

# AESTHETIC IDEOLOGY IN THE ANTHROPOCENE: ON THE TOTAL MOBILIZATION OF THE EARTH INTO THE STATUS OF A WORK OF ART

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**ABSTRACT:** In light of the radical change to the reach and range of technical alteration, the co-evolution of mankind and the biosphere has become one of the principal questions of our age. As we find that man has altered the planet at just about every scale we are capable of measuring, the question concerning the essence of technology, in its power to not only imitate but in many ways even surpass the forces of nature, has become critical for the discussion about global environmental change. Often, the empirical findings of the geosciences have been interpreted as a motive to question the long-standing dualism between nature and artifice that itself has served, during almost the entirety of the history of Western philosophy, as the productive tension through which concepts such as technology and history have hitherto been conceptualized. But if much of our contemporary discourse on global environmental change is premised upon the functional and formal similarities between natural and artificial organs, I argue that returning to the intellectual current of 1920s and 30s Weimar Culture, where the relationship between globalization and industrialization first became of central hermeneutic concern, may shed new light on the Anthropocene as the conceptual site for a resurged geoaesthetics that denotes the ontological ubiquity of the designed environment, making the technological the foundation for a modern typological cosmology. Examining Ernst Jünger's early work on the meaning of the planetary impact of modern technology, I caution that by reifying the cybernetic disclosure of the earth as a natural-artificial hybrid into a naturalistic ontology of work, we are liable to render our planet perfectly functional to its sustained instrumental appropriation as standing-reserve.

**KEYWORDS:** Aestheticization of politics; Anthropocene; Modern technology; political myth; Total mobilization; Will to power.

## THE POLITICAL MOBILIZATION OF THE AESTHETIC

“Produced with the idealism of the control of nature, technology now serves as the instrument which will ‘mythically and directly’ cut through alienation, not by

‘using and illuminating the secrets of nature via technology mediated for the human scheme of things,’ but rather by reemerging with nature.”<sup>1</sup> Although it serves as an excellent description of the ontological status of technology in our contemporary discourse on the so-called “Anthropocene,” the above passage is actually an excerpt from Ansgar Hillach’s commentary on Walter Benjamin’s essay “Theories of German Fascism,” which, in turn, is a critical review of a 1930 anthology on war edited by, among others, Ernst Jünger. If fascism, war, and even Jünger himself seem like three rather far-fetched figures to relate to a stratigraphical dispute about geological time units in the twenty-first century, my attempt in this paper will be to convince you – the reader – otherwise.

We may begin by noting that my sentiments are at least somewhat shared by the philosopher Vincent Blok,<sup>2</sup> who recently published a reevaluation of Jünger’s ruminations on technology in the light of Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer’s now-famous declaration that we have entered an “epoch of man.”<sup>3</sup> Given that it is connected to the supposed inauguration of a new epoch in natural history, where, as Jan Zalasiewicz et al. have put it, “[...] natural and human forces [are fundamentally] intertwined, so that the fate of the one determines the fate of the other,”<sup>4</sup> the concept of the Anthropocene has rather unsurprisingly proved to be fertile ground for a renewal of interest in the ontological question of the nature of modern technology. In light of the radical change to the reach and range of technical alteration, the co-evolution of mankind and the biosphere has become one of the principal questions of our age. As we find that man has altered the planet at just about every scale we are capable of measuring, the question concerning the essence of technology, in its power to not only imitate but in many ways even surpass the forces of nature, has become critical for the discussion about global environmental change. Often, the empirical findings of the geosciences have been interpreted as a motive to question the long-standing dualism between nature and artifice that itself has served, during almost the

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<sup>1</sup> Hillach, Ansgar, “The Aesthetics of Politics: Walter Benjamin’s ‘Theories of German Fascism,’” *New German Critique*, Vol. 17, 1979, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> Blok, Vincent, *Ernst Jünger’s Philosophy of Technology: Heidegger and the Poetics of the Anthropocene*, London, Routledge, 2017 (subsequently referred to in the text as EJ)

<sup>3</sup> Crutzen, Paul J. & Stoermer, Eugene F., “The ‘Anthropocene,’” *IGBP Global Change Newsletter*, Vol. 41, 2000; Crutzen, Paul J., “Geology of Mankind,” *Nature*, Vol. 415, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Zalasiewicz, Jan et al., “The New World of the Anthropocene,” *Environmental Science & Technology*, Vol. 44, 2010, p. 2231.

entirety of the history of Western philosophy, as the productive tension through which concepts such as technology and history have hitherto been conceptualized<sup>5</sup> – an interpretation that have found support in the conviction of philosophers and historians alike that “[...] human history liberated from the natural history of the Earth has been wiped away, because [...] the two histories have now converged, giving us a kind of hybrid Earth, of nature injected with human will.”<sup>6</sup> Of course, on some level, the environmental change we witness in its wake is due to human impact, but there are many systems – technological systems included – that embed humans in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish what is strictly human about them, as well as what “human” in this context even means. It is this bewildering enantiodromia, having already figured as a central trope in interwar concerns about the global extension of technology by writers such as Jünger,<sup>7</sup> that has seemingly returned with full force in the twenty-first century Anthropocene discourse: precisely when the power of modern technology has become recognized as an existential threat due to its capacity to alter the environment on a planetary scale, technological systems of production, organization, and logistics have ironically come to be regarded as essentially natural processes, no different than any other of the earth’s geophysical forces.

While the guiding motive of Blok’s monograph on Jünger (*EJ* 137-141) centers on the way in which his stereoscopic method and poetic experiments may afford us a leap across the time wall from human history into what Daniel Lord Smail has called “deep history,”<sup>8</sup> I consequently want to emphasize another dimension to Jünger’s work that I believe is equally pressing; namely, his antihumanist fusion of the artificial with the natural into an abiotic organicism, revealed as the epochal truth of a fully technologized planet. For if much of our contemporary discourse on global environmental change is premised upon the functional and formal similarities between natural and artificial organs; between biological and technological self-organization; between the propagation of life on the hand and

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<sup>5</sup> Chakrabarty, Dipesh, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2009, p. 207.

<sup>6</sup> Hamilton, Clive & Grinevald, Jacques, “Was the Anthropocene Anticipated?,” *The Anthropocene Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2015, p. 68.

<sup>7</sup> Sloterdijk, Peter, *Infinite Mobilization*, trans. S. Berjan, Cambridge, Polity, 2020; Hui, Yuk, “For a Planetary Thinking,” *e-flux*, Vol. 114, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Smail, Daniel L., *On Deep History and the Brain*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008.

of capital on the other; then returning to the intellectual current of 1920s and 30s Weimar Culture, where the relationship between globalization and industrialization first became of central hermeneutic concern, may arguably shed new light on the Anthropocene as the conceptual site for a resurged geoaesthetics that denotes the ontological ubiquity of the designed environment, making the technological the foundation for a modern typological cosmology.<sup>9</sup> In particular, I will read Jünger's early work through the lens of Ernst Cassirer's analysis of the resurgence of mythical thought in modernity,<sup>10</sup> to argue that what Jünger is partly engaged in is the cultivation of a modern technique of myth. My reason for doing so is two-fold: firstly, to complement Blok's silence on the relationship between aesthetics and politics that lies at the heart of ideological efficacy of Jünger's Gestalt philosophy, founded on a "[...] conflation of artistic form-giving and political will";<sup>11</sup> and secondly, to demonstrate that Blok's silence on this matter is symptomatic of his interpretation of the relevance of Jünger's ruminations on technology for the Anthropocene in general. Although my reading of Jünger thus differs significantly from Blok's, this is not to question the importance of his contribution but merely to voice the concern that his implicit affirmation of Jünger's aestheticization of the earth into a work of art is illustrative of the abovementioned tendency to reduce the meaning of the Anthropocene to that of a natural-epochal fact, thereby repressing the ideological function of such an aestheticization. Instead, I will argue that by reifying the cybernetic disclosure of the earth as a natural-artificial hybrid into a naturalistic ontology of work, our planet is rendered perfectly functional to its sustained instrumental appropriation as standing-reserve.

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<sup>9</sup> Gelderloos, Carl, *Biological Modernism: The New Human in Weimar Culture*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2019, pp. 3-24; Shapiro, Gary, *Nietzsche's Earth: Great Events, Great Politics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2016, pp. 134-165.

<sup>10</sup> Cassirer, Ernst, *The Myth of the State*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1946 (subsequently referred to in the text as *MS*).

<sup>11</sup> Jay, Martin, "'The Aesthetic Ideology' as Ideology; or, What Does It Mean to Aestheticize Politics?," *Cultural Critique*, Vol. 21, 1992, p. 42.

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## TECHNOLOGY AS A CONCEPTUAL SITE FOR POLITICAL MYTHS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

It was in the wake of the First World War that the nature of modern technology properly emerged as a pressing question. First and foremost, the reason for this had to do with the sudden transformation of social life through technological change. Referring to the decade between 1920 and 1930, with a particularly apt expression, as “the age of complete mechanization,” the historian of architecture Sigfried Giedion noted how this was a period during which almost every aspect of Western society was rapidly altered by the general spread of a variety of technical inventions.<sup>12</sup> An early example of such an ontological concern is that raised by Oswald Spengler, who, in his essay *Man and Technics*, first published in German in 1931, defined *Technik* – conventionally translated as “technics” – as “the tactics of the living.” Technics, Spengler argues, “[...] is not to be understood in terms of the implement. What matters is not how one fashions things, but what one does with them; not the weapon, but the battle. [...] This battle is life – life, indeed, in the Nietzschean sense, a grim, pitiless, no-quarter battle of the Will-to-Power.”<sup>13</sup> Similar sentiments flowed through the writings of other authors steeped in the Weimar Culture of the early 1930s, always with the globalization of technology as a proof and symbol of this reinterpretation. Among the most important of these fellow-travelers was Jünger, whose work strikes an equally ambiguous tone toward technology as simultaneously an expression of man’s freedom as well as of his destiny. Another prominent interpreter of his age, convinced that it confronted man with an existential condition marked by emergence of a new Gestalt, Jünger characterized this period as one of “total mobilization.”<sup>14</sup> Here, the concept of technology does not so much refer to objects in the world as to an increasingly all-encompassing horizon of experience, which, as Jünger suggested, would culminate in planetary homogeneity. Total mobilization, then, describes how the global extension of technology bulldozes

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<sup>12</sup> Krois, John M., “The Age of Complete Mechanization,” in A. S. Hoel & I. Folkvord (eds.), *Ernst Cassirer on Form and Technology: Contemporary Readings*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> Spengler, Oswald, *Man and Technics: A Contribution to a Philosophy of Life*, trans. C. F. Atkinson, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1976, pp. 9-11 (subsequently referred to in the text as *MT*).

<sup>14</sup> Jünger, Ernst, “Die Totale Mobilmachung,” in *Sämtliche Werke – Band 7, Essays I: Betrachtungen zur Zeit*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1980; Jünger, Ernst, “Technology and the Gestalt of the Worker,” in C. Mitcham & R. Mackey (eds.), *Philosophy and Technology: Readings in the Philosophical Problems of Technology*, New York, Free Press, 1983.

cultural specificities wherever it encroaches, replacing it with a uniform world wherein the only ideal is for everything to function according to the endless means of instrumental perfection – resulting in a global civilization that worships cost-benefit maximization as the sole sacred form of value. It is in the turning from the particulars of a living culture to the mere mechanical execution of global blueprints that Jünger sees the question concerning technology as having become one of the most pressing philosophical concerns of the modern epoch.<sup>15</sup> In the era of planetary-technological rule, man possesses neither a self-conscious and grounded connection to his past nor the ability to forge a relationship with the liberal futurity of progress.<sup>16</sup> Instead, he has come to live within in a historically atemporal framework, manifest in the perfection and precision of technological design, distribution, and use.<sup>17</sup> It is an epoch without history, one that resides within a timeless temporal horizon structured by the self-absorbed immediacy of instrumental concern; namely, that of productivity and efficiency as an end-in-itself.

Unsurprisingly given the inconceivable loss of human life and the waste laid to social infrastructure, numerous intellectuals that sought to give voice to the interwar *Zeitgeist* – not least those writing within the context of the culturally depressed, economically hyperinflated, and politically exhausted Germany – painted a deeply pessimistic picture where man was portrayed not so much the master of his own technology as subject to it. As noted by Cassirer, “[t]his was the natural environment upon which the political myths” of the twentieth century, which had heretofore already been tolled by the German Romantics, “could grow up and in which they could find ample nourishment.” (*MS* 278). Perhaps more than anything else during the First World War, what struck early twentieth-century writers like Jünger was how its destruction had abruptly overturned the modern promise of technological progress, such that, suddenly, man could no longer understand the meaning of his own industry. Modern war was fought not only with armies but first and foremost with large-scale systems of manufacture and logistics. Machine-like calculation had triumphed and, as a

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<sup>15</sup> Turnbull, Neil, “Modern Technology within the Western Theological Imaginary,” *Im@go – A Journal of the Social Imaginary*, Vol. 6, 2015, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> Jünger, Ernst, *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt*, Hamburg, Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1932, p. 91 (subsequently referred to in the text as *DA*).

<sup>17</sup> Jünger, “Technology and the Gestalt of the Worker,” p. 284.

result, human life had become but a poker chip that could be unscrupulously gambled away in the name of instrumental reason.<sup>18</sup> It had turned man into a cybernetic instrument whose efficiency in carrying out orders the Enlightenment *philosophes* could not even in their wildest dreams have imagined (*DA* 106-109, 146-148). Evoking the same teleological language as Spengler, Jünger wrote that, “[i]t arose when the spirit of the machine took possession even of the battlefields of Europe, and the flying man and the man in the tank and the scientifically trained leader of the raid squad appeared.”<sup>19</sup> Behind the apparent usefulness of technological instruments, Jünger saw at work in technology the esoteric, mystical forces that had been a central aspect of the anti-modern streaks in German Romantic nationalism.

The intellectual historian Jeffrey Herf has described Spengler, Jünger, and to some degree Martin Heidegger, as belonging to a loosely connected group of German intellectuals that sought to reconcile “[...] the antimodernist, romantic, and irrationalist ideas present in German nationalism” with the “[...] most obvious manifestation of means-ends rationality, that is, modern technology.”<sup>20</sup> In the work of these authors, a *Völkish* nationalism imbued with German Idealist *Geist* and Nietzschean *Wille zur Macht* was rather remarkably merged with an enthusiasm and fascination for industrial and military technology, culminating in the ideal of a “reactionary modernism” around which emerged a cultural movement of conservative revolutionaries who sought to embrace modernity all the while reacting against what was lambasted as the devastating shallowness of its liberalism, utilitarianism, and scientific materialism. Bourgeois values such as utility and profit concealed the essence of technology (*DA* 52-56), leading the reactionary moderns to reproach the liberal progress-philistines for failing to perceive in machines the same vital sense that Nietzsche had characterized as essential to life in general (*MT* 43). Thus, technology was no longer perceived as a means by which humans could express themselves in order to flourish. On the

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<sup>18</sup> Costea, Bogdan & Amiridis, Kostas, “Ernst Jünger, Total Mobilization, and the Work of War,” *Organization*, Vol. 24, No. 4, 2017, pp. 476-477.

<sup>19</sup> Jünger, Ernst, *Copse 125: A Chronicle from the Trench Warfare of 1918*, trans. B. Creighton, London, Chatto & Windus, 1930, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Herf, Jeffrey C., *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 1.

contrary, humans had become but a means for the modern technological realization of an asubjective will to power (*DA* 71). Such was the result of every sphere of life having become a planned, calculated, and organized routine – a blueprint to be executed with maximum efficiency and minimal risk to the Field Marshall’s resources. Put differently, the ontological significance of the globalization of technology was, according to the reactionary moderns, not to be found in new modes of transportation and communication but in the coordination and systematization – and, in effect, instrumentalization – of objects and subjects alike.<sup>21</sup> What characterizes technology in the modern era is an overarching *Gestalt* that inevitably leads toward the administration of the entire energy-resource of “the people,” “the nation,” “the proletariat,” and even “the earth” into an autogenic process of endless self-organization.

But if the globalization of technology, wherever it has taken hold, has been ultimately successful in its destruction of tradition, so as to reduce all values into the instrumental realm of efficiency, and thereby ensure the least resistance possible for the continued instrumentalization of every domain of life, there is nevertheless a certain saving power in technology itself, in that the concomitant nihilism, uncertainty, and existential disorientation that follows in its wake may allow us to cultivate a new ontological reorientation to technology and its authority; which, according to Jünger, is best conceived through a return to a primal understanding of the modern machine.<sup>22</sup> Refracting technology through the prism of the mythical symbols of an irrational will to power, Jünger has been interpreted as paving the way for the coming of National Socialism, celebrating the arrival of modernity for giving birth to an ontology based upon the principle of totalized aesthetic value – irreducible to calculable and measurable quantity. Such an interpretation of his work is most congruent with Jünger’s recollection of his experience as a shock trooper during the First World War, initially expressed in his memoir of fighting at the Western Front, *In Stahlgewittern*, and then further developed upon in an essay notoriously criticized by Benjamin for its

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<sup>21</sup> Jünger, “Die Totale Mobilmachung,” pp. 125-126.

<sup>22</sup> Turnbull, Neil, “Heidegger and Jünger on the ‘Significance of the Century’: Technology as a Theme in Conservative Thought,” *Writing Technologies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2009, p. 13.



aestheticization of armed conflict into that of a sublime spectacle.<sup>23</sup>

In his subsequent work, *Der Arbeiter*, Jünger sought to interrogate the disembodied and mechanical phenomenon of the war as a Gestalt shift that had revealed the inadequacy of humanistic categories for interpretation. Tracing the same intellectual path as many other reactionary moderns, Jünger contrasted the poetic dimension to technology with its derivative: instrumentalism. The latter was abstract, lifeless, and repetitive; the former: concrete, lively, and creative. In this sense he agreed with Spengler that technology could not be properly understood through social, political, or economic categories. On the contrary, Jünger perceived the social, political, and economic structures of modernity, including the great industry of mechanical warfare, as mere empirical manifestations of a hidden, world-transforming power that transcended the causal-material realm, and which was constantly at work behind all things (*DA* 81-82);<sup>24</sup> that is, the primordial force that shapes reality into sensible objects in the first place. At this point, man and machine seamlessly blends into each other insofar as both play an equally secondary role – as but organs – to the realization of such a metaphysical will to power (*DA* 149-150).<sup>25</sup> Since the technical framework itself is but a manifestation of an elemental “stamping” and “imprinting” that conditions human experience and behavior (*DA* 31), technology cannot be fully understood in technical terms. Concealed in the midst of such technical procedures, then, is the eternal, artistic will that shapes reality.<sup>26</sup> As Jünger writes:

Es leuchtet ein, daß eine Kunst, die die Gestalt des Arbeiters zu repräsentieren hat, im engen Zusammenhange mit der Arbeit zu suchen ist. [...] In der Werkstättenlandschaft nämlich, in der wir uns befinden, geschieht die Planung im Rahmen einer Totalen Mobilmachung, die auf Herrschaft gerichtet ist, während die Gestaltung sich bereits auf diese Herrschaft bezieht und durch sie ermöglicht wird. (*DA* 208, 210).

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<sup>23</sup> Benjamin, Walter, “Theories of German Fascism: On the Collection of Essays War and Warrior, Edited by Ernst Jünger,” *New German Critique*, Vol. 17, 1979.

<sup>24</sup> See also Jünger quoted in Zimmerman, Michael E., *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1990, p. 63.

<sup>25</sup> Stjernfelt, Frederik, “The Struggle of Titans – Ernst Jünger and Ernst Cassirer: Vitalist and Enlightenment Philosophies of Technology in Weimar Germany,” in A. S. Hoel & I. Folkvord (eds.), *Ernst Cassirer on Form and Technology: Contemporary Readings*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, p. 62.

Hence, technology has no meaning or purpose apart from the restless activity of the will to power at work. It is precisely in the sense of its artistic production that it is irreducible to instrumental use-value. Technology cannot be fully grasped in empirical terms.<sup>27</sup> On the contrary, human experience is organized in terms of a technological manifestation which in itself “[...] besitzt keine qualität” (*DA* 80) – possesses no quality.

In fact, the reactionary moderns neither rejected nor sought to resist technology as such. On the contrary, one of the main characteristics of reactionary modernism was a conscious affirmation of the technological by filling it inwardly with soul and situating it ontologically in the groundless, vital forces that the reactionary moderns saw as primordial to the anthropological-naturalistic reduction of its essence into that of a simple tool.<sup>28</sup> As a retort against the humanistic hubris of instrumental reason, technology, in Jünger’s writings, takes on a vital force of its own, such that it is only by recognizing its organic nature that we as humans might wrest ourselves free from the Enlightenment misperception that we are its master, free to use it for our own ends (*DA* 159). Accordingly, Jünger’s mythical account of the twentieth century has often been construed as a reiteration of a Heraclitean metaphysics of cosmic war between opposing forces (*DA* 104-106). Depicted as a “[...] a nihilistic will to destroy and [...] a will to reconstitute along the lines of power;”<sup>29</sup> armed conflict is interpreted as a rule rather than an exception to human existence. Support for such a militaristic interpretation of Jünger’s writings can be found in his valorization of the fusion of man and technology into a new *Typus* imprinted upon man – that of the globally homogenous worker-soldier, the forerunner of the militarized cyborg characteristic of our postmodern era.<sup>30</sup> But whether or not he can be said to have contributed to the martially oriented fascism that came to dominate nationalist sentiments in the 1930s, Jünger was undoubtedly a thinker who sought

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<sup>27</sup> Jünger, Ernst, “Typus, Name, Gestalt,” in *Sämtliche Werke – Band 15, Essays VII: Fassungen II*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Ihde, Don, *Heidegger’s Technologies: Postphenomenological Perspectives*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2010, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> Mitcham, Carl, *Thinking Through Technology: The Path between Engineering and Philosophy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 249.

<sup>30</sup> Haraway, Donna, “Cyborgs and Symbionts: Living Together in the New World Order,” in C. H. Gray, H. J. Figueroa-Sarriera, & S. Mentor (eds.), *The Cyborg Handbook*, London, Routledge, 1995.

to understand and outline the ontological meaning of the globalization of modern technology in an effort to grasp the significance of the increasingly all-encompassing horizon of experience that was beginning to take hold in the cultural self-consciousness of the West.

In this sense, Jünger saw the emergent technological world picture as historically inevitable: it could not be overcome (*DA* 144).<sup>31</sup> The best man could do was to make it comprehensible and meaningful by forging a profound mythologization of what otherwise appeared as a senseless and radically destructive collection of contingent processes (*DA* 92). In order to endure the technological dramas of modernity, man, from Jünger's point of view, must cultivate an aesthetic sensibility that rejoices in the destruction of familiar gods and dogmas, yet one that at the same time makes this perpetual and dynamic warfare into a mythological basis for understanding the increasingly disorienting tendencies of the era.<sup>32</sup> Such an idea counterintuitively suggests that the antique yearning for an organic community can in fact only reach its conclusion in the distinctively technological features of modernity,<sup>33</sup> as it is only in the total mobilization of the entire globe that no one and no thing any longer stand outside the conscription of all there is into a self-organizing whole (*DA* 192).

Here, the task of Jünger is a characteristically Nietzschean one – “[t]o impose upon becoming the character of being[.]”<sup>34</sup> To stamp chaos with order is the act of the supreme artist, for it asserts meaning not merely amidst the flux, but it champions flux itself as the absolute by turning Plato on his head. While it is in modernity that technology first comes to possess the power to participate in the cosmic realization of perpetual renewal, modern philosophers, as long as they remain tied to old dogmas, as if oblivious of Nietzsche's philosophical overcoming, will however be incapable of understanding what this historical event amounts to.<sup>35</sup> In this situation, the authentic thinker is faced with only one remaining alternative. Sure, he can try to escape the global nihilism of the modern epoch by repressing it altogether – a response to nihilism perhaps best

<sup>31</sup> See also Turnbull, “Heidegger and Jünger on the ‘Significance of the Century,’” pp. 13-15.

<sup>32</sup> Jünger, “Technology and the Gestalt of the Worker,” p. 47.

<sup>33</sup> Stjernfelt, “The Struggle of Titans,” pp. 95-96.

<sup>34</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Will to Power*, ed. & trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, New York, Vintage Books, 1968, p. 330.

<sup>35</sup> Turnbull, “Modern Technology within the Western Theological Imaginary,” p. 20.

exemplified by the Thoreauan transcendentalist's retreat into the forest. But merely erecting some new dogma in the place of the old – some new foundation of a pristine, untouched nature that the technological has not yet spoiled – is not a solution when the very notion of a stable foundation itself has perished. Rather, if there is anything that can be rescued from the Romantic critique of instrumental reason, it is the insight that nature speaks to man from the original untamed core of his being, regardless of what kind of environment he happens to conventionally inhabit – “natural” or “artificial.”<sup>36</sup> The metaphysical ungroundedness of cosmic forces operates through man (*DA* 65), irreducible to the modern instrumental desire to tame and control the entire world. From such a starting point of inner emigration – having expelled all social values from himself – man may serenely face the destructive legacy of modernity with the conviction that it is precisely in the dynamism of creative destruction that he is essentially at home.

#### GEOENGINEERING AS AN AFFIRMATION OF LIFE

As we have seen, the efforts of the reactionary moderns were not to downplay or belittle the importance technology for the human condition. Quite to the contrary, it is only when the existential depth of technology has been properly grasped that man can be set free. Only when no longer misconceived as an instrument will we finally be able to see that technology asserts itself over us; but also, that it does so in the name of the freedom of life itself, and thus in what looks more like a celebratory than a sorrowful sense. Ever the active nihilist, Jünger does not pretend that we may establish order by returning to some prelapsarian state of wilderness. Instead, he writes about a fusion of nature and artifice – by finding the unity of both in an unconditioned abyss of dynamic forces – into a postnatural civilization:

Organische Konstruktion ist erst dann möglich, wenn der Mensch in hoher Einheit mit seinen Mitteln erscheint und wenn der quälende Zwiespalt berichtigt ist, der

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<sup>36</sup> Pekar, Thomas, “‘Organische Konstruktion’: Ernst Jüngers Idee einer Symbiose von Mensch und Maschine,” in F. Strack (ed.), *Titan Technik: Ernst und Friedrich Georg Jünger über das technische Zeitalter*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2000; Löffler, Thomas, “Ernst Jüngers organologische Verwindung der Technik auf dem Hintergrund der Biotheorie seines akademischen Lehrers Hans Driesch,” in F. Strack (ed.), *Titan Technik: Ernst und Friedrich Georg Jünger über das technische Zeitalter*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2000.

ihn heute, aus Gründen, die wir bereits untersuchten, diese Mittel als revolutionäre empfinden läßt. Erst dann löst sich die Spannung zwischen Natur und Zivilisation, zwischen organischer und mechanischer Welt, und erst dann kann von endgültiger, sowohl eigenartiger wie jedem historischen Maßstab ebenbürtiger Gestaltung die Rede sein. (*DA* 216-217).

And just like that, the alienating experience of the industrial-scale mechanization of social life is mythologized, again, into a metaphysical system of cosmic order, such that it turns out, after all, to be in perfect harmony with human nature (*DA* 144).

Although it might appear rather surprising at first glance, considering their disdain for the idea of modernization, this is a hint as to why many of the reactionary moderns in fact rejoiced in the violently transformative nature of technology, describing it as the expression of a restlessly vital force that subjects the entire globe to the steadfast factories, tireless production lines, and deafening furnaces of its industrious imperative. All of these become the supreme expression of life's ongoing strive for greatness – a dynamic and agonistic potency conceived in metaphysical terms. Channelling Nietzsche's will to power, technology was characterized by Spengler as "immemorially old" and "immensely general" (*MT* 11), underlying all of history. Presaging Heidegger's post-war lecture on technology, Spengler adopted the same ambiguous conclusion, characterized by an equal degree of historicism and fatalism, closing his essay thusly: "We are born into this time and must bravely follow the path to the destined end." (*MT* 52). On the one hand, then, what makes this reactionary brand of Nietzscheanism revolutionary is its longing for an abrupt and complete change of society. The reactionary moderns were seemingly ready to jump into the abyss without hesitation. But on the other hand, what they were looking for was not simply a new utopia toward which the linear progress of modern historiography would point anew. Rather, what they sought was the abolishment of history as such; that is, the end of history altogether. Instead, perpetual dynamism was to become the status quo. By means of representing the modern condition of accelerated technological change mythically, outside of historical time, the reactionary moderns sought to produce a universal idea of acceleration without the promise of transcendent fulfillment. The past and the future were to blend into the organic, non-linear time of uninterrupted self-transformation (*DA* 170-171).

But while the will to power, in the work of Spengler and Jünger, signified the manifestation of a metaphysical force at work in shaping world history, for Heidegger the will to power is itself rather a historical phenomenon expressing the consummation of Western metaphysics.<sup>37</sup> To be sure, the intellectual context of Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche during the 1930s was formative for his later assessment of the enframing of modern technology.<sup>38</sup> In Nietzsche's concept of the will to power, Heidegger discovered a philosophical articulation of modernity's nihilistic demeanor toward beings as mere resources for technical manipulation.<sup>39</sup> Translated through the Jüngerian lens of a Gestalt switch to the meaning of history, Nietzsche's critique of the enlightened genealogy of a Christian interpretation of Platonic values initially served as the basis for Heidegger's diagnosis of the Western tradition's fall away from its original concern with the revelation of being. But although he continued to read Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism in the modern era as a herald of the climate of cultural crisis, national mourning, and fierce political conflict that followed Germany's defeat, sometime after 1938 Nietzsche's prescribed cure no longer seemed to Heidegger to offer a promising solution.<sup>40</sup> The problem, as Heidegger eventually came to see it, is that Nietzsche:

[...] thinks the permanentizing of what becomes, thinks it to the point where the becoming of what becomes is secured in the duration of its becoming. The "eternal" thinks the permanentizing of such constancy in the direction of its circling back into itself and forward toward itself. What becomes is not the unceasing otherness of an endlessly changing manifold. What becomes is the same itself, and that means the one and selfsame (the identical) that in each case is within the difference of the other. [...] Nietzsche's thought thinks the constant permanentizing of the becoming of whatever becomes into the only kind of presence there is – the self-recapitulation of the identical.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Heidegger, Martin, "The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics," in *Nietzsche, Vol. 3 & 4: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics; Nihilism*, ed. & trans. D. Farrell Krell, trans. J. Stambaugh & F. A. Capuzzi, New York, Harper & Row, 1987, pp. 6-8, 155-157, 161-163, 182-183, 190-192.

<sup>38</sup> Bambach, Charles, *Heidegger's Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism, and the Greeks*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2003.

<sup>39</sup> Wilkerson, Dale A., "The Root of Heidegger's Concern for the Earth at the Consummation of Metaphysics: The Nietzsche Lectures," *Cosmos & History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2005.

<sup>40</sup> Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots*, p. 266.

<sup>41</sup> Heidegger, "The Will to Power," pp. 164-165.

In short, Nietzsche attributes to becoming the hypostatic character of being. With the will to power, he conceives of being in terms of presence too, by making becoming itself permanent, and thus by making becoming a process that merely recapitulates the identical, such that the motion of becoming is ultimately circular, thereby bringing a static eternity into its notion of dynamism. “All that is left”, Heidegger emphasizes, “is the solitary superficies of a ‘life’ that empowers itself to itself for its own sake.”<sup>42</sup> Note that self-organizational perpetuation for no other reason than itself is what Heidegger calls “enframing,”<sup>43</sup> the disclosure he finds characteristic of modern technology, and which he indeed viewed as the consummation of the Western tradition’s radically diminished understanding of being. This is the path toward a relentless globalization of the same, which stops at nothing but the systematic reduction of the entire earth into homogenous mass-production without goal (*EJ* 76) – finding its philosophical expression in the Nietzschean will to power, which in the work of Jünger, in turn, is phenomenologically described as total mobilization: the self-organization of the entire earth for the sake of nothing but ceaseless, technological reproduction. Understanding enframing, then, is to understand the will to power as essential to the mode of disclosure of modern technology, *not* as substantive of technology as such.

As Blok emphasizes, it is crucial to recognize that by “consummation,” Heidegger did not just mean that Nietzsche’s – and in effect Jünger’s – inversion of being into becoming failed to overcome nihilism, but rather that their purported overcoming ultimately concealed this inversion as essential to enframing as a mode of disclosure (*EJ* 76-79); namely, that “[i]n the planetary imperialism of technologically organized man, the subjectivism of man attains its acme, from which point it will descend to the level of organized uniformity and there firmly establish itself. This uniformity becomes the surest instrument of total, i.e., technological, rule over the earth.”<sup>44</sup> Note the symmetric relationship observed by Heidegger. On the one hand, being is reduced only to what can be

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 176.

<sup>43</sup> Heidegger, Martin, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. W. Lovitt, New York, Harper & Row, 1977, pp. 19-21.

<sup>44</sup> Heidegger, Martin, “The Age of the World Picture,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. W. Lovitt, New York, Harper & Row, 1977, p. 152.

manufactured and controlled – explained, calculated, manipulated, etc.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, Heidegger concludes that “[i]nstituting planetary dominion, however, will itself only be but the consequence of an unconditioned anthropomorphism,”<sup>46</sup> such that man finds himself disclosed as but a cog in the vital powers of modern machinery. So, while the instrumentalist desire for full control is the surest instrument for the enslavement of man to his own tools, it is only as a consequence of the unconditioned anthropomorphism which ensues, due to the ontological levelling of being, that instrumentalism can establish planetary dominion. Seeking to resolve modern man’s separation from his natural environment – insofar as technology, in modernity, is constituted as a “terminus medius,”<sup>47</sup> an intermediate concept, a site for mediation, thereby making possible understanding by creating a distance between the will and its object as well as between means and ends<sup>48</sup> – by dissolving the hermeneutic distance between nature and artifice, such a purported overcoming results instead in the most extreme form of alienation; namely, the ontic reification of the disclosure of being as a mere collection of objects endlessly available for instrumental manipulation. This is what Heidegger (quoted in *EJ* 77), in his reading of *Der Arbeiter*, wants to get at when asking whether “[...] the essence of the worker [is] determined out of the essence of work [...] or [if] the essence of work [is] put forward out of the essence of the worker[.] [...] [H]ow does Jünger decide? Does he see this question at all, does he notice its weight?” Heidegger’s question is rhetorical because there is indeed no room for historically effected consciousness in Jünger’s philosophy, and as a result Jünger *cannot* see this question. Instead of questioning our planet’s availability as standing-reserve, Jünger’s aesthetic interpretation of the nature of technology can thus only re-inscribe instrumentalism into the irrational basis of the absolute. As to the agency of the human, then, it leaves us neither with anthropocentric hubris nor with deep ecological reverence, but with an “ontological indifference” (*EJ* 10-11) that sets the stage for an unrestrained instrumentalism precisely by flattening the relationship between being and

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<sup>45</sup> Wilkerson, “The Root of Heidegger’s Concern,” p. 32.

<sup>46</sup> Heidegger, “The Will to Power,” p. 174.

<sup>47</sup> Cassirer, Ernst, “Form and Technology,” in A. S. Hoel and I. Folkvord, *Ernst Cassirer on Form and Technology: Contemporary Readings*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> Stjernfelt, “The Struggle of Titans,” p. 101.



beings: man, no more than an expression of nature's inherent productivity, yet therefore also destined to poetically appropriate nature without restraints.

*On the Typus of the Geoengineer*

It is in this manner that the technological may spread and extend across the globe all the way to the point where, as it culminates in a planetary-scale power comparable to any other of the earth's geospheres,<sup>49</sup> it loses its properties as artificial and, with the loss of these properties, that which would allow it to be distinguished from nature in the first place. Part of the lingering allure of the concept of total mobilization can thus be explained by its prescience of the way in which our global environmental predicament has been framed in the contemporary Anthropocene discourse. For in the philosopher Clive Hamilton's words, "[...] the appearance of this new object, the earth system, has ontological meaning. It invites us to think about the earth in a new way, an earth in which it is possible for mankind to participate directly in its evolution by influencing the constantly changing processes that constitute it. It therefore brings out the conception of a joint human-earth story."<sup>50</sup> According to its proponents, the Anthropocene indicates that mankind is no longer ontologically distinguishable by some fundamental essence that constitutes its exceptionality. Rather, the human has become incorporated into the pure immanence of an unqualified immersion or embeddedness in the complex processes of geophysical flows and folds. The concept of the Anthropocene is thus not isolated to the scientific concerns of geology, climate science, or even earth system science, but moves beyond disputes over empirical evidence insofar as it more generally "[...] represents a ground-breaking attempt to think together Earth processes, life, [and] human enterprise [...] into a totalizing framework[.]"<sup>51</sup> Such a proposed convergence of "human enterprise" with "earth processes" is philosophically relevant since it renders nature and artifice ontologically symmetric, in the simple sense that technological processes of change are made to appear in the same

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<sup>49</sup> Ellis, Erle C. & Haff, Peter K., "Earth Science in the Anthropocene: New Epoch, New Paradigm, New Responsibilities," *EOS Transactions*, Vol. 90, 2009; Barnosky, Anthony D. et al., "Approaching a State Shift in Earth's Biosphere," *Nature*, Vol. 486, 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Hamilton, Clive, *Defiant Earth: The Fate of Humans in the Anthropocene*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2017, p. 21.

<sup>51</sup> Hamilton, Clive, Bonneuil, Christophe & Gemenne, François, "Thinking the Anthropocene," in C. Hamilton, C. Bonneuil & F. Gemenne (eds.), *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch*, London, Routledge, 2015, p. 2.

ontological register as those of natural processes of change.<sup>52</sup> By implication, artifice is not merely considered to play a supplementary role in relation to nature, nor is reason depicted to appear on earth as a manifestation of something superlunary or transcendental, but rather *as* earth, as intrinsic or immanent to its own self-organization.<sup>53</sup>

Consequently, such a global fusion of nature and artifice has, just like in the work of Jünger, hardly been seen as monstrous or threatening at all.<sup>54</sup> On the contrary, what is common among many of the various ways in which technology figure in the Anthropocene discourse is that they are contingent upon an understanding of humanity's relation to its own artifice in ecological terms – as a milieu within which man dwells, with its own metabolic self-regulation. This belies the instrumental interpretation of technology as a tool to instead suggest something much more akin to that of a global environment; that is, another geosphere that man lives with, in, and through.<sup>55</sup> Such a discursive shift follows from the simple acknowledgement that, since prehistory, humans – just like every other organism – have engineered their environments to suit their own survival. “[I]n this sense,” the geophysicist Peter Haff declares, “one might say that technology is the next biology.”<sup>56</sup> Urban environments have in effect been disclosed not as cultural artifacts that impose themselves upon an a priori geological and geographical location, but as “hybrid designs”<sup>57</sup> that merely

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<sup>52</sup> Zwier, Jochem & Blok, Vincent, “Seeing Through the Fumes: Technology and Assymetry in the Anthropocene,” *Human Studies*, Vol. 42, 2019, pp. 622-627.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 623. See also Zwier, Jochem & Blok, Vincent, “Saving Earth: Encountering Heidegger’s Philosophy of Technology in the Anthropocene,” *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology*, Vol. 21, No. 2-3, 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Hornborg, Alf, “Post-Capitalist Ecologies: Energy, ‘Value,’ and Fetishism in the Anthropocene,” *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, Vol. 24, No. 7, 2016; Hornborg, Alf, *Nature, Society, and Justice in the Anthropocene: Unraveling the Money-Energy-Technology Complex*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 93-113.

<sup>55</sup> Haff, Peter K., “Technology and Human Purpose: The Problem of Solids Transport on the Earth’s Surface,” *Earth System Dynamics*, Vol. 3, 2012; Haff, Peter K., “Technology as a Geological Phenomenon: Implications for Human Well-Being,” *Geological Society Special Publication*, Vol. 395, No. 1, 2013; Haff, Peter K., “Humans and Technology in the Anthropocene: Six Rules,” *The Anthropocene Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2014; Donges, Jonathan F., Lucht, Wolfgang & Müller-Hansen, Finn, “The Technosphere in Earth System Analysis: A Coevolutionary Perspective,” *The Anthropocene Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2017.

<sup>56</sup> Haff, “Technology as a Geological Phenomenon,” p. 302.

<sup>57</sup> Holy-Luczaj, Magdalena & Blok, Vincent, “How to Deal with Hybrids in the Anthropocene: Towards a Philosophy of Technology and Environmental Philosophy 2.0,” *Environmental Values*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2019.

actualize geomorphological possibilities;<sup>58</sup> that is, ontologically inclusive assemblages that conjoin nature and artifice in the production of terrestrial habitats.<sup>59</sup>

To recast our narrative frame on this basis implies that global environmental change is inscribed into a vitalist ontology of technical alteration that portrays the active modification and constant transgression of limits as the natural state of the geological economy. In this manner, the technification of nature appears as no less a desirable way of producing human existence than the reverential ideal of letting nature itself dictate the terms of man's dwelling. For if the artificialization of nature maximizes the possibility for all products and forces to express themselves with maximum vitality by connecting them into a network such that all parts are allowed to increase their functional and expressive capacities in relation to each other, then the genuinely artificial attitude *par excellence* – an attitude that Jünger associates with the bourgeois liberal (*EJ* 9), which is incidentally what Nietzsche calls “passive nihilism”<sup>60</sup> – would be the one that strives to extrinsically limit such a life-affirming, vital impulse.<sup>61</sup>

Succinctly summed up by the political economist Melinda Cooper, “[t]his is a vitalism that comes dangerously close to equating the evolution of life with that of capital.”<sup>62</sup> Understood as a “tactics of the living” in the Spenglerian sense, technological organization is seen as essentially negentropic:<sup>63</sup> it seeks to grow beyond any provisional closure, and insofar as such systems are self-organizing,

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<sup>58</sup> Latour, Bruno, “A Cautious Prometheus? A Few Steps Toward a Philosophy of Design with Special Attention to Peter Sloterdijk,” in W. Schinkel & L. Noordegraaf-Eelens (eds.), *In Medias Res: Peter Sloterdijk's Spherological Poetics of Being*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2011; Latour, Bruno, “Love Your Monsters: Why We Must Care for Our Technologies as We Do Our Children,” in M. Schellenberger & T. Nordhaus (eds.), *Love Your Monsters: Postenvironmentalism and the Anthropocene*, Oakland, The Breakthrough Institute, 2011; Ellis, Erle C., “The Planet of No Return,” in M. Schellenberger & T. Nordhaus (eds.), *Love Your Monsters: Postenvironmentalism and the Anthropocene*, Oakland, The Breakthrough Institute, 2011.

<sup>59</sup> Clark, Nigel, *Inhuman Nature: Sociable Life on a Dynamic Planet*, London, Sage, 2011, pp. 7-11; Sörlin, Sverker & Wormbs, Nina, “Environing Technologies: A Theory of Making Environment,” *History and Technology*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 2018.

<sup>60</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pp. 17-18, 158-159.

<sup>61</sup> Herrmann-Pillath, Carsten, “Energy, Growth, and Evolution: Towards a Naturalistic Ontology of Economics,” *Ecological Economics*, Vol. 119, 2015, pp. 440-441.

<sup>62</sup> Cooper, Melinda, *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2008, p. 42. See also Pellizzoni, Luigi, *Ontological Politics in a Disposable World: The New Mastery of Nature*, London, Routledge, 2015, p. 66.

<sup>63</sup> Stiegler, Bernard, *The Neganthropocene*, ed. & trans. D. Ross, London, Open Humanities Press, 2018.

we ought to dismiss all efforts to artificially limit them exogenously. Quite to the contrary, the technical infrastructures of the so-called “technosphere” is acknowledged as man’s *natural* environment – it constitutes the preconditions for his modern existence – and so adapting it, and adapting to it, is no less an environmentalist task than adapting, and adapting to, say, the biosphere.<sup>64</sup> Just like life, technology is perceived as inherently progressive, expansionist, and evolutionary, possessing the same vital impulse to perpetuate itself for no other sake than the perpetuation of the same process; namely, the reproduction of itself as an end-in-itself.<sup>65</sup> Made into the ontological foundation of an inherently dynamic and far-from-equilibrium nature, the vital impulse toward increasingly complex organization present in technological systems are, precisely as they were for Jünger (*DA* 178-179), taken to proceed from the same organic process of becoming as that of life, unrestricted by the closure of any sort of limitation or fixed form. Since this impulse knows no limits, it inevitably ends up levelling all domains – biotic and abiotic, biological and technological, natural and artificial – into a flat ontology where life transmutes into technology and technology into life.<sup>66</sup> Such an active nihilism seeks to stage the values of becoming against the apparently reductive principles of being, but it accomplishes this only by inverting the latter and thereby granting the former a fundamentally hypostatic character.

“Nihilism,” as Hillach has observed, “thus appears as the ultimate historical consequences of Idealism’s self-declared autonomous spirit, which in its decadent forms is no more than the figure of advanced alienation. The economic correlate of this Idealism lies in debasing nature to abstract matter, the mere object of arbitrarily imposed productive or destructive impulses.”<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the arbitrariness of which Hillach writes is part and parcel of the will to power: “[...] it not only ‘is’ the highest value, but it also accounts for the way of the highest value as what *is*.”<sup>68</sup> It is in this manner that just about anything can be justified in the name of nature’s unbounded proliferation, to which we as humans may at

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<sup>64</sup> Vogel, Steven, *Thinking Like a Mall: Environmental Philosophy After the End of Nature*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2015.

<sup>65</sup> Haff, “Humans and Technology in the Anthropocene,” p. 127.

<sup>66</sup> Pellizzoni, *Ontological Politics*, pp. 11-16, 42-43, 63-64, 66-67; Pellizzoni, Luigi, “New Materialism and Runaway Capitalism: A Critical Assessment,” *Soft Power*, Vol. 4, 2017, p. 47.

<sup>67</sup> Hillach, “The Aesthetics of Politics,” p. 103.

<sup>68</sup> Wilkerson, “The Root of Heidegger’s Concern,” p. 32.

most attune ourselves. This is no simple quietism, however. Paraphrasing Bret W. Davis, the will, here, operates on a fundamental antinomy between fatalism and voluntarism, which he describes as “[...] a passage through utter passivity that gives way to a birth of ‘pure activity’ without a subject or an object, that is, to the spontaneous generosity of living ‘without why;’” such that “[...] absolute passivity paradoxically releases one into an originary freedom for ‘pure activity.’”<sup>69</sup> It implies that the authentic and decisive action of the active nihilist is bound to autogenously justify itself *as* destiny, and thus expresses a unification of might and right in the very articulation of the will. Rather than expressing a capacity or an ability of the subject, the will instead alludes to an activity that resides in the abyss from which subjectivity first emerges. Although man is thereby subjugated to the arbitrary dispensations of the will’s unrestricted power, which is beyond reason to comprehend, it simultaneously opens the space for man to express himself in an equally arbitrary act of radically free willfulness: man’s submission to an empty readiness for subjugation is rendered indistinguishable from his power to act out of an empty resoluteness.

This is all to suggest that we may understand the reactionary infusion of technology with spirit as an attempt to reinvent Romantic organicism, with the help of which the contradictions of modern life may thus be dissolved by finding their unity in the esoteric forces of an underlying powers ontology.<sup>70</sup> Such a merging of the esoteric with the instrumental shares striking similarities to Ernst Cassirer’s observation that in order to grasp the function of myth, it is “[...] necessary to understand myth as a spontaneous and creative formation of experience by which ‘what was a passive state becomes an active process.’”<sup>71</sup> Notably, Cassirer held that the technological substantivism that figured in the writings of the reactionary moderns constituted precisely an example of the reappearance of myth in modernity, understood in terms of having set man upon a destiny that lay outside his control, while at the same time framing this destiny as expressed in the will of the those who simply act most decisively by treating

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<sup>69</sup> Davis, Bret W., *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2007, pp. 134-135.

<sup>70</sup> Gelderloos, *Biological Modernism*, pp. 147-174.

<sup>71</sup> Cassirer quoted in Gordon, Peter E., *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2010, p. 302.

the means of political power as an end-in-itself (*MS* 289-293). As Cassirer sees it, this is “[...] the central paradox of modern political myth – that it appear[s] as both a regression to primitive belief and a cynical instrument of mass propaganda[,] [...] both mythos and techne.” (*MS* 307). Through this mythologization, which grants technology an auto-productive and self-determining nature,<sup>72</sup> it may symbolically begin to occupy that groundless abyss whose ceaseless activity is taken to underpin the modern world. Rather than a tool for history or reason, technology may consequently be interpreted as an artful expression of nature’s unconditional self-organization; and rather than a means for class conflict, it may be construed as integral to the regeneration of the social organism.<sup>73</sup>

We shall have to ask ourselves, therefore, whether the poetic resources of Jünger’s Nietzscheanism, rather than presenting a challenge to the enframing of modern technology, marks the consummation of its global dominance. Following Heidegger, the question we shall have to entertain is this: could it be so that rather than a site of resistance against the instrumentalist attitude of geocybernetic stewardship,<sup>74</sup> the disclosure of the earth as, in Jünger’s terms, an “organic construction” (*DA* 120, 124, 137 et passim), constitutes the manner in which such a process of global appropriation may proceed unchallenged? What should make us suspicious, at the very least, is the implicit conviction that the geophysical power of modern technology cannot be wielded instrumentally by man, but at best aesthetically appreciated and artistically affirmed as an innate will to terraformation.<sup>75</sup> Just like Benjamin identified the “[...] perversion of the German defeat into an inner victory by means of confessions of guilt which were hysterically elevated to the universally human”<sup>76</sup> as fundamental to the Jünger’s aestheticization of war, there is something to be said about the fact that the

<sup>72</sup> Löffler, “Ernst Jüngers organologische Verwindung der Technik,” p. 64.

<sup>73</sup> Benjamin, Walter, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” in *Selected Writings Vol. 3, 1935-1938*, ed. H. Eiland & M. W. Jennings, and trans. E. Jephcott et al., Cambridge, Harvard University, 2002, pp. 121-122.

<sup>74</sup> Schellhuber, Hans J., & Kropp, Jürgen, “Geocybernetics: Controlling a Complex Dynamical System Under Uncertainty,” *Naturwissenschaften*, Vol. 85, 1998.

<sup>75</sup> Neyrat, Frédéric, *The Unconstructable Earth: An Ecology of Separation*, trans. D. S. Burke, New York, Fordham University, 2019, p. 52.

<sup>76</sup> Benjamin, “Theories of German Fascism,” p. 123.

concept of the technosphere has operated on a similar reification of a historically contingent structure of social relations as a condition for the possibility of global environmental change into that of an original sin essential to the human condition as such, and thereby as an inalienable consequence of our species-being.<sup>77</sup> The fundamental error in such Anthropocenic reveries, as Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg have argued, is that social relations historically adequate to capital thereby come to be “[...] encased in eternal natural laws independent of history, [and] then quietly smuggled in as the inviolable natural laws on which society is founded.”<sup>78</sup> By reifying human- into deep history,<sup>79</sup> the same inventory of vitalistic concepts that came to the fore in the metaphysical affirmation of industrial warfare by the reactionary moderns thus reappears in an evolutionary narrative about the emergence of a globe-girdling network of artifacts for the production of terrestrial habitats;<sup>80</sup> and whose life-affirming potential, this time around, is guaranteed as a destiny to be seized by the *Typus* of the geoengineer.

#### DISCURSIVE FORMATION MASQUERADING AS NATURALISTIC ONTOLOGY

Due to the aforementioned reification, critical scholars such as Jeremy Baskin (2015) have instead sought to shift the conceptual discussion away from the Anthropocene understood as a natural epoch to the product of a scientific paradigm, and demonstrated how its discursive framing of the problem of global environmental change presupposes a naturalistic-ontological fusion of nature and technology; a presupposition for which the natural history of the Anthropocene,

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<sup>77</sup> Cunha, Daniel, “The Anthropocene as Fetishism,” *Mediations: Journal of the Marxist Literary Group*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2015.

<sup>78</sup> Malm, Andreas & Hornborg, Alf, “The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative,” *The Anthropocene Review*, Vol. 2, 2014, p. 67. See also Winner, Langdon, “Rebranding the Anthropocene: A Rectification of Names,” *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology*, Vol. 21, No. 2-3, 2017, p. 286.

<sup>79</sup> Hornborg, Alf, “Artifacts Have Social Consequences, Not Agency: Toward A Critical Theory of Global Environmental History,” *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2017; Malm, Andreas, “Against Hybridism: Why We Need to Distinguish Between Nature and Society, Now More Than Ever,” *Historical Materialism*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2019.

<sup>80</sup> Ellis, Erle C. & Ramankutty, Navin, “Putting People in the Map: Anthropogenic Biomes of the World,” *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, Vol. 6, 2008; Ellis, Erle C., “Ecology in an Anthropogenic Biosphere,” *Ecological Monographs*, Vol. 85, No. 3, 2015.

as an epoch, is then enrolled as empirical evidence. According to Baskin, proponents of such an uncritical adoption of the Anthropocene as epoch include Crutzen, according to whom “[...] we should shift our mission from crusade to management, so we can steer nature’s course symbiotically,”<sup>81</sup> as well as the geographer Erle Ellis, who states that “[i]n moving toward a better Anthropocene, the environment will be what we make it.”<sup>82</sup> Of course, there are differences in tone among the various accounts, as demonstrated by these two quotes. What both accounts share, however, is an implicit ontological dissolution of the hermeneutic distance between nature and artifice into that of a monistic hybrid, whereby it is not only possible but in fact desirable for man to intensify the artistic and fundamentally life-affirming production of his terrestrial abode.<sup>83</sup> Pursuing the same line of argument as Baskin, the philosopher Agostino Cera holds that this aesthetic ideology runs to the very core of the Anthropocene discourse, since, as he writes:

[...] quite unquestioningly, it expresses the accepted meaning of an epochal fact, i.e., the complete and definitive naturalization of technology. The normative/prescriptive element of this aspirant geological epoch lies in its unquestioning, “natural” acceptance of the metamorphosis of *technē* in *phusis*. In other words: within the present-day historical configuration, technology has taken on such a pervasive role that the only way it can be properly perceived is to think of it and interpret it as being nature itself[.]<sup>84</sup>

As in the case with Baskin’s critique of ideology, Cera argues that the Anthropocene discourse on the planetary impact of modern technology is conditioned by a prescriptive integration of nature and artifice into an organic construction; which, importantly, is made to appear as a mere descriptive fact insofar as its historical conditions of possibility is in effect hidden by this very ontological flattening.<sup>85</sup>

Once again, however, this is not an entirely novel insight. On the contrary, the abovementioned concern finds support in Benjamin’s critique of Jünger,

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<sup>81</sup> Crutzen quoted in Baskin, Jeremy, “Paradigm Dressed as Epoch: The Ideology of the Anthropocene,” *Environmental Values*, Vol. 24, 2015, p. 14.

<sup>82</sup> Ellis quoted in *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>83</sup> Neyrat, *The Unconstructable Earth*, pp. 45-59.

<sup>84</sup> Cera, Agostino, “The Technocene or Technology as (Neo)Environment,” *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology*, Vol. 21, No. 2-3, 2017, p. 247.

<sup>85</sup> Neyrat, *The Unconstructable Earth*, pp. 39-40.



writing already in 1930 about the curious merging of nature and artifice in reactionary-modernist thought:

[I]n the face of this “landscape of total mobilization” the German feeling for nature has had an undreamed-of upsurge. [...] Instead of using and illuminating the secrets of nature via a technology mediated by the human scheme of things, the new nationalists’ metaphysical abstraction of war signifies nothing other than a mystical and unmediated application of technology to solve the mystery of an idealistically perceived nature.<sup>86</sup>

In both cases – in the 1930s as well as today – such a “metaphysical abstraction” has fundamentally to do with the elimination of an object-disclosing horizon altogether, which, by emancipating our discourse from the conditions for a hermeneutic concern about the world simultaneously forms an ontology liberated from any demand for justification and argumentation. Therefore, if the dissolution of the tension between the natural and the artificial in the Anthropocene has come to be increasingly accepted as common sense, it is necessary, in order to avoid the superficial equation of the laws of nature with the instrumentalizing logic of capital, to examine the revival of this particular strain of vitalism in the context of its wider discursive formation.

What has been severely lacking, then, despite the renewal of interest into the question of the nature of technology, is an interrogation of the presuppositions behind the disclosure of the earth as a cybernetic organism. Without such an interrogation, as Baskin notes, we run a serious risk of uncritically adopting ideas such as Ellis’; namely, that nature is nothing other than “what we make it,” nothing other than its commodification as a homogenous set of objects to be exchanged, precisely because such an artificial appropriation is aestheticized as an expression of nature’s unconditioned self-organization. Recounting Fredric Jameson’s observation that the cultural condition of late capitalism is reproduced through the proliferations of various ontological hybrids, we may thus venture the suggestion that:

[t]o do away with the last remnants of nature and with the natural as such is surely the secret dream and longing of [the Anthropocene] – even though it is a dream the latter dreams with the secret proviso that “nature” never really existed in the first place anyhow. This is then the moment at which it becomes obligatory to

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<sup>86</sup> Benjamin, “Theories of German Fascism,” pp. 126-127.

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observe that [the Anthropocene] is also the moment of a host of remarkable and dramatic “revivals” of nature – [...] [and] [w]hat can lie beyond what Marx called *naturwüchsige* modes of production, if not simply more capitalism albeit of a more technologically sophisticated and globalized variety?<sup>87</sup>

So, while I share much of Blok’s enthusiasm for the relevance of Jünger’s philosophy of technology to shed new light on our current state of planetary emergency, I nevertheless suspect, and worry, that the monistic hybridism of an organic construction may provide the perfect foundation for the instrumentalism of modern technology to continue ravaging the earth. This suspicion is warranted, it seems to me, by the contradictions inherent to an epoch – the Anthropocene – whose main characteristic is the waning of historical consciousness; not only lacking a sense of its own genealogical provenance, but intellectually related to the same tendency to subordinate history to myth that is so seductively expressed in the work of Jünger. Therefore, I propose that we must instead read him critically in the same way that Heidegger after 1938 came to read Nietzsche. Rather than expecting to find in Jünger’s work the solution to the crisis of global environmental change, we may still commend it for the way in which it poetically expresses the existential anxieties of the *Zeitgeist*: the global enframing of the entire earth by cybernetics and its disclosure as an organic construction.

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<sup>87</sup>Jameson, Fredric, *The Seeds of Time*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996, pp. 46-47.

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