entire terrain of human experience, technics now raises the apocalyptic need to arrest its advance, to redefine its goals, to reorganize its forms, to rescale its dimensions- above all to reabsorb it back into organic forms of social life and organic forms of human subjectivity."¹⁸ If this end is not sought by free human beings, it will be imposed upon humans as a necessity by technology itself.

It is not the point of this thesis to speculate on the necessity of such a transformation in the future. As Kojève offhandedly comments in the addition to his re-animalization footnote, this future is now.¹⁹ The radical proposals that Bookchin made thirty years ago are now as commonplace as our recycling bins. This suggests that Bookchin's 'organic' or mythic vision of the future is a vision of technology. What Bookchin is writing of is not anti-technological, but an extension of technology, a better, i.e. more efficient technology that results when the control of human and non human nature is complete. When this occurs man will not see himself apart from other men, nor from nature, because man will rule all.

Of course, Bookchin would have difficulty with this language of domination; after all, it is hierarchy in general which he wishes to get rid of. This aim is by no means unique within modern thought. Hobbes, for one, repeatedly

¹⁷ The Ecology of Freedom. p. 10.

¹⁸ The Ecology of Freedom. p. 240.

¹⁹ Introduction.. p. 160 fn..

and forcefully denies any natural hierarchy among men even as he defends the centralized dominion of the sovereign. "Nature hath made men so equal, in the faculties of body, and mind"²⁰ that no social hierarchy can be considered natural, but must be a mere convention and a technique for control. This statement follows from Hobbes' critique of the intellectual virtues in Chapter 8 of the Leviathan and of the Aristotelian virtue of magnanimity in Chapter 10. No one is by nature suited to rule for Hobbes, since there are no virtues, either intellectual or political, which would distinguish a potential ruler. Rather, the ruler himself is part of a larger mechanism for creating an orderly state. Hobbes' treatment of the ruler is technological. There is nothing about political rule that is good in and of itself, but it is recommended as a technique only because of its measurable consequences. One can imagine other techniques working more effectively. Hobbes' speculation on the various types of rule emphasizes this. He collapses Aristotle's six regimes into three, Monarchy, Democracy, and Aristocracy, leaving aside the distinction between natural and unnatural regimes, since all regimes are by definition artificial. In judging between these three, he employs a strictly functional standard, efficiency. "The difference between these three kinds of commonwealth, consisteth not in the difference of Power; but in the difference of convenience, or Aptitude to produce the Peace, and Security of the people; for which end they were instituted."²¹ Hierarchies embodied in political rule are not natural fixtures of human life, but are techniques for guaranteeing human happiness and freedom, something which must be measured by efficient social structures.

²⁰ Leviathan, p. 183.

²¹ Leviathan, p. 241.

Now Bookchin has words for Hobbes, especially for his view that human nature must be dominated.²² This kind of critique is easy, however, within the stable, liberal political environment we have inherited from Hobbes. Bookchin lives within the success of the Hobbesian project, and this success makes a full acceptance of the initial conditions for the removal of hierarchy unpalatable. Bookchin wishes to replace a Hobbesian 'social science' with an Aristotelean 'social ethics',²³ in which the stark purposelessness of the Hobbesian universe is replaced with a sense of causality which could fill out social relations as well as relations between man and nature. But Bookchin cannot bear the full implications of such a theory. For Aristotle everything has its *telos* or purpose. Purpose is imbued in material- in the wood of a table- as well as in social relations. This is what Bookchin wants to take from Aristotle, since this sense of purpose allows a society to come together as an organic whole, and also allows man to treat nature as more than just 'stuff'. However, for Aristotle purpose is manifest in hierarchies. One cannot help but wonder when Bookchin relates Aristotle's description of *techne* as an alternative to modern technology, and waxes about the master- apprentice relation in the crafts,²⁴ how the natural hierarchy there is overlooked. It is true that there is no domination of the object by the subject, and also that the apprentice may be on his way to becoming a full craftsman himself, but there is still an obvious hierarchy. The master craftsman is closer to the final cause, and hence is privileged by a larger wage, more enjoyable tasks, and superior status. The purpose of the craft does flow through all the elements, from material through to the final cause, but it does so in such a

²² The Ecology of Freedom. p. 117 & 188fn..

²³ The Ecology of Freedom. p. 286.

²⁴ The Ecology of Freedom. p. 222.

way as to direct our attention towards the end as manifest in its most developed form.

By contrast, Bookchin, true to the mythic society he vaunts, is attracted to process, not ends. His obvious admiration for classical philosophy, and especially the philosophy of Aristotle, is reducible to this true orientation. He argues that, "The principal architects of Greece's hierarchical epistemology- Plato and Aristotle- had a long philosophical pedigree rooted in pre-Socratic nature philosophy."²⁵ This is neither an uncommon nor an outrageous statement, for both E.R. Dodds and F.M. Cornford convincingly argue along much the same lines.²⁶ Adding only a little marxist jargon, Bookchin argues that the kind of organic societies from which classical thought sprang are marked by an "intense solidarity internally and with the natural world".²⁷ Though there is room for unique human beings, their uniqueness is only good because it has a place within the community as a whole, whether that whole is considered narrowly as the human community or broadly as the community of man and nature. Something is unique only inasmuch as it stands out momentarily from within a larger context.

It is this type of uniqueness that Bookchin has in mind when he writes of freedom. He defines freedom as the freedom to realize potential, and here there is some confusion. At points the free realization of potential is described in an open-ended historical sense; at other times, when it is discussed within the

²⁵ The Ecology of Freedom. p. 109.

²⁶ See Dodds, E.R. The Greeks and the Irrational. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951); Cornford, F.M.. From Religion to Philosophy: a study in the origins of Western speculation. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); and Cornford, F.M.. Principium sapientiae: the origins of Greek philosophical thought. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952).

²⁷ The Ecology of Freedom. p. 44.

context of an organic society, it seems to occur within limits set by the community as a whole. The former presentation of freedom is perhaps more familiar to us, and is close to the conventional understanding of technology as the key to an unlimited future. The latter is a substantial reconfiguration of that conventional view. In an organic society, "Individuality, to the extent that it did not conflict with the community interest on which the survival of all depended, was seen more in terms of interdependence than independence. Variety was prized within the larger tapestry of the community- as a priceless ingredient of communal unity."²⁸ Freedom is not something enjoyed with a full tank of gas and an open road; rather, true freedom means realizing our potential as members of a community that includes us.

These two presentations of freedom are not, however, at odds. Freedom as an unlimited unfolding of potential requires the blurring of the distinctions between individual and community, as well as between man and nature. Just as for Hobbes, it is also true for Bookchin that there cannot be any agreement on what constitutes purpose in a fixed, ahistorical sense. This is the critique that makes the idea of an open-ended unfolding of potential possible. But for this process to be practically feasible, there must be agreement on the techniques by which freedom is secured. For Hobbes, the spur for this agreement is the danger of a descent into the state of nature through civil war; for Bookchin, it is ecological and social crisis. For Hobbes this crisis is manageable through the forfeiture of a measure of individual freedom, whereas for Bookchin the crisis requires a fundamental rethinking of the individual and of freedom as such. Bookchin is not looking for a provisional consent to the authority of the State,

²⁸ *ibid.*.

rather, he is looking to alter people's sensibilities, including their notions of freedom, reason, and individuality. For him we are only truly free as members of an organic society, we are only reasonable when we adapt to complex and changing social circumstances, and we are only individuals when our uniqueness finds its place within and contributes to society.

While Bookchin longs for an organic, or mythic society of the type seen in archaic communities, he does not imagine a rejection of the present and a return to the past. Rather, technology, with its emphasis on the interdependence of both processes and consequences, produces dispositions of thought akin to those found in mythic societies. This structural similarity does not bring with it the particular trappings of organic societies. Hence Bookchin is against neo-primitivism or a revival of ancient rituals in a new context. "What is significant about the differences in outlook between ourselves and preliterate peoples is that while the latter think like us in a structural sense, their thinking occurs in a cultural context that is fundamentally different than ours. Although their logical operations may be identical to ours formally, their values differ from ours qualitatively."²⁹ Bookchin looks for a society with a mythic structure: an integrated, process-thinking society, but with modern values.

However, it is questionable whether these values will hold within the mythic society that Bookchin describes. Rather, as our values are incorporated into the process, their essence will change, such that they will become unrecognizable. On this point it is interesting to note that in his Preface to the 1991 edition of The Social Ecology of Freedom, "Twenty Years Later... Seeking a Balanced Viewpoint", Bookchin's avowed enemy is not the CEO or the World Bank

²⁹ *ibid.*

bureaucrat, but the deep ecologist. Bookchin dismisses these as mystics and romantics who abandon the ideal of human freedom for a nebulous sense of wholeness and unity with nature. Bookchin, on the contrary, does not wish to abandon such 'anthropocentric' values as human freedom and reason. He instead wants to incorporate such values into a workable model for a future society.

However, it is difficult to see how these values would maintain their autonomy within the social structure that he describes. Rather, human freedom is seen as a vehicle for change. This requires that claims to the ahistorical uniqueness of the human species are put aside. In the end, we are left with a valorization of change, and a vision of human beings, both as individuals and communities, as free agents of change, self-creating within the limits of an also changing environment.

Bookchin confronts the criticism that his social ecology elevates human beings over non-human nature. His response is that humans are not higher than or superior to other animals or to non-human nature in general, that is, they are not closer to a set standard of perfection; rather, humans are distinguished by a greater capacity for change. We are more a part of the process that is nature, because our ability to think opens us up to change and to that process. We are distinctive not because we stand outside the process, but because we are more essentially a part of it. Whereas, according to the classical tradition, our nature as thinking beings allowed us to step outside of the endless currents of change, here thought is put in the service of change,³⁰ and even more, is seen as the most

³⁰ Similarly for Hobbes, the stable, thinking faculty is put in the service of that which moves, as thought becomes the scouts and spies of the desires. [*Leviathan*, p. 139] As thought serves desire in Hobbes, similarly in Bookchin reason is in the service of evolutionary, historical

open-ended, hence essential, expression of change. Human beings do not possess a permanent, distinctive capacity, but are marked by a general openness to change. Bookchin is careful to speak in the most general terms when he describes this: "some species are more flexible than others in this ability to adapt and... they possess more complex nervous systems that endow them with the capacity to make more suitable choices from among evolutionary pathways that promote their survival and development."³¹ This is a vague definition of human being. Humans are more 'complex' than other animals, hence better suited to adapt to complex, changing situations. Thinking allows us to adapt to our environment, and what's more, our ability to anticipate future changes allows us to become ready for them.

Whereas deep ecologists and their post-modern allies are inclined to reject reason, turning instead to romantic mysticism, Bookchin attempts to conflate technological reason and romantic yearnings for authentic community. To do this, reason is transformed from self-interested calculation to an open-ended capacity for conscious integration; for Bookchin, our rationality makes us "flexible", "adaptable", and "evolutionary". Whereas the shallow romanticism of deep ecology rejects technological rationality altogether, social ecology weds the rational and the irrational in a vision of a technological, organic society. Man is integrated into an organic society within which there are no clear divisions between man and man or man and nature. This is not an irrational flight from technological society, but an effort to infuse an irrational sense of sympathetic,

change. In both cases, the classical argument that what is stable is superior to what changes is reversed. In this reversal reason loses its autonomy.

³¹ The Ecology of Freedom. p. xxxii.

tribal attachments into the hyper-rational and oftentimes alienating structure of technological society.

Section 4: The Artist- Leni Riefenstahl

Bookchin's vision of an organic society is a natural outgrowth of technological politics. It is partly an expression of the drive to efficient integration, and partly a reaction against the alienation experienced in living in our world of wires and gears. The organic society consists of both this rational drive and this irrational reaction- it is both technological and mythic.

One sees something similar in the warrior societies depicted with such skill by the German artist Leni Riefenstahl. Riefenstahl's films and photographs are motivated by an admiration for authentic beauty- moving beauty- in human form.³² Her camera follows beautiful bodies and beautiful communities in motion. This admiration for authentic beauty is matched by a technical proficiency for reproducing the beautiful as a moving image. Her emphasis on technical perfection in film and photography does not collapse into barren formalism. Rather, as the technical proficiency of her work improved, as the

³² I refer the reader to several of her works of film and photography that I have found illuminating:

- films:** *The Holy Mountain* (1926) (directed by Dr. Arnold Fanck and co-starring Leni Riefenstahl)
 The Blue Light (1932) (directed by and starring Riefenstahl)
 Triumph of the Will (1935) (directed by Riefenstahl)
 Day of Freedom: Our Army (1935) (directed by Riefenstahl) [only clips remain of this film]
 Olympiad (1938) *Part 1: Festival of the People; Part 2: Festival of Beauty* (directed by Riefenstahl)
- photography:** *Last of the Nuba*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973)
 People of Kau. (New York: Harper & Row, 1976)

frames of film were moved closer together in time, until they could portray smooth motion slowed to nothing, so did her images return to the fixed archetypes of myth. Her work was mythic as it was technological.

i) *the fascist aesthetic*

This movement in Leni Riefenstahl's films and photographs from within technology to myth reveals itself as a fascist aesthetic.³³ By 'fascist' I mean a violent reaction against the universalizing and homogenizing effects of technology. By 'aesthetic' I mean a turning towards a visceral, non-abstract sense of beauty, captured in isolation from the ugly vulgarity of modern society. Fascism adds value to technology, putting it in the service of the community and its beautification. In this broad sense, Riefenstahl's fascist aesthetic is familiar to us. I share this thesis with the more general statement that Siegfried Kracauer gives in his study, that in Riefenstahl's films and others, "deep psychological dispositions predominant in Germany from 1918 to 1933 can be exposed",³⁴ and further, that research into these dispositions, "can profitably be extended to studies of current behaviors in the United States and elsewhere."³⁵ The dispositions which Kracauer illustrates using German film include the worship of leaders as icons, an appetite for authentic belonging to a folkish community, and an affinity for the natural and rural against the artificial and urban. We sense

³³ I say this despite her claimed ignorance in the Müller documentary of what a 'fascist aesthetic' might be. [Müller, Ray. *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl* (1993)]

³⁴ Kracauer, Siegfried. *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1947) p. v.

³⁵ *ibid.*.

these dispositions in our own reactions against technological society, reactions that remain thoroughly technological, as well as mythical.

As Susan Sontag observes in her essay "Fascinating Fascism", this fascist aesthetic is continuous throughout all of Riefenstahl's work. The artist herself has made a comeback, being accepted by the popular press in North America as an aesthete, a posture which manages to distinguish the formal beauty of her films from their often ugly content. Part of her newfound acceptance has to do with her two books of photography on the Nuba, which, through their subject matter dispel any associations with the racist theories of the Nazis (although this is already accomplished through her splendid portrayal of Jesse Owens in *Olympiad*). Yet her presentation of the Nuba is thematically continuous with her depictions of the German Volk in the *Triumph of the Will*. The Nuba, as Sontag observes, live in a highly aestheticized, martial society, bound by rigid ceremonies and a cult of manliness, and sustained by a mythic closeness with nature.³⁶ The Nuba, like National Socialism, "stands for an ideal or rather ideals that are persistent today under other banners: the ideal of life as art, the cult of beauty, the fetishism of courage, the dissolution of alienation in the ecstatic feelings of community, the repudiation of the intellect, the family of man (under the parenthood of leaders)."³⁷

However, I would like to go beyond a thematic discussion of the fascist aesthetic in her work (and with it the type of offhand counter-argument which Riefenstahl gives to Sontag and Kraucauer: that, for example, themes of upward

³⁶ Sontag, Susan. "Fascinating Fascism" in Under the Sign of Saturn. (New York : Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980) p. 86.

³⁷ "Fascinating Fascism". p. 96.

struggle and purification are readily found in many places),³⁸ to see what ideas underlie these themes. There are two interconnected points to be made here. First, I will argue that the image of beauty of the group and of the great person that Riefenstahl represents in her works is sustained by the idea of time as process, such that beauty is considered as a product of integration, and of flowing movement. Beauty is not considered in either Platonic or Christian terms, as an eternal and transcendent standard, but more primordially, in a mythic sense. Something is beautiful if it is in tune, or to use more modern language, if it is integrated with its changing surroundings. Beauty is not something stable, but a process in motion. This process itself is beautiful, irrespective of its ends.

This idea of beauty as process, whereby change is liberated from a determinate end or purpose, to fold back upon itself in a series of rhythmic or cyclical fluctuations, must affect the conception of art also. This is my second point. For art can no longer be considered as a means for representing an eternal idea of beauty, more or less accurately or objectively; nor can it be considered to be an expression of mere subjective preferences. Art must be thought of in a mythic sense, and within this conception the division between subject and object is not present: it is overcome by the unity of process. Mythic art is evocative, and as such is directed towards neither the object of representation nor the perceiving subject, but to the process of self-creation. Ultimately mythic art is directed back at us, such that we make art of ourselves.

Where does the artist stand in this process of self-creation? She is at its center, she moves it, but she too is moved. This seems to let Riefenstahl off the

³⁸ Riefenstahl, Leni. Leni Riefenstahl: A Memoir. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992) p. 622.

hook for her involvement with the Nazis. However reluctant she may have been to direct the Nuremberg trilogy, it remains a fact that she refuses to apologize for *Triumph of the Will*. My point here is not to put Riefenstahl on trial; that has been done often enough. Rather, it is to show the continuities in her aesthetic vision of human beauty that extends back to her earliest efforts as a dancer right through to her later pictorial work. These continuities are synchronized with the kind of aestheticized politics which one sees in Nazi Germany, and are not far from our own sensibilities either.

Riefenstahl's unapologetic attitude may be the result of German stubbornness. But more essentially, it speaks to a conception of historicity within which an apology is difficult to conceive. As Riefenstahl says in the Müller documentary, the time of Germany under National Socialism was "like another world." She is clear about the excitement she felt for Hitler and his movement. Her defense for her involvement is that she was politically ignorant, and could not have known how the movement would work itself out. If someone as close to the center of the movement as herself could not have known, then few could have. Rather, this attitude manifests a world-view within which apology is impossible. The orientation is not towards the end, but to the movement itself. It is the same sense of radical historicism that made it possible for the hippie movement of the 60's to become the yuppie movement of the 80's. Values change. Apology requires an enduring presence, expressed in human words and deeds, ultimately leading us towards the Good. If the Good is considered as a value, as a historically determined expression of the world-view of a people, then there is nothing to bind a person to apologize.

Apology has its origin in the Greek ἀπολογία, which can be broken down into two roots: ἀπό and λόγος. ἀπό means out of or away from; λόγος means rational speech. In an apology one gives a rational account of what one has done. One speaks out from the past, bringing the past into the present to show that one is a whole person, possessing a lasting identity. As Socrates shows in his *Apology*, an apology in the sense of a defence depends upon one's ability to hold their position,³⁹ to stick to an argument, and to defend a past action. Something of the past endures into the present. An apology gives an account of one's actions by connecting past to present. This idea that our words and deeds endure is essential to an apology, and is traceable to the root λόγος, and the emphasis that is placed upon it in Plato's writings. λόγος for Plato is not just any speech: that loose sense is taken up by μῦθος, which is only salvageable inasmuch as it is presented as in-formed speech, or likely speech-
 τὸν εἰκότα μῦθον. λόγος by contrast is rational speech. It is rational because it is directed towards an understanding that endures outside of time. λόγος is consistent with itself, i.e. it is not both one thing and its opposite; it is not one thing one moment and another the next because it is linked to a stable, enduring essence.

A tacit acceptance of these fundamentals is required for a real apology to be given. Riefenstahl, the artist of moving images, moved herself by aesthetic concerns, does not admit these preconditions. Instead, in her comments during interviews and in her memoirs she suggests that such a sense of responsibility would have been an impediment to her work. The artist must live in the

³⁹ *Apol.* 28d.

moment, and not concern herself with what endures outside that moment of creation.

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The gossip that surrounds Riefenstahl, and which makes her a suitable subject for *Vanity Fair* articles and the like, hinges upon the question of whether her films, especially *Triumph of the Will* (1935), but also the two *Olympiad* (1938) films- *Festival of the People* and *Festival of Beauty*, are documentaries or propaganda. This question is diminished in significance when one looks at her work as myth. A documentary reproduces the world; propaganda produces a new world. Myth does both.

Riefenstahl is clearly not moved to mere objective representation in any of her work. Her aim is to present something beautiful, whether it is an image of the human form, of a community, or of nature. Her directoral work from the *Blue Light* (1932) through the war films and onto her pictorials of the Nuba are animated by a vision of youthful, vigorous human form. She reproduces images of this form in her work, and in the case of her films for Hitler and Goebbels, these reproductions are directed towards the production of a new community- a community that is both perfect and original.

This image of perfection has its origin in myth. Both of her *Olympiad* films begin with clear references to Homer. Riefenstahl reproduces Homer's picture of the relation between man and nature, and between individual and society. These references are more substantial than a trumpeting of the ancient Greek origins of the modern Games, and touch at the core of the experience of myth.

More than vain, ahistorical allusions, they reproduce Homeric myth from within modern technological society.

The references follow the form of Homer's similes, and are intended to introduce and contextualize the films. In the prologue to the first *Olympiad* film, *Festival of the People*, Riefenstahl shows a shot of woman dancers, waving batons in unison. The shot recalls the awesome display of uniformity from *Triumph of the Will*. The dancers move in perfect synchronicity. This is obviously a technological feat- the transformation of individual human beings into parts of one integrated whole on a grand scale. A perfect formalism reigns over human action, making it something other than action- regular, predictable, and totally organized. The obvious metaphor for this sort of organization is the machine, with humans as its parts. But this is not the metaphor the director chooses. She uses a natural image, borrowed from Homer: she compares the field of dancers with a field of wheat, waving together in the wind.

The army started to move on the shore.

Long waves form
On the Icarian Sea when winds East and South
Explode from the clouds of patriarch Zeus;
Or the East Wind rapes a field of deep wheat,
Rippling and tassling the ears as it blows.

So too these troop lines.⁴⁰

Riefenstahl cuts from the field of dancers to a field of wheat. Human society, even in a most strikingly unnatural form of organization- war or concerted, aestheticized movement- is considered as a natural event. The union of human beings into one giant movement, a feat which requires complicated social structures and integrated patterns of command, is not considered

analytically, in terms of all the parts which go into the whole, but synthetically, in terms of one fluid process. Unlike in Chaplin's *Modern Times*, where the worker is depicted being fed through the wheels and gears of a giant machine, for Riefenstahl being a part of our technological society is not necessarily de-humanizing because it robs us of our individuality, but being part of it can make us more human inasmuch as it coordinates our actions into one beautiful movement. Human beings are moved not by individual, isolated volition, like atoms moving at random, but according to natural, unified forces. The patterns of organization and command then become forces like the wind.

It would be easy to jump to the conclusion that this vision of naturalized man and society is merely a kind of veil for submission to command. Certainly command has a part to play in naturalized society, but this does not mean that command itself stands outside of that which is commanded. For Homer, even the gods are not fully removed from human society, but participate as players in it. This reaches the nadir of vulgarity in Book 20 of the *Iliad*.

As the gods are involved in the process, so too is the artist. In the following shot, we see Riefenstahl herself, dancing on a beach in a scene reminiscent of the famous opening sequence of *The Holy Mountain* (1926), "Dance on the Sea".⁴¹ Everyone is a part of the movement, including the movers themselves. Riefenstahl runs and sways back and forth, her whole body and being liberated to the rhythmic movement. Her standing out as an individual is made possible by the same natural forces that hold the group together. These

⁴⁰Il. 1.155-161. (Lombardo trans.)

⁴¹ Incidentally, this was the very scene that first attracted Hitler to the dancer/director. "The most beautiful thing I have ever seen was Riefenstahl's dance on the sea in *The Holy Mountain*." - reported by Herr Bruckner, adjutant to the Fuhrer to Riefenstahl, (May?) 1932. [*Leni Riefenstahl: A Memoir*, p. 105]

natural forces are most strongly felt and displayed in great persons. Great persons stand out most for being the least free, such that the individual is reclaimed as part of a natural process. To confirm this Riefenstahl employs a common Homeric simile, cutting from a shot of herself dancing on the beach to a shot of waves on the shore. Her perfect form is the result of her total integration with nature.

What makes humans natural is their movement. Two images from the prologue to the second *Olympiad* film, *Festival of Beauty*, illuminate this idea. In one shot, Riefenstahl pans from the image of moving water, to a river, to a line of runners moving along the bank. Man flows like water. His being as both an individual and a group is defined not by any enduring and self-subsisting qualities, but by his movement. Through this motion, beings are joined together in the flow of process. We are a process without end.

Like Homer, Riefenstahl contextualizes human life with natural images. Also in the prologue to *Festival of Beauty*, she shows an image of leaves falling. Likewise, Homer has Glaucus say:

Human generations are like leaves in their seasons.
The wind blows them to the ground, but the tree
Sprouts new ones when spring comes again.
Men too.⁴²

Life is a process of purposeless and continuous change.

Movement is the principle that blends a people into a unity while stasis breaks them apart. Take, for instance, the field of gymnastics from *Olympiad*⁴³. Gymnasts perform exercises in unison in a huge field. If the gymnasts were to

⁴² *Il.* 6.149-152. (Lombardo trans.)

⁴³ Hinton, David B.. *The Films of Leni Riefenstahl*. (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2000) plate

stop, one would tend to slouch, another to arch his back up too high; then someone would turn his head to the side, to look on his companions. Constant synchronized movement keeps them together.

Performance of Sudeten German Gymnasts, Urstinad Labem, 1934.⁴⁴

As the 'object' of art is in motion, so too is the 'subject'. One of Riefenstahl's contributions to filmmaking was to self-consciously move the camera. She put cameras on wheeled dollies to film sporting events in *Olympiad*, and on 'elevators' to film the Nuremberg rally. There is no permanent point of reference; nothing is fixed, neither object nor subject, and only smooth motion keeps them together.

The Festival of Beauty includes a stirring set of images that show this emphasis on purposeless motion. The men's diving scene is the most beautiful scene covering an event, and also the one that looks the most choreographed. One is more aware of the camera and the director here than in the other scenes

⁴⁴ From "Bodies in Formation: mass gymnastics under communism" Petr Rubal (curator). <http://www.osa.ceu.hu/galeria/spartakiad/online/>

that present what would become our familiar style of sports reporting. The scene is both iconic and artificial. It is iconic because it is an authentic portrayal of the pure form of human movement, exercised without effort or strain, perfectly fluid, moving yet still. The movements represented are not unique, unlike those shown in other event coverage - e.g. Lovelock will win the 1500 metre footrace only once. Instead, we see an on-going succession of the same dive, the swan dive, repeated again and again by athletes who are not introduced and who wear no numbers, but are absorbed into a singular process of human perfection. Riefenstahl is reproducing the perfect human being, and there is nothing distinct about him- this is what makes him stand out. This artifice of reproduction is not at all at odds with the iconic status of the athletes, but reinforces that status through repetition.

The beautiful flow of motion is more important than any end which motion effects. Diving in and of itself is purposeless, a useless series of labored ascents and rapid, apparently effortless descents. If done well, the dive does not even leave a trace, just the smooth 'gulp' of water swallowing the diver.

As Riefenstahl represents it, even the water, the final limit of the dive, vanishes. As the scene progresses, the divers are filmed against the sky, and the edge of the plank becomes the edge of an abyss. Their dive is a free fall into nothingness, willingly accomplished. The diver wills nothing. He recognizes his situation, with no purpose and no firmament, and rather than backing away, he leaps in. In this moment, buttressed by willful courage, the beauty of human form shines brightest.

While the shining forth of perfect form is what captures our attention, that momentary stability is viewed as a moment within an ever-moving process. The

divers are recycled again and again. The scene is one of splendidly choreographed movement; what is most important is that the divers keep moving, that the interval of waiting, of stillness, is shortened.⁴⁵ One is left with the impression of an endless, joyful, collective suicide, intended to glorify the beauty and the transience of human accomplishment. However, even death is seen not as the ultimate end for human beings, but as a process. The point is the experience of dying, not the state towards which death takes us. Thus the director moves us back and forth across that threshold; if one watches closely, one sees that the dives are replayed in reverse, so that the diver moves from the plank into the air, then back onto the plank, then back into the air, toeing that line. They abandon themselves in endless succession for a momentary aesthetic experience.

Frame from *Olympia*,
showing men's diving event.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that Riefenstahl insisted on a higher film speed for this sequence, a demand which pushed forward film and camera technologies. [from her cameraman Hans Ertl in the Müller documentary] To slow something down, you must speed it up.

⁴⁶ <http://www.riefenstahl.org/downloads/>

ii) *man as art*

Rather than proceed directly to *Triumph of the Will*, let us jump ahead, and expand upon the topic of mythic art, and the idea of man as art, for by doing so we will better understand her most notorious work.

After the war, Riefenstahl's excitement for National Socialism waned, and she went to Africa looking for an authentic experience of beauty. She had to travel far to find the beautiful people she wanted, the Nuba of Sudan. This was in 1956. When she returned in 1974, she found them ruined by civilization. "The age of paradisaal innocence was dead."⁴⁷ So she went farther into the rocky interior of the Sudan, searching out a tribe, the Kau, buttressed against the world by their isolation and fierce temperament. In this isolated tribe, she found her natural society, radiant in primordial beauty.

However, the Kau's authentic beauty is also manifestly artificial. Like the Nuba whom she had seen previously, the Kau appear to be "from a different planet".⁴⁸ Though they belong to the earth in the sense that they are well adapted to their harsh environment, and live according to its rhythms, there is something strange about them. They live in almost complete nakedness, but mark their bodies with white ash, with paint, and with numerous raised cuts. They look on their own bodies as art. They are themselves artificial. As Riefenstahl depicts them, their society is completely aestheticized: even though they are, by Sudanese standards, very poor, they devote much of their time to self-ornamentation, music playing, and ritual.

⁴⁷ *People of Kau*. p. 7.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*.

A Kau man making art of himself; this is a regular- not a ritual- activity.⁴⁹

A Kau woman receiving body tattoos.⁵⁰

Their best food is directed towards the healthiest young men, who devote themselves to raising cows that only will be slaughtered for funeral ceremonies,

⁴⁹ From The People of Kau. (no page numbers)

and then not for general consumption. The rest of their time is devoted to training for wrestling. In describing the Kau's wrestling rituals, Riefenstahl writes: "Victors are never offered material objects as prizes- they would consider such a thing unworthy and irrelevant. They fight for the renewal of the sacred vitality of the tribe."⁵¹ Fighting has no purpose, but is bound by the cyclical patterns of release and restraint. It is a momentary release of vital energy.

Kau men fighting with knives attached to their wrists. The man on the left is bleeding from his head.⁵²

⁵⁰ From The People of Kau.

⁵¹ Last of the Nuba, p. 134.

⁵² From The People of Kau.

Their art, like their fighting, is purposeless. It is done for its own sake, and it is done to themselves. The Kau make no lasting art, only music and auto-mutilation. It reveals an uninstrumental creativity- a drive to self-creation.

The Kau (as depicted by Riefenstahl) are just as they appear. They express their being with their tattoos and face paint. Appearance is identical with essence. In her Memoirs Riefenstahl recounts a perhaps familiar story in which she played back film and audio recordings of the Nuba for them to watch themselves.⁵³ They screamed and wept at the images of themselves. In this lies an important lesson about myth: mythic art is not derivative of the real thing, but attains the status of reality, in that the thing itself is made present in artistic representation. In this case, the Nuba were ecstatic because they were being presented with themselves. They were, literally, *ek static*, outside of themselves, effectively doubled by their representation. There is no clear division between artificial and real in myth.

Something similar can be said of Riefenstahl's propoganda films, in that they both documented the Nazi movement in Germany and helped to create that movement. The most influential of these is *Triumph of the Will* (the most technically perfect of the Nuremberg Trilogy⁵⁴). *Triumph of the Will* is an expression of the drive to self-creation, of the drive to create a new, organic, and beautiful social movement. However, whereas the Nuba had limits to their creativity, the Nazis saw none for themselves. The massive, moving assemblies

⁵³ Memoirs. p. 556-7.

⁵⁴ The other two Nuremberg party rally films, *Victory of Faith* (1933) and *Day of Freedom: Our Army* (1935; same year as *Triumph of the Will*), were shot under difficult circumstances, and unlike *Triumph*, Riefenstahl is not proud of either of them as works of art. Nor did these other two become well known. *Victory of Faith* did not survive the war, and only parts of *Day of Freedom* survived. The latter consists of unimpressive shots of battle maneuvers, a concession for generals who thought the army was unfairly ignored in *Triumph*.

of bodies re/produced in *Triumph* are a mechanized tribe. The Nazis are Nubas lined up.

Frame from *Triumph of the Will*, showing view of the Nuremberg rally from elevator mounted on flag post.⁵⁵

The leaders of the Nazi movement were not detached puppet-masters manipulating their great organic machine, but were taken up in the movement themselves. The powerful are not distinguished by their elevation above society, but by their position at its center. All of the powers of that society are focused

inwards, such that a pure identity of leader and group is possible. When Rudolf Hess introduces Hitler to the opening congress in scene 4 of *Triumph*, stating "You are Germany"⁵⁶, this is the identity he is evoking. Of course, we are not used to taking statements like this as they appear, but in aestheticized politics, this is just how it must be taken. Appearance and essence are identical. National Socialism appears to us in the person of Hitler. Likewise, the Nuremberg rallies, as depicted in *Triumph*, are the Nazi movement, and in a double sense: *the film both opens National Socialism up to the viewer, as it opens the viewer up to National Socialism*. There is real ecstasy in the eyes of the crowd. We may, in the present day, look upon the film as either an objective documentary or as a subjectivized piece of propaganda, but in its time and place it was an authentic, ecstatic union of spectator and movement, in which the person in the crowd was caught in a process larger than themselves, yet within which they could secure an identity.

For this identity to remain secure, the movement must engage in a continual process of self-creation, moved from within. Only in the indeterminacy of this constant, self-perpetuating movement can the separate identities of participants and leader be blurred. The edited selections from the rally's speeches express Riefenstahl's own fascination with the moving over the fixed. Her selection from the rally speech of Fritz Reinhardt, the head of the School for Oratory, emphasizes this: "Wherever one looks, construction is in progress, improvements are being made, and new values created."⁵⁷ In creating new values we create what is good and bad, effectively reproducing the work of

⁵⁵ Reproduced in Riefenstahl, Leni. Hinter den Kulissen des Reichsparteitag. [Behind the scenes of the Party Rally film] (Munich, 1935) from "Bodies in Formation"

⁵⁶ Barsam, Richard Meran. Filmguide to Triumph of the Will. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975) p 39.

⁵⁷ Filmguide. p. 41.

the gods in the origin of the cosmos. 'Progress' and 'improvement' are not given to us according to some fixed, transcendent standard, but are relative to our own creative capacities, to what we define as progress and improvement. The question is not how do we know the Good (so that we can guide and judge our creation), but how do we create. Our attention is turned from the telos of change, to the origin; and our concern shifts from understanding and working towards the Good, conceived ahistorically, to recalling the genitive power of the origin, recalling the mythic pre-history of a people. Since a society is not held together by a conception of a permanent Good, but by the unity experienced in its origin, it must constantly return to this origin to recover its unity and vitality.

Goebbels states:

"May the bright light of our enthusiasm never go out. This flame alone gives light and warmth to the creative art of modern political propaganda. This art arises out of the depths of the nation and, in order to search for its roots and find its power, it must again return to these depths."⁵⁸

This creative art of propaganda is neither secret nor imposed from above, but draws its power from the depths of the people. This creative art is not mimetic in the Platonic sense, imperfectly imitating stable forms in material representations, but its result is an identity between form and substance, or leader and group. Form matches itself to substance, as substance gives itself up to form. The process moves in circles, descending to the depths to find its power, calling upon the origin of a people, then drawing that power upward into concerted effort. This process has no end outside of itself, nor can it be judged according to the adequacy of representation, but moves in an ongoing cycle of regeneration.

Interpreted in this way, *Triumph* has no subjective purpose outside of itself, nor any objective reality that it represents. It is the appearance and the essence of Nazi Germany. It is the flowering image of an aestheticized politics, the point where a recognizable form shines from out of the murky darkness of indeterminate wholeness, as light from a smoky fire.

In her Memoirs, countering the old propaganda charge, Leni is insistent that no political purpose animated her films. Rather, she writes, the films were moved by a sense of rhythm.⁵⁹ But then, no political purpose animated Nazism either, and it too can be seen as a self-perpetuating, rhythmic process. There is, strictly speaking, no purpose to the assemblies of marchers and Party members other than the assembly itself. Provisional (and often ludicrous) purposes have to be given to the assembly in order to keep it moving, but ultimately it is mobilized for itself. This new organism swells and shrinks, builds to a frenzy in the gathering dark, quiets while it sleeps, and wakes up for the excitement of a new day. The diurnal rhythm of *Triumph* is contrived from scenes pulled from different days of the seven-day rally,⁶⁰ but this does not matter. The division between the real and the representation is not important.

iv) *the great artist*

We know of Hitler's admiration for cinema, partly through Riefenstahl's own accounts. He even saw a future for himself in directing after the war. As Hitler's projectionist says in the production, *Hitler: a film from Germany*, "There is

⁵⁸ Filmguide. p. 42.

⁵⁹ Memoirs. p. 148.

⁶⁰ Films of Leni Riefenstahl. p. 29.

only one future, the future of cinema." One author goes so far as to ask, "whether the whole of the Second World War was not indeed conducted as a big budget war film, solely put on so that it could be projected as newsreel each evening in his bunker."⁶¹ This is not a bizarre fantasy. Nazi politics is aestheticized politics, and this means that the essence of power lies in the control of image, and especially, since politics is concerned with change, with moving images. Hitler considered his famous 'thousand-year Reich' in these terms, as when he confided to Riefenstahl:

I could imagine a film stock made of the finest metal, which would not be altered by time or weather and could hold out for centuries. Just imagine what would happen if, a thousand years from now, people could see what we have experienced in this era.⁶²

The purpose is to preserve the experience, along with its urgent senses of intensity and of movement. For this, moving pictures are perfect.

This idea of re-evoking the experience of a historical moment, rather than re-presenting an accurate image of history, also informs Albert Speer's so-called 'architecture of ruins'. Speer the architect of the thousand-year Reich, specified sandstone as the building material of the future Berlin, not granite or limestone. For this, Paul Virilio calls him the "architect of ruins"⁶³. As Speer argues in his "A Theory of Ruin Value" (1938) and recalls in his memoirs, the purpose of construction is to create beautiful and inspiring ruins.⁶⁴ The creation of a building or city anticipates and carries within it its own destruction. Stability is

⁶¹ Hans Jürgen Syberg, quoted in Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. Heidegger, Art and Politics. Chris Turner (trans.) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990) p. 62.

⁶² Memoirs, p. 271.

⁶³ Virilio, Paul. War and cinema: the logistics of perception. Patrick Camiller (trans.) (New York: Verso, 1989) p. 55.

⁶⁴ Speer, Albert. Inside the Third Reich. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970) p. 56.

only achieved through an acceptance of constant change. There was little difference then between his design of the future Berlin and the set for *Triumph of the Will*: both aim to create an experience of something lasting from within the context of impermanence. Indeed, the image with which Riefenstahl ends part 2 of Olympiad, "Festival of Beauty", is Speer's *Cathedral of Light*, the seven thousand metre high monument to the greatness of Germany, 'constructed' with spotlights, which would vanish with the first rays of sun, leaving only an image burned into the brains of the onlookers.

Speer's *Cathedral of Light*.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ From http://faculty-web.at.nwu.edu/art-history/werckmeister/April_6_1999/Nuremberg2.jpg

All of this is to account for the consistency of Riefenstahl's fascist aesthetic in terms of a conception of beauty as integration and as process. The artist is responsible for this integrating vision and for moving this process. Her own words, given in a lecture titled "Is Cinema Art?", January 17, 1939 in Paris, sound like the words of a dictator:

Ideally the director- the shaper of the whole- would be in control. A painting cannot be painted by many hands; a symphony cannot be composed by a number of musicians. The control of all means is the first requirement for creating an artwork. Passionate visions are more instinctive than rational- a balance of the two is ideal. In the creative process the birth can be chaotic; the later shaping, the realization, and the execution, can be conscious.⁶⁶

Cinema, like politics, is concerned with shaping motion, unlike the other arts that deal with subjects that keep still. The unity of the whole, and its essence as one creation, with a single origin, requires total control over the whole process, an identity between creator and creation. The coming together of the creation into a single organism requires technical perfection. The integrity of the work of art requires a combination of the rational and the irrational. Only then do the moving images cease to be 'mere' appearances, but take on a systematic and integrated formal structure all their own. In the same lecture, Riefenstahl projects beyond art through cinema: she argues that as film takes on more dimensions, first sound, then color, then depth (3-D), cinema will achieve, in her words, "a super-reality, far removed from art."⁶⁷ A totalized set of appearances

⁶⁶ Memoirs, p. 245.

⁶⁷ Memoirs, p. 247.

replaces reality, and, therefore, carries its own essence within it. The representation replaces the real.

In Riefenstahl's work we see the tendency of technology towards myth, wherein the acceleration of technical and formal perfection turns technology back on itself. Beauty is expressed not as a transcendent standard, but as a process; man- understood either singly or as a group- is beautiful if he is integrated into his surroundings, if he is part of the process. The role of art is radically changed according to this new technological and mythical understanding of beauty. The point is not to intimate a divine order, manifest only fleetingly in this world, but to continually re-produce a beautiful integration of man and society and man and nature. Ultimately then, this new kind of art is not concerned with the representation of man, but with creating a new kind of man. Man himself becomes art. What results is a completely self-referential process, with man at its center.

Section 4: The Madman- Bataille

There is a perennial attractiveness to fascism as a political response to technology. Like Riefenstahl, Georges Bataille had to defend himself against charges of fascism, even though he lacked her political associations. He took pains both to criticize totalitarian governments as over-determinations of human life and to recover Nietzsche from Nazi propagandists. However, his violent reactions against technology and his longing for community experienced through continuous revolution and ritualistic sacrifice do remind one the darkest aspects of fascism. My point is not to put Bataille on the rack (something he just might enjoy), it is rather to show how these irrational, violent responses against technology belong to the essence of technology, how they are the corollaries of technological ordering.

Bataille agrees with Kojève that history is over. As Derrida writes, Bataille "took Hegel very seriously, and took absolute knowledge very seriously."⁶⁸ However, Bataille and Kojève respond to the end of history very differently. Their differences are manifest in their lives: Kojève was a technocrat of the new world order- the Universal and Homogenous State- while Bataille was a member of secret, anarchist societies dedicated to the destruction of the UHS. Bataille sees the UHS as a static, formal imposition of the mind upon an essential, changing life force. He sets out to reclaim an authentic existence from within a world otherwise devoid of meaning outside of the efficient function. He does this through a valorization of excessive sexuality, automutilation, spontaneous (and sometimes violent) revolution, and through spontaneous expenditure (the gift).

⁶⁸ Derrida, Jacques. Writing and Difference. Alan Bass (trans.) (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1978) p. 253.

However, it is my argument that beneath these questions of life-style lies a fundamental agreement on technology. In Bataille's reaction to Hegel/Kojève there is not an aim to oppose them, but to radicalize that teaching, as Derrida describes it, to "'take it seriously' up to the end", and then to "exceed" that end in a sudden burst of laughter,⁶⁹ to go beyond our fate by accepting that fate. As technology is radicalized, its mythic character becomes clearer. Man becomes a shifting locus of self-creation, a process that has no ends.

Bataille makes this association between technological rationality and myth in his own writings. Here I will focus on two of his essays- "The Sorcerer's Apprentice"⁷⁰, and "The Absence of Myth"⁷¹- though referring at times to his work on political economy, The Accursed Share,⁷² to other short essays on the end of history, and to his book On Nietzsche.⁷³ I will argue that in his attempt to go beyond a static technological society effectively radicalizes technology. Instead of lock-step teleological progress, Bataille proposes a cyclical process of alternating release and restraint. Technology is freed of determinate teleology and becomes purposeless process.

Bataille argues that underlying any and all purposive action or thought is an ongoing cycle of release and restraint. By shifting our attention from the functional and the strictly purposive, we can perhaps restore the authenticity of our selves and our communities. This means embracing the spontaneous, the excessive, and the passionate, and eschewing the overly intellectual and ordered.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*.

⁷⁰ This was originally published in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, #298 (July 1938): pp. 5-54; and reprinted in *Ouvres Complet*, I, pp. 523-37. The translation I will refer to is Allan Stoekl's, in his anthology Georges Bataille: Visions of Excess Selected Writings, 1927-1939. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) pp. 233-234.

⁷¹ Bataille, Georges. The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism. Michael Richardson (trans.) (London: Verso, 1994) p. 48.

⁷² Bataille, Georges. The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy. Vol. I Consumption; Vol. II The History of Eroticism; Vol. III Sovereignty. (New York: Zone Books, 1988 & 1991)

⁷³ Bataille, Georges. On Nietzsche. (New York: Paragon House, 1992)

Often, this valorization is excessive, if not ridiculous: "For it is human to burn and consume oneself to the point of suicide at the baccarat table;... It is, on the contrary, inhuman to abandon life to a chain of useful acts."⁷⁴ One may laugh, but then this is the point. He asks his work to be judged according to its evocativeness. He wants his readers to roar in laughter or to shrink in disgust.

Especially disgusting is his admiration for violence and for automutilation. For Bataille violence- the wound- is an expression of disdain for the measured self-interest and functionalism which govern everyday life, and is an opportunity for an outburst of the sacred, distinguished by a certain *ganz ander*, to use Eliade's terms. If the transcendent exists for Bataille, it exists concretely in the wound, which violates the integrity of the self and opens the inside up to the outside. Judged against the common practice of automutilation within mythic societies, for example Riefenstahl's Kau with their ritual scarring, this interest seems faithful to mythic practices.

Bataille's reactions against instrumental reason and its manifestation in technology, however strange and outrageous they first appear, are endemic to technological society in its final stages. As I showed in Part I, using Grant's argument from English-Speaking Justice, technology is essentially indeterminate. Continuous movement is essential to technology. Bereft of definite ends, technology valorizes change itself. Through technology, we come to experience time as process. Thus, even in our most desperate reactions against technology (among which Bataille's ranks high) we are pulled closer to the beating heart of technology. We then feel its purposeless rhythms, and are liberated from any determinate teleology to pure, spontaneous and continuous self-creation and destruction.

⁷⁴ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 231.

Bataille's reaction against Kojève's UHS is articulated in his essay "The Sorcerer's Apprentice". The essay is a response to a lecture Kojève gave to The College of Sociology, a group dedicated to the exploration of the sacred in society, co-founded in 1939 by Bataille, Michel Leiris, and Roger Caillois. Kojève's lecture is not available, though we do have Bataille's response, in which he willingly takes up both the title Kojève gave him as a 'Sorcerer's Apprentice', along with his predicament as one longing after myth and magic in a completely rationalized world. "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" is a diagnosis of a disease without a cure. In it Bataille attempts to show how we can live with our disease, without attempting to cure ourselves, and without merely coping in a manner which would numb our senses. Rather, Bataille sets out to attune us to our suffering in its full intensity. This is Bataille's answer to the question of how one ought to live within technology/myth.

Bataille argues that we are suffering a profound absence, the absence of need. The empty self-satisfaction of Kojève's UHS is the worst peril, since it, "causes silent decomposition, when it is inconceivable that one could be aware of it."⁷⁵ The greatest danger of living within a technological society is that one's faculties for being aware of absence are diminished. Technology tends towards efficiency, hence it tends towards its own invisibility. As the interval between wish and fulfillment is shortened, satisfaction becomes increasingly automatic. We experience the absence of absence, the absence of desire. Absence is not considered essential to human being. This is the disease of our time.

Curiously, Bataille does not ask for a cure for this disease. He does not step outside our disease to find some lasting standard of health, since such standards have already been taken up by technology on its way to creating a society of healthy, well-adjusted human beings who lack a sense of absence.

⁷⁵ "Sorcerer's Apprentice" p. 223.

"There is no cure for the insufficiency that diminishes anyone who refuses to become a whole man, in order to be nothing more than one of the functions of human society."⁷⁶ To become completely self-satisfied and disease-free, we take on our functions within technological society.

If there can be no cure which does not reinforce technological society, then what is one to do? As Bataille argues throughout "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" one could withdraw from society, become dysfunctional. Yet, as he describes it, there is really no society left from which to withdraw. True, there is a collection of humans and machines performing various interrelated functions, but there is no real sense of the whole. Technological society is not directed towards any one end, unless it is the standard of efficiency, which is an empty, self-referential substitute for an end or purpose. "It is a paradox", he writes, "that a function could only be fulfilled on condition that it become an end in itself."⁷⁷ No single purpose is available to unite us in our functions. Our apparent unity of thought and action is, therefore, merely formal. We live, "like so many servant of a dead man".⁷⁸ This is the general condition of modern society. There is no purpose beyond ongoing production and consumption. Man is self-satisfied. He experiences this absence of need as "smug bliss".⁷⁹ Bataille seeks to disturb this bliss and open us up to the ecstasy of need.

Yet what is there that Bataille can open us to? After Nietzsche, he argues that all of the highest ends of human striving have been mortgaged to the technical tasks of production and accumulation. The good, the true and the beautiful are mere formal principles- ideals we might call them- that can be applied using appropriate techniques. Similarly, the relief of man's estate from

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 224.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

nature, or the creation of a society of free and equal human beings only succeeds in producing a herd of conformists. What then is the cause of revolt? What moves us to rail against these imposed forms? Bataille's answer is that an essential restlessness persists in our hearts, as in our cycles of digestion and excretion, inhalation and exhalation. By opening ourselves to these rhythms, to change as it is given to us by our bodies, we may disrupt the impositions of the mind and the static uniformity of technological society. Hence Bataille calls upon Nietzsche and his teaching of the "persistence of '*amor fati*'"⁸⁰, the love of fate, to dislocate man from his servitude as a functionary within technology. Without some purpose to love, we love change itself, and this open-ended desire upsets the social order built upon the illusion of determinate ends. Bataille exposes technological society for what it is- essentially purposeless- and hopes to recover an authentic experience within technology by radicalizing this essence.

This radicalization fundamentally alters the three spheres of society Bataille describes: science, art and politics. Within his radical vision of technological society, science would be put at the disposal of man.⁸¹ This would require that science quit pretending to be knowledge autonomous from human interests. There are no truly autonomous spheres within Bataille's radicalized technological society. Science would have to be integrated into all parts of our lives, including consumption and production. With this, science would no longer be considered as the dispassionate pursuit of objective 'truth'.⁸²

As science would no longer be objective, so too would art cease to be merely subjective. As he sees them, artists are "men of fiction",⁸³ who claim to be possessed by what they create, yet who recognize their creations to be fictive, or

⁸⁰ *ibid.*.

⁸¹ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 225fn..

⁸² "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 224.

⁸³ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 225.

worse, realistic representations of the world: either nothing or pale representations. Art can move beyond the merely subjective through its incorporation into politics and religion (and preferably both). In this, art may be given a proud place within a larger whole: "If the institutions one serves were themselves agitated by the contradictory movement of destiny, art would encounter the possibility of serving and expressing profound life;"⁸⁴. This is not art in the service of the state- straightforward propaganda- but a dual process of making art real through political activity while at the same time upsetting the regularity of partisan politics through constant agitation. Through the co-penetration of art and politics, art takes on the substantiality of deeds, while deeds are unsettled by the uncertainties of art.

All of this is to integrate science, art, and politics into one whole, thereby radicalizing technological society and hopefully stripping it of its apparent stability. As its 'autonomous spheres' are dismissed as illusions, technology is revealed as, in Grant's words, the new union of knowing and making,⁸⁵ or similarly, as the integration of the techniques necessary to make our ideals real. Bataille writes: "If the truth that science reveals is stripped of human sense, if the *fictions* of the spirit alone respond to the strange will of man, then the accomplishment of this will demands that these fictions be *made true*."⁸⁶ Technology is rendered down to a virile will to self-creation. "He only remains virile by trying to make reality conform to what he thinks: each force in him demands that the failed world in which he has appeared be submitted to the caprice of dreams."⁸⁷ Rather than action judged in terms of the "benefits of having acted", following Kojève Bataille conceives of the essence of action as

⁸⁴ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". pp. 225-226.

⁸⁵ English-Speaking Justice. p. 1.

⁸⁶ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 226.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*.

negation: "'To act' resonates in the ear with the blasts of the trumpets of Jericho."⁸⁸ Bataille opens us to this authentic essence of action while revealing the limited benefits of action as epiphenomenal to the act itself.

Like many of his contemporaries, who focused upon the compartmentalizing and alienating effects of early technologies, Bataille saw technology as opposed to the fullness and wholeness of life. "In the region where savage simplicity had made men dormant, there are now nothing but scientists, politicians and artists. The renunciation of life in exchange for a function is the condition consented to by each of them."⁸⁹ Bataille seems to criticize these fractured men for much the same reasons that Vico finds to criticize the new barbarians: their tendency to over-simplify an inherently complex social reality, to analyze it into its parts, simple and irreducible, effectively destroys society, while their radically anthropocentric outlook cuts them off from the source of reality. Human beings dwell apart even though thronged together, "like wild beasts in a deep solitude of spirit and will".⁹⁰

Yet for both Bataille and Vico, this 'Dissociated Life' (to use Bataille's section title from "The Sorcerer's Apprentice") seems to prepare the way for a new vital life. Bataille begins the next section, titled "Full Life and the Image of the Loved One" with the sentence: "Simple and strong life, which has not yet been destroyed by functional servility, is possible only to the extent that it has ceased to subordinate itself to some particular project... : it depends on the image of destiny, and the seductive and dangerous myth with which it feels itself to be in silent solidarity."⁹¹ It is no technical matter of conjoining the parts Bataille describes into one whole, but it requires a sense of the whole to erupt upon man.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*.

⁸⁹ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 227.

⁹⁰ *New Science*. § 1106

⁹¹ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 228.

He must be enraptured, wounded, and feel terror. All of these experiences are ways to open man up to the whole. The disease of modern man, its signs and symptoms, are not laid out so that he can be cured, but rather so that perhaps in the violence of our dismemberment we can be opened up to a new unity.

As a touchstone for this experience, Bataille turns to the image of the loved one. He suggests that 'full life' is experienced only in love; otherwise, there are only particular, linked technical projects, and no sense that humans are caught up in a whole, in a common, tragic destiny.⁹² "The lost, the tragic, the 'blinding marvel,' possessed in one's innermost being, can no longer be met anywhere but on a bed."⁹³ The ecstasies of sex substitute for the aridity of public life. In response to the same idea, Grant writes that, "When the chthonic has been driven back into itself by the conquests of the environment, it can only manifest itself beautifully in sexuality, although at the same time casting too great a weight upon that isolated sexuality."⁹⁴ Grant is referring to Marcuse's Eros and Civilization,⁹⁵ but what he says applies equally well to Bataille's valorization of sex as a means of liberation and a source of wholeness. But for Bataille as for Grant, this retreat into the private realm of sexual union casts the emptiness of public life in technological society into stark relief. That Bataille's forays into that public life were limited to secret anarchist societies confirms this.

⁹²Why tragic? It is not, I believe, completely necessary that it be so, but that it serves as a contrast to the comedy of technological progress, in which our vestigial sense of fate is expressed as a dumb faith that the future will be continually better than the present. Our dim sense of fate as progress causes us to lapse into self-satisfaction. To short-circuit this self-satisfaction and restore fate to its full powers, fate must shock us

⁹³ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 228.

⁹⁴ Technology and Empire. pp. 39-40.

⁹⁵ Marcuse, Herbert. Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud. (New York: Vintage Books, 1962). In an argument similar to Bataille's, Marcuse suggests that a 'non-repressive sublimation' of sexual desire could liberate human beings and form the basis of a new civil society.

These ecstatic unions, private or public, are like "so many islands" in an otherwise broken and lifeless world.⁹⁶

The image of the loved one disrupts the chain of everyday concerns and "agitations".⁹⁷ It keeps desire pure of these technical concerns, and imposes on the lover a strict necessity through an overwhelming power. Hence the love relation could as easily be rough as tender, ugly as beautiful. As in Nietzsche's account of friendship, all that matters is that the love relation shocks the lovers with great force.⁹⁸

Yet for Bataille, although the beloved is an image, the union itself is not mere appearance. Because it is ecstatic, it can be a real union, resulting in a true identity of lover and beloved, something experienced even in silence, when there are no representations at all.⁹⁹ However, although real, the world of lovers is only "the narrowly real world of a bedroom."¹⁰⁰ As an endnote clarifies, sexual union can neither serve as the foundation for society, nor can it fulfill human life completely.¹⁰¹

Nietzsche's *amor fati* is here found in every authentic union of lovers. There is no reason for love, only a force which commands. In being exposed to this force, one becomes the victim of chance. To love another is to love chance: "For sheer love of humanity one occasionally embraces some random person".¹⁰² Likewise, love for Bataille is completely without purpose. Any perceived purpose is the consequence of an "avid and powerful will to be",¹⁰³ which is the desire to desire. Or again, as Nietzsche writes, "Ultimately one loves one's

⁹⁶ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 228.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ See for example: Beyond Good & Evil, §172 & §173; Thus Spoke Zarathustra, "On the Friend"; Selected Letters, p. 176.

⁹⁹ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 229.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 234n..

¹⁰² Beyond Good and Evil, §172

¹⁰³ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 230

desire, not the desired object."¹⁰⁴ One desires to be the victim of chance, and in this one confirms an identity between oneself and a world which is essentially capricious. "Existence recognizes that it is at the disposal of chance, provided that it can see itself on the same scale as the starry sky, or death. It recognizes itself in its magnificence, made in the image of a universe untouched by the stain of merit or intention."¹⁰⁵ Pushed beyond the limits of intentionality or purposiveness, technological society is opened up to a mythic sense of space as a whole and of time as purposeless, cyclical change.

This is not a readily acceptable proposition; as Grant comments, "I do not understand how anyone could love fate, unless within the details of our fates there could appear, however rarely, intimations that they are illumined; intimations that is, of perfection (call it if you will God) in which our desires for good find their rest and their fulfillment."¹⁰⁶ Yet the difficulty is that our desire for the good- at least manifest goods such as health and prosperity- seem to be fulfilled through technology. Grant recognizes this in many places, and insists that we not turn away from the fact that technology has been a provider of goods for human beings. For most people technology is good enough even in the absence of a transcendent Good. The 'crowd' "demands that assured life no longer depend on anything but calculations and appropriate decisions."¹⁰⁷ This crowd has internalized its many functions and naturalized them. All thoughts and actions are justified by an internally consistent logic, and achieve a formal stability. Those in the crowd desire only the assurance that the world will remain

¹⁰⁴ Beyond Good and Evil. §175 We should recall that this desire of desire is identified by Kojève as circular desire, and its self-referential character confirms the integrity and stability of the End of History.

¹⁰⁵ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 231.

¹⁰⁶ Time as History. p. 60. For a similar judgment of Nietzsche's attempt to love fate see Gilles Frazer's book Redeeming Nietzsche: On the Piety of Unbelief (London: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁰⁷ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 231.

as it is. They want an "empty and correct solution"¹⁰⁸ to the problems posed by chance. While Bataille gives a nod to the conventional causes of the Left, to "freeing oneself from problems such as hunger, cold, and social constraints",¹⁰⁹ ultimately these projects are seen to be determined by technological society. "Without having anything against justice," he writes, "Under the mask of justice, it is true that general *freedom* takes on the lackluster and neutral appearance of existence subjected to the necessities".¹¹⁰ To be truly free is to accept a chanceful fate as the determination of human existence. To work towards a set purpose is, in an illustrative reversal of terms, "to abandon life to a chain of useful acts."¹¹¹ By contrast, to be free is to accept one's fate, to enter into a purposeless cycle. In political terms, this means to engage in an endless and purposeless revolution, which "manifests itself to the eyes of the world mute with fear as the sudden explosion of limitless riots."¹¹² In essence freedom is to embrace chance and have the courage to act.

This kind of purposeless politics is for Bataille the only authentic kind of public life. It is a kind of politics (using that word loosely now) which has its basis in myth, and specifically in the mythic concept of time, which Bataille describes as a cyclical process interrupted by sudden explosions of brilliant reality.¹¹³ "Myth remains at the disposal of one who cannot be satisfied by art, science, or politics."¹¹⁴ In love we can register the emptiness of modern society in our private lives, but only myth can restore public life to its original fullness. "Myth alone returns, to one who is broken by every ordeal, the image of

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*.

¹¹⁰ *Accursed Share*. p. 38.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*.

¹¹² "Propositions". in *Visions of Excess*. §10.

¹¹³ "Propositions". §6-15.

¹¹⁴ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 232.

plenitude extended to the community where men gather."¹¹⁵ The dismemberment which technological society effects, and the complete emptiness which results, psychically prepare us for the destruction which precedes a rebirth: restraining traditions are cleared away, and our desire for ecstatic union is piqued. The ecstasies of myth require a preceding deprivation. This experience heightens our desire and prepares us to accept whatever is given to us in the moment. All of our concerns of good or bad, pleasurable or painful are exhausted through their rigid implementation. Once we have created a 'perfect' world, and when we see that world as a sham, we become ready for anything.

"Myth is perhaps a fable," but only for those who are outside of it; those who are within myth make no such distinctions.¹¹⁶ Rather, they are moved by myth, and see myth as a life-giving whole to which they owe their being. At present, technological society, though on its way to becoming a whole, is not yet a living whole, because what fables it does have (among which Bataille includes those of art, science, and politics) are viewed as tools to an end. Bataille aims to strip technology of the division between means and ends and of the drive to impose order. The head must be cut off of technological society to rid the community of the governing rationality. The image for this is the Acéphale- the headless man:

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*..

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*..

André Masson drew this picture, dedicated to Bataille and published on the cover of the first issue of the journal *Acéphale* (1936), as a depiction of the 'headless' anarchist society. The body without a governing intellect, sacred heart in hand, with guts exposed, and a skull as genitals. It is a celebration of a vital life force intertwined with death. Without the guidance of an overseeing rationality, the wholeness of technological society may be experienced in the fullness and vitality of myth.

Bataille argues that although myth is perhaps even more over-determined than instrumental reason, it is no more oppressive than a locked bedroom.¹¹⁷ Compared to the determining laws of sciences, the necessities of capricious chance are liberating. One can do whatever chance directs one to do, and these possibilities are rich and varied. True freedom is the freedom to obey the

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

dictates of myth, to experience a never-ending cycle of diverse forms- both painful and pleasurable. Fantasy constitutes life.¹¹⁸ Whereas art may approach myth in a limited way by recognizing the ultimate reality of capricious chance, myth alone "enters into human existence like a force demanding that inferior reality submit itself to its domain."¹¹⁹ The stable must submit to the changing, the particular to the whole, and the idea to bodily power.

That such things can be said marks a turn in the history of Western civilization, a history which has often been guided by idealized visions of the future. Bataille's vision of a future is not a progressive one. His vision is guided by recollections of "the old house of myth", which today appears to us in the deserted, if picturesque, rubble of temples.¹²⁰ However, the point is not to know these old myths in any objective way, but to experience them anew in the present and project them into the future. This requires a creation, like that of art, but raised from the level of fiction by a "*sacred feeling*."¹²¹ It does not, for Bataille, diminish the role of this myth-maker if he confines himself to secret circles, since the sacred must be contrasted with the profane, and the initiate set apart from the vulgar masses. "Myth is born in ritual acts hidden from the static vulgarity of disintegrated society, but the violent dynamism that belongs to it has no other object than the return to lost totality; even if it is true that the repercussions are decisive and transform the world... . The obscurity of such projects only expresses the disconcerting reorientation necessary at the paradoxical moment of despair."¹²²

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*.

¹²¹ "Sorcerer's Apprentice". p. 233.

¹²² *ibid.*.

I have argued that we can read Bataille as a critic of technological society, and that he turns to the power of myth to open us up to a new sense of wholeness and vitality. While there is little that is conventional about his writings, his yearning for an authentic community, and his reaction against the objectivizing, dehumanizing, and totalizing effects of technological society are familiar. Though I am sympathetic to these reactions, it would be hard to hold up Bataille as a model for how we ought to live, if only because his responses are so immoderate and potentially so damaging to what we would hope to save. For Bataille, the only way to save the self is to harm it: through the wound, through automutilation, and through a total abandonment of human freedom to the dictates of capricious necessity, we can open ourselves to the possibility of a new freedom in myth/technology, a never-ending cycle of self-creation and destruction.

Beyond any visceral aversion we may have to this line of thinking, I would argue that in his attempt to go beyond technology by radicalizing it, Bataille cannot be radical enough. The kinds of trespasses he encourages, meant as concrete experiences of transcendence from within technological society, can now be readily viewed and purchased. To take one apparently extreme example, automutilation is a fairly common practice for young adults looking to get out of themselves in a society which encourages breaching our human limits—most concretely, the limits of our skin and body. Tattoos, piercings, and brandings are common forms of release. The feminist sex journal On Our Backs recently published an article titled "the art of cutting"¹²³, giving instruction on erotic mutilation which is both hygienic and sensitive to the feelings of both

¹²³ Venning, Rachel. "the art of cutting" *On Our Backs*. (on-line version) #3. The journal and author are associated with the San Francisco underground BDSM sex community that attracted Foucault in the late '70's [see Miller, James E.. The Passion of Michel Foucault. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993)]. However, as soon as someone publishes an instructional manual for an act it can no longer be a true limit experience.

partners. Technology, it seems, has an appetite for anything, no matter how transgressive; the article's author concludes her instructional piece by saying that, happily, "skin is a renewable resource"¹²⁴. Instead of rupturing the integrity of the technological order, we are shown how thoroughly we are taken up by it. So where Bataille fails in provoking us to live in new and dangerous ways, he succeeds in describing the essence of technology, which is not at all a static vision of social order imposed by the mind on body, but an open-ended process. He is right to turn to myth, not as a cure for the symptoms of technology, but as a way of revealing its essence.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

Conclusion: TOWARDS WONDER

*What is worth doing in the midst of this barren twilight
is the incredibly difficult question.*

George Grant¹

I have shown how radical responses to technology tend to push it closer to its essence, making it more mythic. Lashing out against technology is like struggling in quicksand: it only speeds the sinking.

More moderate reformers of technology like Feenberg and Ihde can be agreeable in their descriptions of technology, yet weak in their responses. Their matter-of-fact solutions are 'tacked on', and don't follow from the descriptions of technology they give.² As Ellul writes of technology reformers, their reforms do not follow from what they describe, but "belong to the realm of fancy and have no bearing on reality."³ If we are to really think through technology in its essence we must set aside this vain hope to an easy solution to the 'problem' of technology, since this vanity only radicalizes the technological imperative.⁴

¹ Technology and Empire. p. 78.

² Feenberg proposes that we invent 'alternative' technologies. ["Looking Backward, Looking Forward: Reflections on the 20th Century" in Technology, Globalization and Philosophy] Ihde abandons the Heideggerian questioning of technology that characterizes his earlier work, Technics and praxis. (Holland: D. Reidel Pub. Co., 1979) and suggests that we get on with practical business of managing technology, that we simply ask "Which Globalization Do We Want?" [in Technology, Globalization and Philosophy] and choose.

³ Technological Society. p. xxxi. This disclaimer from offering any 'solution' to the 'problem' of technology is made most explicit in his Forward to the American edition (1964). Ellul specifically addresses the pragmatic orientation of the American audience, their urge to ask- 'How do we solve this problem?'- before the depth of the 'problem' is fully appreciated.

⁴ Arthur Melzer makes this point convincingly in his essay, "The Problem with 'The Problem with Technology'", in Technology, Globalization, and Philosophy.

In contrast with the assurance of would-be technology reformers- radical or moderate- Heidegger, Grant, Vico, Kojève, McLuhan and Ellul are ambiguous in their responses to technology. Their aim is to think through technology, to look in wonder on our world in order to see it as it is. They each have their own responses to what they see, but they are careful not to confuse these responses with the way the world is. Their responses to technology are ambiguous, and rather than promising an easy escape from technology, this ambiguity forces us to think even more intently about technology. We are made to wonder about technology.

Let us look at these responses to technology in turn, beginning with Vico. In the *Practic* to his New Science⁵ unpublished in his life- Vico specifies a more practical response than an evocation of openness to divine providence, which is as close to a 'solution' as he comes in the published conclusion to the New Science. The fact that the *Practic* was not published suggests doubts about whether Vico saw it as a workable solution. However, even in and of itself the *Practic* is a curious 'solution'. Superficially in the *Practic* little seems to be wrong: Vico's advice seems to be to conserve existing traditions. He addresses himself as a philosopher to princes of commonwealths,⁶ and encourages them to continue their diligent, praise-worthy, noble, upright, constant, serious and grave ways.⁷ As representatives of the reasoning element, which embodies

⁵ Vico, Giambattista. "Practic of the New Science". Thomas G. Bergin and Max H. Fisch (trans.) in Giambattista Vico's Science of Humanity. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Donald Phillip Verene (ed.) (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

⁶ *Practic*. §1406.

⁷ *Practic*. §1410.

order, light, and harmony, they must impress themselves upon the "other"⁸- that which is "diverse from itself"- the "formless, defective, dark, sluggish, divisible, mobile."⁹ However, it is difficult to see how principles of conservative order can arise from within the barbaric, mob-driven state of affairs that Vico describes. All opinions are considered equal, and the academies, which should guard the noble against the base, instead encourage a variety of critical reflection caustic to common sense and the observance of tradition.

However, this conservatism is only superficial; deeper down, there is a radical historicism in which he sees a new birth for civilization from out of the complete ruin of the present one. At the end of the *Practic* Vico identifies the princes whom he addresses as a race of "robust giants" who are called by their strength "to found humanity."¹⁰ I suggest that these are the same giants Vico describes in his myth of origins in the *New Science*,¹¹ the proto-humans that lived undifferentiated from their environment. Given this connection between the *Practic* and the myth of origins, the advice given in the *Practic* is not conservative at all, but effectively radicalizes what we know as technology in order to return us to the undetermined state of myth- a whole new beginning. This brings us back to the millenarianism that crops up in Bataille, Riefenstahl, Bookchin, and

⁸ *Practic*. §1408. Vico's indictment against "the other" suggests a political dimension to what the Stranger says about the nature of "the different" or "not-being" in Plato's *Sophist* [258d-259b]. As that argument goes, it is impossible to speak in rational terms about 'not-being'; thus Plato has the Stranger recall Parmenides' injunction to "keep back thy thought from this way of inquiry." [258d; 28B7] The present-day, post-modernist advocates of 'the other', of difference and multiplicity, could be answered with the Stranger's words: "if he imagines he has discovered an embarrassing puzzle and takes delight in reducing argument to a tug of war, he is wasting his pains on a triviality". [259c] Our post-modern morass can be linked to Heidegger's weird inversion of Parmenides' injunction against inquiry into nonbeing, which he takes as an indication that nonbeing "must be specially considered". [Introduction to *Metaphysics*. p. 111]

⁹ *Practic*. §1408.

¹⁰ *ibid*.

¹¹ *New Science*. §62; §369-73; and §1097.

Barthes. Vico's decision not to publish the *Practic* shows him cautiously backing away from this sort of response. What we are left with as readers is an overall ambiguity concerning how to respond to technology.

Asking Kojève for advice is like asking directions from the Cheshire-Cat in Wonderland. One gets only an elusive, ironic smile. When asked by admiring, so-called radical students what they should do during the Berlin student rebellion in 1967, Kojève is said to have replied, "Learn Greek."¹² This is not 'constructive' advice. Rather, as Kojève sees it, there are no truly revolutionary possibilities. 'Get on board,' he seems to be saying. Become a bureaucrat and a part of the system; all alternatives are considered criminal.¹³

If we can judge by the example he set with his life, outside of his work of planetary housekeeping- negotiating for what would become the EU and GATT- Kojève wrote philosophy, but only as an edifying hobby on weekends. Philosophy is reduced to a kind of lifestyle, to the pleasures of buzzing conversations with French intellectuals and sonorous letter-writing with an American scholar. Philosophy is over, along with politics. There is no true desire, and without desire philosophy becomes lifestyle and politics becomes entertainment. The question of how to live does not, therefore, appear to have any real urgency in Kojève's thought. The Cheshire-Cat just keeps his ironic grin, and leaves one wondering what to do or think.

¹² Lilla, Mark. "The End of Philosophy" p. 3. The 1967-69 student movement in Germany is comparable to the present anti-war and anti-globalization protests, in its focus upon American imperialism abroad and restrictions on civil liberties at home. Kojève could give the same advice now as then.

¹³ How to manage criminals becomes a central question in Kojève's description of Right in the UHS, *The Outline of a Phenomenology of Right*. He argues that criminal behaviour is annulled through the intervention of a disinterested third party, the State in the UHS.

McLuhan is notoriously ambiguous in his presentation. His experimental style of writing is strange and disorientating. This disorientation is not accidental, but is supposed to alert us to how technology is threatening our sense of perspective and our ability to understand media. Electric media, or in the terms of this essay, technology, abolish the individual's sense of perspective. The depth awareness and tribalism that are associated with electric media wash over the detached individual. McLuhan writes that whether this is 'a good thing' is a "question that admits a wide solution."¹⁴ And there he stops. His main concern is understanding media- understanding technology. Though he hopes to ease the transition from old to new media, this is only a palliative measure. What is first is understanding.

McLuhan is not out to predict or control the future; rather, he desires to understand the world in which he lives. His technophile followers do more to confirm his arguments than suggest an evangelical message in his writings. McLuhan was not a proponent of the global village as a place of global, folkish harmony. To the contrary, he warned that the global village could be a very violent place, given the irrational character of tribalism coupled with the global reach of electric technologies. This violence is difficult to localize or contain. Yet still, McLuhan is not discouraging the spread of electric technologies, since this would be impossible. Rather, he wants to understand their effects, and to understand the world in which we live.

Ellul is skeptical about any solutions to the problem of technology, and dismisses hopes for a solution as fanciful. This has partly to do with his

¹⁴ Understanding Media. p. 4.

sociological approach, which allows for individual action but does not consider it as significant in a collective sense. Ellul is criticized for being too deterministic,¹⁵ but this has more to do with the level of his analysis than with a flaw in his account. The individual may enjoy some freedom, but as a society we are driven by technology. He sees an obvious necessity to technological development: barring some great disaster, spontaneous collective action, or the intervention of God, the technological drive to increased efficiency in social organization will continue.¹⁶ As McLuhan sees the development of electric media as inevitable, so too does Ellul see the drive to efficiency as inevitable.

Apart from the catastrophic breakdown of the technological system or divine intervention, Ellul asks of his readers to seek to preserve their freedom from the necessities of technique, in order to transcend the determinism of technique in their daily lives. "How is this to be done?" he asks, "I do not yet know."¹⁷ His answer is strictly evocative, and it works by setting the necessity he describes against an uncertain potential for individual freedom. The power of his evocation consists in this ambiguous tension between freedom and necessity.

Heidegger and Grant are both especially ambiguous in their responses to technology. As the exergue to this conclusion suggests, Grant sees no easy answer to how we should live with technology. This should not imply an empty or indefinite vagueness. Rather, Grant's dilemma opens us to the question of technology in its full and definite urgency.

¹⁵ See for example Eduardo Sabrovski's essay, "Is Technology Autonomous?" pp. 73-91 in *Research in Philosophy and Technology*. (1995; 15)

¹⁶ *The Technological Society*. p. xxx.

¹⁷ *Technological Society*. xxxiii. Ellul has not found an answer by the time he writes *The Technological System* either. Rather, the shift from describing the technological society to the technological system dismisses even this limited separation between individual and society.

Heidegger and Grant evoke an openness to think what is given, and what is given to both to think is technology. Both share an understanding of technology as a calling forth of nature as object to give its reasons to us as subjects. However, as Heidegger writes and Grant repeats in other words, "The modern freedom of subjectivity vanishes totally in the objectivity commensurate with it."¹⁸ Our mastery of nature as object requires us to master our own nature, and to do this efficiently requires that we objectify ourselves. Both Heidegger and Grant see technology as ultimately issuing forth in cybernetics- the calling forth of human nature as an object. In the face of this calling-forth, they attempt to short-circuit technology by evoking an immediate and spontaneous receptivity joining humans and their world. This openness is experienced in the wonder of thinking.

So long as technology is conceived as a set of neutral tools for our use, and so long as the drive to master technology animates our thinking about technology, the essence of technology will be unthought. By opening themselves to the determinations of technology in thought, Heidegger and Grant relieve those determinations of their driving character.

In more practical terms, Heidegger puts forth resolve and silence as responses to technology. Both responses serve to undermine the division between subject and object. Resolve is a choosing to choose in the absence of a transcendent standard, and as such resolve opens one up to the necessities of the moment. Though it may appear arbitrary, resolve is not an expression of empty subjectivism:

¹⁸ "Age of the World Picture" p. 152n.

Resoluteness, as *authentic Being-one's-Self*, does not detach Dasein from the world, nor does it isolate it so that it becomes a free-floating "I". And how should it, when resoluteness as authentic disclosedness, is *authentically* nothing else than *Being-in-the-world*? Resoluteness brings the Self right into its current concernful Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand, and pushes it into solicitous Being with Others.¹⁹

Resolve does not set one apart from the world, but rather situates one firmly within the world, in one's particular time and place. In resolve one freely chooses the world as it is given, so that its givenness ceases to appear as an objective determination, and we cease to impose ourselves upon the world as masterful subjects.

There is a quiet sense to resolve. One must keep silent to hear the call of conscience that gives rise to resolve. The silent thinking that Heidegger emphasizes in his later thought, is in Being and Time laid out as a pre-condition for resolve:

Thus the mode of Articulative discourse which belongs to wanting to have a conscience, is one of reticence. Keeping silent has been characterized as an essential possibility of discourse. ...Only in keeping silent does the conscience call;²⁰

Something is given in the call to conscience. The openness of silent listening and of sturdy resolve evoke this same given.

Heidegger's openness to the given is expressed in both his pervasive worldliness- Being-in-the-world - and in his occasional millenarianism. There is a sense in which what is given- technology- may lead to either the complete destruction of the world or to a whole new world. In his preface to Pathmarks, Heidegger argues that the technological drive returns us to "the oldest of the

¹⁹ Being and Time. p. 344.

²⁰ Being and Time. pp. 342-3.

old."²¹ In the terms of this essay, technology returns us to myth. In technology as in myth, the complete destruction of the world and the rebirth of the world go together:

It could be that history and what it hands down to us may be leveled out into the uniform storage of information and as such made useful for the inevitable planning needed by a humanity under control.

Whether thinking will then come to an end in a bustle of information, or whether a descensional passage into the protection offered by its provenance, concealed from thought itself, is reserved for its vocation remains the question. It now directs thinking into a region this side of pessimism and optimism.²²

The leveling, the planning, and the control required by technology could represent our total closure to Being, or it could open us to the fullness of Being by integrating us into our environment and giving us over to fate.

Grant, like Heidegger, dismisses the terms 'optimism' and 'pessimism'. He views the terms as projections of pre-set perspectives onto the world, and sees this as an impediment to contemplating our fate as technological beings.²³ In both Grant and Heidegger's encounters with technology, they make an encounter with fate, giving themselves over to it in thought, wondering at what has been given to us to think. In our time, it is predictable that this language of fate should be confused with a language of pessimism. Pessimism is an outlook, a perspective that judges that the future will inevitably be worse than the past.²⁴ For both Grant and Heidegger, whether the future will be better or worse is an open question. As Grant writes, "The kindest of all God's dispensations is that

²¹ Pathmarks, p. XIII.

²² ibid.

²³ Technology and Empire, p. 63.

²⁴ Lament for a Nation, p. 14.

individuals cannot predict the future in detail."²⁵ Some things are given to think, while others are held back.

Wonder is a sense of openness to the world as it is given, not as we would have it be. Wonder puts one within the world, at the center of things, and not at some strange, Archimedian vantage, looking down on the world. Wonder abolishes perspective through involvement, through the intensity of experience. 'Positive' and 'negative' perspectives fade in significance. Wonder can be either awe at the beauty of things or terror at the precariousness of human existence. Wonder flows easily over the human categories of good and bad. Wonder also disables the drive towards the crude control of human beings, the drive that would make us all "adjusted little members of the ant community",²⁶ and opens us to the possibility of real thinking. According to Grant (and to Plato²⁷ and Aristotle²⁸) it is "spontaneous wonder"²⁹ that is evidence of our desire to know. "Astonishment about being itself, about what is, is philosophy."³⁰

To think technology is to enter into it in thought, to look with wonder upon the world we share. Grant writes: "Therefore, as living now, the task of thought among those held by something that cannot allow themselves to make a complete 'yes' to time as history, is not to inoculate themselves against the

²⁵ Lament for a Nation, p. 97.

²⁶ "What is Philosophy?" p. 35 in George Grant Reader.

²⁷ *Theaet.* 155d.

²⁸ *Met.* 982^b12.

²⁹ "What is Philosophy?" p. 35.

³⁰ George Grant in Conversation, (with David Cayley) (Concord: Anansi, 1995) p. 56. Grant chooses 'astonishment' here rather than 'wonder' because of its sense of forcefulness, contrasted with the romantic sense of 'wonder'. However, there is also a sense of- 'It cannot be...' to astonishment, whereas in wonder one is acceptant of that which is. To think something is to accept it into thought, to let it come to be thought.

present, but first to enter what is thought in that present."³¹ Grant's words timidly (and prudently) echo Heidegger's, when the thinker says:

...precisely the essence of technology must harbor in itself the growth of the saving power.³²

Heidegger too enters into technology, though he does not reserve an eternal essence that exists outside of history. There is the important difference between Heidegger as a radically historicist thinker and Grant as a Christian philosopher. However, Grant always insists that thought about eternity must arise out of thought concerning what is temporally present. He warns that we should not 'inoculate ourselves against the present'. Eternity is an easy escape from the events of our time. Yet entering into the present and thinking our fate does not mean a careless abandonment to historical change, change moved by the unfolding of the essence of technology. Grant writes: "it would be immoderate and uncourageous and perhaps unwise to live in the midst of our present drive, merely working in it and celebrating it, and not also listening or watching or simply waiting for intimations of deprivation which might lead us to see the beautiful as the image, in the world, of the good."³³

Listening or watching or waiting. These are strange ways to act- they hardly seem like actions at all. Yet, like action, it is difficult to tell what will come out of nothing. An act of expectant waiting does not have to be a blessing upon what comes into being, nor is it necessarily a condemnation. In a very Heideggerian sounding phrase, Grant writes, "As in every historical condition,

³¹ Grant, George. Time as History. p. 285 in George Grant Reader.

³² "The Question Concerning Technology" p. 334.

³³ Technology and Empire. p. 143.

some not only have to live their fate, but let it come to be thought."³⁴ What Grant and Heidegger let come to be thought is technology. The particularities of our historical condition are our given, and only by entering into the given can one have a concrete basis for thought.

The curious thing about our given- technology- is its seemingly unlimited capacity to keep all thought as its own. For us, openness to what is given means openness to technology, but this openness seems to require that we close ourselves off from nature as our given. Technology, unlike nature, does not serve well as a stepping stone for broader thinking. As technology integrates all processes with one another, transforms all beings into resources for use, and even re-jigs language into a pry-lever for our problems, it encloses us in a self-referential cosmos. The many goods that go with this are manifest, but even the most comfortable house can be claustrophobic if one does not get a chance to step outside and see the wider world.

Something like this is denied to us. One can hold onto past goods from outside of the sphere of technology, "But no one can deny that today technology, industry, and economy, setting the standard for the work of the self-production of human beings, determine the reality of all that is real."³⁵ One can reject the conceptions of human nature and of historicism that underlie this reality, but not that technology is a real presence in our world, and a presence that crowds out all others. However, if we were to relieve technology of the over-determinations that enframe it and the sheer willfulness that animates it, we might at least- in

³⁴ Technology and Empire. p. 15.

³⁵ Heidegger, Martin. "Principles of Thinking" in The Piety of Thinking. James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo (trans.) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976) p. 57.

Heidegger's terms- come into a free relationship with technology,³⁶ and be able to look on our world in wonder.

This is a lesson straight out of myth. Myth is the fullest expression of wonder. However, it would be a parody of mythic man to portray him as a slack-jawed star-gazer. He has his ways, his *ethos*, and this is laid out clearly in his stories. To describe the patterned exchange of release and restraint that holds the mythic *ethos* together would be to go beyond my subject. I have shown by argument and example the likeness between technology and myth; it follows from this that specific myths such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and the Finnish *Kalevala* are well suited for describing our technological world. The centuries' old prejudices against myth are losing their hold, and so we can now look to these myths for an account of the way the world is and for prescriptions on how we should live. The *Odyssey*, for example, is not just a collection of far-fetched travelers' tales, but contains sensible codes of conduct for hospitality, charity, and manners in our multi-cultural world. The *Iliad* teaches codes of friendship and manifest honours that are suited to contemporary materialist dispositions, yet ennobling in their effects. The *Kalevala* provides good, practical advice for new husbands and wives.³⁷ This is only to hint at the richness of these myths and others as sources of instruction. There needs to be further study of myths not just as historical curiosities, but as vital sources of wisdom and instruction. This is made possible by the affinities between our technological thinking and mythic thinking. Myth calls out to us to be retold.

³⁶ "The Question Concerning Technology" p. 311.

³⁷ I recently had the honour of speaking at the wedding of a friend, who requested that I read passages from the *Kalevala*- from canto XXIII, "Songs of Duty", and canto XXIV, "The Teaching of the Bridegroom". That ancient instruction is as vital and vibrant as a new marriage.

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