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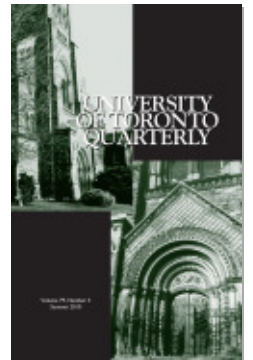
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## **The Will to Technology and the Culture of Nihilism: Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Marx**

Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong, 1969-

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dried up riverbeds, and drought, which reduced the fish and wildlife populations that had been food sources for Native peoples for generations.

Morse concludes, without actually evaluating whether or not the Klondike Gold Rush was worth the environmental damage, that few found gold, which was scattered. In 1898, of the five thousand claims, two hundred were worth working, and the gold rush cost much more than the amount of gold extracted, but it did introduce capital and labour into the Yukon, open up the area's resources for future exploitation, and result in an improved transportation network, all of which was seen at the time as 'progress,' the triumph of capital and technology over nature, and the bringing of civilization to a frontier, famously analysed at the time by Frederick J. Turner. Though the gold miners in the 1890s never questioned the cultural or environmental consequences of their work, some North Americans today evaluate mining 'jobs' very differently as a result of the ideas of the modern environmental movement, and the reality of a planet which cannot sustain its current economies or lifestyles. (LAUREL SEFTON MACDOWELL)

Arthur Kroker. *The Will to Technology and the Culture of Nihilism: Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Marx*

University of Toronto Press. viii, 230. \$50.00, 24.95

*The Will to Technology and the Culture of Nihilism* is a lyrical, provocative, and strangely hopeful rumination on technology as the essence of (post) humanity. Describing our culture as suicidal and profoundly bored – we are sick of being human and on the verge of a 'third eugenics' – it takes as its fundamental premise Heidegger's assertion that technology cannot be understood technologically. Rather, we need metaphysics to comprehend our wireless future and new media as a (contaminated) survival strategy.

The book is structured around 'readings' of Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Marx that treat them as 'the true prophets of technological destining.' As prophets, they are 'simultaneously its fiercest critics and, most certainly against their own intentions, accurate guides to the unfolding technological future.' Marx is the theorist of streamed (or fully realized) capitalism because his emphasis on relation or value over the thing itself foreshadows the ways in which circulation currently takes precedence over production (circulation itself is now commodified). Nietzsche is the prophet of completed metaphysics: his writings encapsulate our digital culture's resentment and cruelty. His texts also historicize the defeated and humiliated subjectivity (our disparagement of the thing itself) out of which emerges the virtual will to self-destruction. Heidegger is the true metaphysician of our age because he understands that technology is the essence of humanity. This heralds both oblivion *and* revelation; technology both destroys *and*

carries with it the saving power of poesis. So, rather than mourn the loss of our old human shelters, we need to dwell attentively within 'the digital nervous system' so that the possibilities for overcoming the present abandonment of being can be revealed. According to Arthur Kroker, new media art, with its 'anti-codes' of digital dirt, technologies of otherness, and digital incommensurability, intensifies technology in order to intensify its saving power. And so, at the end of most chapters and in the last section of the book, Kroker explains how new media art, by exciting perception, can serve as an x-ray vision into the void.

If the writings of Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger put into place – tragically reinforce – what they appear only to be describing, so does Kroker's book. His arguments for streamed capitalism, completed metaphysics, and profound boredom are cases in point. By putting these into place, *The Will to Technology and the Culture of Nihilism* also covers over – puts into the shadows – important phenomena, such as the differences and specificities of global production and circulation; most crucially, the persistence of labour and production in the South. (This blindness to conditions in the South, though, is not particular to Kroker: Deleuze in his postscript to control societies famously dismisses the entire Third World in a couple of sentences.) Arguably, this blindness and reinforcement points to the impossibility of understanding technology non-technologically. Not only do technological terms seep into Kroker's ruminations (e.g., he describes Marx's, Nietzsche's, and Heidegger's writings as constituting 'the ruling code of the will to technology'), they grant technology far more power than it actually has (e.g., our situation is described as a 'digital nervous system,' a 'politics of perfect control'). A more direct engagement with technology would reveal the ways in which technological control is never perfect and technology constantly fails. This book is perhaps best read dialectically with other critiques, such as Matthew Fuller's and Florian Cramer's, which deal with codes more narrowly. Also, Kroker's assertion that new media 'art is the essential strategy of digitality today, and perhaps the basic survival strategy of human life itself' needs further development in order to be convincing, especially given new media art's limited audience and insularity. This insularity is also mirrored in Kroker's writing – *The Will to Technology and the Culture of Nihilism* is surprisingly unengaged with other critics of technology, Marx, Heidegger, and Nietzsche.

Having said this, I want to reiterate that this is an insightful and ambitious project, written in the tradition of Marshall McLuhan. It is filled with provocative insights, such as the diagnosis of digital media as a precursor for biogenetics (this argument resonates with the recent move in film studies to see cinema as a precursor to surveillance). Importantly, *the Will to Technology and the Culture of Nihilism* moves us towards an ethics of third-wave eugenics. (WENDY HUI KYONG CHUN)