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**On how God became pocket-
sized: Digital Machination's
Challenge to Active Nihilism**

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Abstract:

This thesis examines how digital technology has created an individualized environment of understanding which threatens genuine value creation in an individual and collective. Whereas television, through machination of information mediums in the 1960s, created a hyperreality of understanding at the macro level, society, digital technology operates on the micro level, the individual. The development and use of digital technology, such as social media or online entertainment content, has created an understanding in users which appears to be active nihilism, but is in actuality passive nihilism, and perhaps even creating Digital Last Men.

Introduction

Every facet of our lives is being digitally recorded. The places we go, the people we speak to, the shows we watch, all have been pieces of information collected and organized into data profiles meant to capture who we are as people. The goal is not some genuine curiosity about human behavior, but about exploitation for economic and political aims. By engaging with digital technology a user makes themselves vulnerable to the most elusive and advanced form of postmodern machination. The digital world has become a cornerstone of our contemporary times. A seemingly endless supply of information, entertainment, and escape from the physical world. While the presentation of this digital world appears to be one which allows individuals to forge genuine understanding, it is in actuality a masquerade. The use of data profiles and personal agency online cultivates an attitude in users to either adopt or numb the responsibility of forging their own genuine understanding. The value and meaning creation of users is one based off a simulation of the real, where pure simulacrum dictates the presentation of values. This work aims to explain how the development and use of digital technology has made the responsibility of creating ones' own values and meaning in life more difficult, not less.

To accomplish this, I will be engaging with multiple thinkers to construct my argument. Stretching from metaphysical discussions on the meaning of life to empirical studies regarding the current state of online activity it will be made clear how digital technology has become a serious and ubiquitous metaphysical threat.

In the first chapter I will be discussing Nietzsche's thoughts on nihilism. How the death of God led to a world full of nihilism, a realization at the inherit meaninglessness of values and meaning in life. From his talk on nihilism, Nietzsche describes a possible opportunity in the form of active nihilism, taking responsibility for ones' own value and meaning creation. He also discusses the more prevalent path, passive nihilism, where one adopts or numbs this responsibility.

The second chapter will be connecting this nihilism to and discussing Heidegger's essence of technology. As Heidegger claims, the essence of technology is by no means anything technological but is instead a kind of revelation. It is a way of thinking about and discovering some truth in the world. When this essence of technology and nihilism combine, it changes this essence into something not awaiting truth, but challenging it, demanding it show itself. The lack of individual and collective value and meaning creation led to machination being adopted as a basis for society. A

technological framework bent on manipulation and malleability that came to dominate value and meaning creation in society.

The third chapter will discuss this machination moving into the postmodern era by looking at McLuhan and Baudrillard. Both discuss the shift in understanding brought about by mechanized information medium at the behest of machination in the form of the television. By looking at the process of information exchange, machination came to optimize the delivery of information, but a neglect for the overall message it was meant to give. By basing society's very avenue of understanding on such optimality it came to present a simulation of the real based on a simulation of value in accordance with this machination. Machination, at the behest of nihilism, led to the creation of the postmodern hyperreality, where technology has made the real and simulation of the real indistinguishable.

The final chapter will take the previous three chapters' discussions and juxtapose it with contemporary works and research regarding digital technology, to show how the postmodern hyperreality brought about by 1960s television has become individualized. The use of data profiles and personal agency online (which will feedback into each other in a constant cycle), entraps individuals, and through it, collectives, into passive nihilism. What appears to be a genuine action of a supposed active nihilist online can be in actuality an insidious passive nihilism, as an understanding forged through digital technology is one based off digital machination – an adoption of value. Digital technology also allows for easy engagement in numbing pleasure, producing Digital Last Men.

In the same way God provided value and meaning for pre-modern society, digital technology now ubiquitously does the same. The word of God - of certainty, right and wrong, good and bad – has changed from a holy book to a pocket-sized smart phone. Much in the same way as the church exploited faith in the followers of God, businesses, governments, and even us, exploit faith in our new God – technology.

CHAPTER 1 – Nietzsche and Nihilism

If one wishes to describe how technology has found its way into the divine seat of value and meaning making that God once sat upon, it will be necessary to discuss how God found himself displaced in the first place, and what impact this caused. Nietzsche discusses such throughout his works, such as *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and the posthumously published *The Will to Power*, and, utilizing his thoughts, it will be made clear how a pervasive nihilism is the root cause of technology's hegemony over our metaphysical being. From the death of God to existential nihilism, to the "choice" between active nihilism, passive nihilism, or the Last Man mentality, the responsibility for value and meaning creation and acceptance has been thrust upon the west. The individual and collective outcome of which is dependent on how one engages with the abyss. Either they take up the challenge, adopt another's way of being, or attempt to avoid it entirely.

1.1 The Death of God

Nietzsche claims, "God is Dead!" A quote which shook the foundations of the west. God always was and had been there. Giving direction and meaning to life, but he was no longer. Now, the death of God was not meant as a normative proclamation against Christianity in Europe, but rather a descriptive acknowledgement of the erosion of what Nietzsche called "true world theories."¹ This erosion of such theories meant that the all-encompassing moral and ontological fabric that God represented for Europe was pulled apart. The west was alone in the world now. The dark abyss of reality was made clear. If we are to understand nihilism, we must understand how they came about, and for what reasons and impacts it caused.

Nietzsche's argument for the death of God began in the 18th century when Europe underwent a priority shift. The Enlightenment introduced society to the view that the universe could be understood not by the divine will of God, but by physical laws. For Nietzsche, this was the beginning of the end for God. By cultivating this sense of skepticism and desire for objective understanding, we came to question, and then kill, God. Nietzsche claims this to be the case in his infamous parable, *The Madman*, in which a supposed deranged man runs through a marketplace shouting down the streets:

¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. (1895) *Twilight of the Idols*. Kaufmann, W. (trans.) London, England: Oxford University Press. 2008.

Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!" -- As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated? -- Thus they yelled and laughed. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. We have killed him -- you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. "How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us -- for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto." Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. "I have come too early," he said then; "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than most distant stars -- and yet they have done it themselves. It has been related further that on the same day

the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his requiem aeternam deo. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: "What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?"²

This extensive parable encapsulates Nietzsche's view about the death of God. The first thing to note is that the people in the marketplace are atheists, "...as many of those who did not believe in God were standing around..." laughing at his seeking of God. This means, within this story, that the death of God has already occurred, yet the people seem incapable of understanding what this truly means. Nietzsche addresses the cause of the death, or in fact murder of God, when the madman claims: "What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun?" Here the madman is invoking one discovery made during the European Enlightenment, the heliocentric model, which placed the sun, rather than Earth, as the center of the universe. Such a discovery was resisted by the established church at the time, as this revelation of the natural order of the universe countered the religiously backed geocentric model. This deed the Enlightenment inadvertently underwent, as well as many others, on the surface looked wholly positive. If we can question the nature of the universe, and through such understand more, why not? Epistemically, it was promising. However, by questioning the nature of universe and discovering the physical laws that hold everything together, we came to question other aspects of God's involvement. This desire for human understanding chipped away at God's perceived power. As more about our universe was revealed, God's role in society diminished. Nietzsche claims this to be a good thing, as in the parable *New Battles* he says "God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. – And we – we still have to vanquish his shadow, too."³ Men have supposedly replaced God, but his shadow will remain; a shadow which ought to be vanquished, according to Nietzsche. The reason for this will be addressed in the following subchapter, as the death of God supposedly gives opportunity for true human flourishing. That is, by displacing God's divine position as the core of society, it allows for people to obtain their highest form, the "Übermensch" as Nietzsche calls it. However, as will be discussed later, there is a transitional period with the death of God, a deep sense of despair at this realization of the death of God, and, thus, the meaning of life and the values one holds. The madman's tirade was intended as a warning

² Nietzsche, F. (1882). *The Gay Science; with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. §125; Kaufmann, W. (trans.) New York: Vintage Books, 1974. pp.181-82.

³ Ibid. §108

of this coming despair following the death of God, as he states “I come too early, I am not yet at the right time. This prodigious event is still on its way, and is travelling...”⁴ This event the madman refers to is the result of the death of God at the hands of people. With the death of God, we came to see the universe through the scope of human understanding. The very stars people looked up to at night were not heaven, but balls of hot gas. If the very heavens themselves are capable of mathematical meaning, what of ontological meaning? If God is dead, what is the value and purpose of life, if heaven does not exist? As is stated in Revelation 22:13: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” If God is neither Alpha nor Omega, then what is? Scientific discoveries can yield answers about other questions, but perhaps not this one, at least not yet (or ever). Even in our contemporary time this is apparent, as Nobel prizewinner theoretical physicist Steven Weinberg wrote “the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless.”⁵ Such a realization in the pointlessness of life led to what Nietzsche calls “nihilism.” All of this is not to say people in general did not continue to be religious and believe in divinity, but that the collective priority was no longer God. The priority then, as is it is now, is on human understanding.

Before delving into nihilism, I will briefly juxtapose the death of God to our contemporary era. Plainly speaking, the death of God has continued to ripple through society. For instance, empirical studies have shown a global decline in the belief of a higher power.⁶ What this evidence shows is that the momentum first started in Europe’s Enlightenment has continued into the postmodern day. Science is at a point now never before imagined. We continue to create a clearer understanding of the universe, but still are unable to answer the most basic and fundamental question surrounding the purpose of our lives. This global retreat from God and Old Truths will be important for the later discussion of technology and the creation of a more hyperreal world at the behest of digital technology. For now, let us discuss nihilism.

1.2 Existential Nihilism

Nietzsche’s acknowledgement of the death of God at the hands of human desire of understanding would lead to his prophecy of the “prodigious event” that the madman warned of. This event was the realization that the meaning and value of life was no longer ordained by a divine

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Weinberg, Steven. (1977). “The First Three Minutes: A modern view of the origin of the universe.” New York: Basic Books.

⁶ Inglehart, Ronald. “Giving Up on God.” Foreign Affairs. September 2020.

being, and in fact had no inherent essence. Now, there are many kinds of nihilism scholars have discussed⁷, and for the purpose of this work I will be focusing on perhaps the most pervasive nihilism, existential nihilism, as this is the nihilism Nietzsche is most interested in.

Simply put, nihilism is the acceptance that life has no inherent meaning or ultimate purpose. It is an understanding that any value in life is essentially baseless. The values guiding much of the western world through Christian dogma were devalued following the death of God. The growing skepticism borne in the Enlightenment led to the realization that God was not the answer to our curiosities. As Nietzsche claims in *The Will to Power*, “What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer.”^{8*} God once provided this unquestioning meaning and purpose for individuals and society, and as the last subchapter discussed, we murdered God with our continued desire to understand the universe. This, however, does not fully grasp why nihilism was able to root itself into western society. By answering two questions I will explain how and why nihilistic feelings grew. The first question is: Why do we need meaning for life? The second is: What does it mean to negate this meaning?

Nietzsche, as well as Schopenhauer, sought to understand the need for meaning in life. We live, we suffer, and we die. Meaning, then, allows for some measure of human flourishing. It is a reason for the suffering. Without meaning in the face of inevitable suffering and death, life becomes an arduous and pointless experience. Nietzsche claims in *The Gay Science* that, “Man has gradually become a fantastic animal: man *must* from time to time believe he knows *why* he exists; his race cannot thrive without a periodic trust in life – without faith in the *reason in life!*”⁹ For Nietzsche, in order to thrive one must have a degree of trust in life. That, without faith in the reason for their living, a human is unable to flourish and may succumb to despair. Our fantastic gift of consciousness comes as a curse without some meaning. Schopenhauer, one of Nietzsche’s biggest influences, also claimed that the inevitable suffering in life as well as the understanding of an unavoidable death created this need for meaning.¹⁰

⁷ Crosby, Donald. (1988). “The Specter of the Absurd.” State University of New York Press.

⁸ Nietzsche, Friedrich (1901) *The Will to Power*. §2. Kaufmann, W. (trans.) New York: Vintage Books. 1968.

*While a cautious reading of *The Will to Power* is necessary given that it was published posthumously, it does contain the thoughts and notes from Nietzsche himself, and, on the subject of value, it resonates with his previous work.

⁹ *The Gay Science*. §1

¹⁰ Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer: Studies in Pessimism*. Saunders, T. (trans.) CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (June 20, 2015)

So, we need meaning because meaning provides a reason for the human experience. It gives us that reason to get up every morning and try to make something out of our lives despite the inevitable suffering and death that will occur. With the death of God, the meaning by which people attributed this reasoning was gone. The meaning was negated. But what does it mean to “mean”? How are we able to give reason for life? In his book, *Retrieving the Ancients*, David Roochnik explains we can define “meaning” in two different ways. The first way is that “to mean” can be used to signify something. For instance, gorilla means a jungle animal which walks with their arms. The second way is to intend or have a purpose. So, to claim human life has a meaning means that “life has a purpose which can be signified or explained.”¹¹ For life to have a meaning, for there to be a reason to keep going, it must have something to be signified or identified with. With the death of God at the hands of scientific inquiry, this thing with which people had signified or identified their meaning of life with was gone. A thing which is found externally from another. The belief in God and his divine will cultivated the idea that the meaning of life was obtained through an external source, namely, himself.

Combining this need for meaning, and nothing by which to signify such meaning, led to existential nihilism. Existential nihilism, then, is essentially an acknowledgement for the need for meaning to give reason for our suffering, believing this meaning must come from something (external or intrinsic), and also accepting that this something as a signifier of meaning is baseless in nature. From this existentialist nihilist view an individual can either take an active or passive role in obtaining this meaning- the fork in the metaphysical road which will be discussed soon.

As severe as the death of God, and the resulting existential nihilism, seemed, Nietzsche saw this as an opportunity for the highest form of human thriving. A thriving which is supposedly based on an intrinsic meaning for life, not external. The death of God freed people from the hegemony of God’s supposed will. The external signifier of life was extinguished for the west. The true world theory was proven wrong, and thus a void formed. For Nietzsche, this void ideally is filled through the individual themselves by engaging in what he called “active nihilism.” The ideal end result of such active nihilism would be becoming what he refers to as the “Übermensch,” an individual capable of totally creating their own meaning, through their own genuine value creation. Those who fail to fill such a void themselves engage in passive nihilism.

¹¹ Roochnik, David. (2004). *Retrieving the Ancients: An introduction to Greek philosophy*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.

For the purposes of this work, I will also be connecting the concepts of meaning and value. Since the death of God meant the removal of some external signifier for the meaning of life, it meant also that the values associated with such meaning were questioned. Value, and the creation of such, will play a continually important role throughout this paper. Meaning and value are concepts which overlap. As was discussed, for something to have meaning means to have a purpose which is signified or explained. A value, on the other hand, is something which is given *to* an object of value *by* a subject. In a discussion about the connection between purpose, meaning, and value, Jared Moore claims "...if we conceive meaning as genus, and regard it as divisible into the two species, logical (or cognitive) and affective-conative meanings, purpose and value become subspecies..."¹² Moore argues that value becomes a supportive factor for a meaning. Whereas the meaning for some object (like our lives) "possesses" its own value, value is something which we (a subject) designate to an object. When an object loses its meaning, the values which went into supporting that meaning are under question, as supports without a structure are useless. With the death of God, we came to understand the role of values, and how, most importantly, they are something created.

The death of God led to existential nihilism taking root throughout the west, specifically Europe. Through this transitional period of despair and revelation, people came to see how the values and meanings of their lives were that of a human creation, with no inherent basis. With this understanding, individuals (and collectives) find themselves at a fork in the road. To actively engage in their own value creation, adopt another's value, or avoid this responsibility altogether; the active, the passive, and the last man.

1.3 Active Nihilism, Passive Nihilism, and the Last Man

. By understanding the connection between meaning and value, we have come to see that a subject projects values on an object, which results in the overall meaning "possessed" by that object. With the death of God, our lives (the object) came to lose its meaning, and so the values we (the subject) placed in it were also lost. With a pervasive existential nihilistic view, society came to accept the meaninglessness of life and the values that supported it. If nothing has any inherent meaning, that means values themselves are baseless. Our lives, our societies, and indeed our world, have no objective meaning, and so any values given to support an object's meaning are subjective. The death of God and the resulting existential nihilism led to the realization that value is a human creation. The

¹² Moore, Jared. (1914). "Value in its relation to meaning and purpose." *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*. Vol. 11, No. 7. pp. 184-186.

decision following this realization is then: will the values and meanings these values produce be of my own creation, or another's?

Nietzsche argued for a subjectivist approach to values by denying that there are any objective values. The values and meaning a belief in God held were a subjective creation of the church. They appeared objective since society devoted and prioritized God above all else. If everyone believes in a subjective value or meaning, it can appear as though it is objective. The death of God at the hands of the human desire for understanding showed the error in this devotion to the "objective" values and meanings. The core meaning of life was snuffed out, and so the supposedly objective values of society showed their true colors. They were subjective – a human creation. Nietzsche claims in *The Gay Science* that "Whatever has *value* in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature – nature is always value-less, but has been *given* value at some time, as a present – and it was *we* who gave and bestowed it."¹³ Value is given, not naturally grown, as was stated prior in connection to meaning. Subjects bestow value on an object. What this means is that following the death of God, the death of a supposed objective meaning, forced individuals and society to acknowledge the subjectivity of values themselves. This is why Nietzsche believed existential nihilism to be a transitional period for the reevaluation of values, as at this point nihilism provides three paths, active nihilism, passive nihilism, or becoming a "Last Man."

Nietzsche provides the core distinction between active and passive nihilism in *The Will to Power*. If it is taken as a sign of "enhanced spiritual strength," it is active nihilism. If nihilism is taken as a sign of "the collapse and decline of spiritual strength," it is passive nihilism.¹⁴ At its essence, the distinction between the two kinds of nihilism is created from the spiritual strength of the nihilist. If one has the "spiritual vigour" of an active nihilist they are able to march forward through their own convictions, tossing aside a submission to authority which hinders their growth and power. It becomes a powerful destructive force, taking Nietzsche philosophizing hammer and shattering the values and meanings given to them by the authority, and creating their own. The passive nihilist, on the other hand, has a "fatigued" and "exhausted" spiritual strength. They have been made aware that the prevailing values and meaning provided by authority are baseless, but do not have the strength

¹³ *The Gay Science*. §301

¹⁴ Nietzsche, Friedrich (1901) *The Will to Power*. §22. Kaufmann, W. (trans.) New York: Vintage Books. 1968.

to act destructively as the active nihilist does. Their spiritual being decomposes as it conflicts with the world, unable to forge their own values and meanings.¹⁵

Nolan Gertz also provides some insight into the discussion for the distinction between of active and passive nihilism As Gertz’s describes in their book, *Nihilism*, active nihilism is when individuals come to first self-destruct prevailing values, after which they create their own values, and thus, their own meaning for their lives. They reject the values given by others. As Gertz’s claims “The active nihilist destroys in order to find or create something worth believing in.”¹⁶ They self-create their own beliefs – the values and meaning for themselves and the world. On the other hand, the passive nihilist is an individual who adopts values from others. Instead of accepting the responsibility of their own value creation they rely on others to do so. Nietzsche warned against such a path as it disallows for true individual flourishing and growth. It is a seemingly comfortable and convenient path, but also a dangerous one in which the passive nihilist still suffers. “The passive nihilist would rather navigate using a faulty compass than risk feeling completely lost,” says Gertz. This “faulty compass” the passive nihilist uses provides the direction for value and meaning in life, all the while they are aware of its faultiness. They suffer from the doubt realized with nihilism but continue to adopt another’s direction as a result of their spiritual weakness and unwillingness. One such historical example of this faulty compass and the danger it can bring came in the 20th century with the rise of nationalism. By understanding the subjectivity of value and meaning, nations were able to create their own “objective” narrative for citizens. The passive nihilistic approach meant individuals accepted the values and meaning given to them by another. They replaced God with the nation- perhaps desperately trying to believe it was for the best. They wanted another to give them what they cannot give themselves: value and meaning.

The Last Man, as discussed in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is the antithesis to active nihilism and Nietzsche’s Übermensch - the passive nihilistic apex. The Last Man is an individual (or collective) who focuses not on destruction and creation, or even the adoption of another’s values and meaning, but on pure consumption. A self-infatuated engagement in life which seeks pleasure to the highest degree to numb the existentialist understanding of inherent meaninglessness. The Last Man knows that, despite all these pleasures and comforts they strive to hold on to, they are empty and miserable on the inside – stagnant in their supposed nest of ease. The Last Man has encountered existential

¹⁵ Ibid §23

¹⁶ Gertz, Nolen (2019). *Nihilism*. The MIT Press.

nihilism and countered it by saying, “We have discovered happiness.”¹⁷ The Last Man is the individual or collective who chasing happiness. One such example of the passive nihilistic Last Man in contemporary times is how many peoples’ meanings of life is “to be happy,” which is a direct reflection of Nietzsche’s discussion of Last Men through Zarathustra.

Nietzsche’s discussion of active and passive nihilism, as well as the Last Man, illuminates the prevalent metaphysical struggle of the west. With such an utter lack of meaning creation, it opens up the potential for other ways of thinking which can come to dominate the collective mindset, through which individuals themselves can become victims of passive nihilism and the Last Man mentality. Without a spiritually strong active nihilistic approach to value and meaning, people may find themselves relying on others to provide such, perhaps even the values and meaning provided to them through technology. Heidegger shares this worry of the metaphysical danger imposed through technological thinking that comes to assert itself as the status quo – the “objective” meaning creation of entities. Our adherence to such only deepens the metaphysical struggle of nihilists.

CHAPTER 2: Heidegger and Technology

In his essay “On the Question Concerning Technology” (1977) Heidegger makes three main claims about technology. The first is that technology should not be thought of purely as an instrumental entity, but rather a way of understanding. The second is that technology can develop beyond our comprehension and control. With both of these claims the final point is made clear, that by only viewing technology as a means to an end and its capability to develop beyond us presents a metaphysical danger to us and the world. That when technology is allowed to development unhinged, it comes to dictate the values and meaning. Through technological thinking, entities have become enframed into a destiny that seeks to exploit them as simply a resource awaiting use. The question we must explore first, though, is what exactly is “technology?”

2.1 The Essence of Technology

Heidegger claims in his “On the Question Concerning Technology,” that at the very essence of technology is a way of revealing. It is a way of discovering some truth. He sets out to explain how

¹⁷ Nietzsche, F (1883). *Thus spoke Zarathustra: a book for all and none*. Kaufmann, W. (trans.) New York: Modern Library. 1995. Pg 10.

and why this is, and how by viewing technology as simply a means to an end clouds our understanding of the power and potential such a way of revealing has over us and the world.

Heidegger begins his essay with the fundamental question which is the focus of the first half of his work: what is the essence of technology? His claim is that technology is a way of understanding the world and does so with a thorough argument in support of it. To do this, he first rejects the popular view that technology is merely an instrument of human activity as he argues this does not capture technology in its full essence. He takes this surface level view of technology of being purely an instrument and says that any instrument implies a means and ends. We use this specific technology, a tool or instrument, as the means to acquire some end. If we accept this, and indeed it makes intuitive sense to do so, something more fundamental can be realized about the nature of technology with a deeper inspection into the means and ends. To begin this deeper inspection into technology Heidegger claims, “Wherever ends are pursued and means are employed, wherever instrumentality reigns, there reigns casualty.”¹⁸ By grasping the viewpoint of technology being simply a means to an end, Heidegger moves to examine the underlying causality implied with the relationship between a piece of technology and casualty. He discusses this relationship by examining the Greek philosophy of the four causes behind creation: *causa materialis* (the material), *causa formalis* (the form), *causa finalis* (the end), and *causa efficiens* (the maker). The example of a silver chalice is made in the essay to clarify both the causes and Heidegger’s argument that these causes for the creation of some object do not exist independent of one another, but instead are “belonging at once to each other,”¹⁹ as this co-dependency alludes to Heidegger’s view of the essence of technology. A silver chalice is made from silver, the material, made in the shape of a chalice, the form, it serves as a vessel for a potential religious event, the end, and is made by a silversmith, the maker. They are all responsible for a bringing forth of something, namely, a silver chalice. However, the creation of this silver chalice is indebted to certain factors which result in its production, which is why, according to Heidegger, the four causes ought not be thought of as independent from one another. The creation of this silver chalice is indebted to the actual silver which produces it, as well as indebted to the aspect of chalice-ness, how it appears and is accepted as a chalice. More importantly, Heidegger points out, is that they chalice is indebted to that which “in

¹⁸ Heidegger, M. (1977). *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. Lovitt, W. (trans.) New York: Harper & Row. 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

advance confines the chalice within the realm of consecration and bestowal.”²⁰ That is, something was decided on and accepted beforehand, which gives an object its necessity. In the case of this silver chalice, it is indebted to the need for it to be used in religious rites and ceremony. Heidegger invokes the Greek term *τέλος* (*telos*) to describe this third indebtedness, as that is what the matter and aspect are together co-responsible for. *Τέλος* can be translated as “ends,” or “goals,” which are the ends at first thought of with the surface level viewpoint of technology. Without the *τέλος* there would be no motivating force behind the creation of an object at the hands of the four causes. Without the need for a silver chalice for religious ceremony it would not be created. Because of this, Heidegger rejects that the silversmith is the sole *causa efficiens* of the silver chalice, as while the silversmith is the one responsible for putting the material in its form in accordance with aspect of chalice-ness, the more responsible maker of the chalice is that desired end which creates the motivating force behind its production. While the silversmith is the craftsman behind the physical creation of the chalice, they are only co-responsible for its creation, as the three ways the chalice is indebted to its creation are also responsible. The silversmith merely puts it all together. All four causes that result in the creation of a chalice are responsible for such, intertwined through the indebtedness each has toward the material available, the aspect by which deems something a silver chalice, and the *τέλος* which incites the need for such an object. Heidegger then asks what is it that unites them from the beginning, as this will give insight to the nature of technology.

The four causes and the indebtedness implicit throughout which are responsible for the creation of an object and give rise to what the essence of what technology is. The silver, the aspect of chalice-ness, the *τέλος*, and the production in accordance with the previous three result in something being brought forth. As Heidegger claims “They let what is not yet present arrive into presencing.”²¹ From no silver chalice to the creation of one. That bringing something from which is not presencing into presencing is called *ποίησις* (*poiesis*) or bringing-forth. That which not presencing is concealed. To bring-forth something means bringing something which is concealed into unconcealment. It is here Heidegger claims that the bringing-forth in the creation of something is a kind of revealment. By creating, by bringing an object forth, we reveal to the world something that is. Heidegger uses the Greek term *ἀλήθεια* (*aletheia*) to describe this, which is commonly translated as “truth,” but holds more significance to Heidegger’s argument when translated as “revealment.” From the initial view of technology being a means to an end, Heidegger moved to

²⁰ Ibid., 8.

²¹ Ibid., 10.

casualty and thus the four causes, from which an object is brought forth, and finally arriving at this bringing-forth being a kind of revealment, or ἀτέλεια. It is with this revealment that Heidegger moves to his central claim about the essence of technology, “What has the essence of technology to do with revealing? The answer: everything. For every bringing-forth is grounded in revealing.”²² The logical conclusion when viewing technology as an instrument leads to the deeper view that technology is a kind of revealment. It is a source of truth and understanding. And so, from this, Heidegger makes his claim: “Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing. If we give heed to this, then another whole realm for the essence of technology will open itself up to us. It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth.”²³ The essence of technology is grounded in revealment. Even when accepting technology as a tool, it possesses this aspect by which it brings something forth. Some truth is brought from concealment into unconcealment. Heidegger also examines where the term “technology” comes from, that being the Greek word τέχνη (techne), which holds a double meaning. One way of viewing τέχνη is that it is the activity of a craftsman, and the other is the arts of the mind. Τέχνη is a kind of bringing-forth which is linked to ἐπιστήμη (episteme), both of which are words for knowing. To know is to open up- to reveal.²⁴ There are two ways things are brought-forth for our understanding in the world which hold significance in this discussion of technology. Either a thing is brought-forth through their own natural causes or through human creation. The kind of bringing-forth produced by this human creation, τέχνη, is a differing kind then that of natural causes which reinforces Heidegger’s arguments on technology. In a Heideggerian discussion about the difference between φύσις (physis, nature) and τέχνη (techne, technology), Glazebrook notes that “The difference between φύσις and τέχνη is that an artifact (human creation) reaches its stillness, that is, comes to be what it is, differently than a natural thing.”²⁵ When something is brought-forth through τέχνη is remains at a standstill, as it was brought-forth to serve that intended purpose (τέλος, telos) behind its creation. It rests after having-been-produced. Natural things through φύσις, however, are brought-forth and continue to move in their own accordance. When building a house through τέχνη the production ceases once the job is complete. The house is at rest. A tree, on the other hand, continues to grow. Τέχνη has an end point, φύσις does not. In relation to ποιησις (poiesus), or bringing-forth, this means that the

²² Ibid., 12.

²³ Ibid., 12.

²⁴ Ibid., 13.

²⁵ Glazebrook, Trish. “From φύσις to Nature, τέχνη to Technology: Heidegger on Aristotle, Galileo, and Newton.” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. XXXVIII. 2002. 104.

technology brought forth through τέχνη is done so with an intended end. It is not a fully genuine ποιησις since that thing which is brought-forth has already had its end determined. It is disallowed to continue moving, staying at rest once it has been produced. What is revealed through the bringing-forth of technology through τέχνη is a truth, ἀλήθεια, which is constructed and intended. In the following subchapter I will address the importance of τέχνη in conjunction with Heidegger's discussion of modern technology, which will show how that the clear end point has ceased to exist, and what is revealed has ever more been an intended construction. The conclusion to draw for now with Heidegger's discussion of ποιησις τέχνη, and ἀλήθεια is that the way the ancient Greeks defined technology provides the same understanding that the inspection behind the four causes did: that technology is a way of revealing.

Before moving to Heidegger's discussion on modern technology, I will put Heidegger's examination of the essence of technology with a contemporary example that is interrelated to my overall argument. By viewing social media, one of the most widespread technologies in use today, through the lens of the four causes and the indebtedness through its creation and use it will reinforce the argument that technology is no mere means to ends, but a way of revealing. The *causa materialis* (material) from which social media is created is the hardware and the servers which house it, but also the user generated content we see online, the raw material and raw data. The *causa formalis* (form) is the code and algorithms which take this hardware and content and present it to use in the way we see it. The *causa finalis* (ends) are the different reasons users want to connect to social media. And, finally, the *causa efficiens* (maker) are the owners of the platform. But this is the surface level view. On deeper inspection, it is also us, the user, who are the *causa efficiens*, as we are the ones who “decide” what people and pages to like and follow, and what content we put on social media. The creation of social media is indebted to the actual raw material which is at the basis for it as well as the aspect of social media-ness. It is the τέλος (telos) which holds the most weight here, as the ends responsible for the creation of social media is that need to connect. A supposed social environment we can use anytime and anywhere. Social media brings forth a constant social digital world that users anywhere can connect to. It reveals to us the potential for worldwide connectivity, and yet, as will be explored in the following subchapter, this revelation from social media is one grounded in a challenge. A challenge for what not only constitutes human connectivity and socialization but doing so because of a potential means of wealth accumulation through data. The four causes and indebtedness which bring forth social media highlight Heidegger's claim for the

essence of technology, as well as introduce us to the power such a revelation has over us and the reasoning for such. What happens when our development of technology gets ahead of us? What happens when the revelation it provides us comes to deeply influence, and perhaps even dominate, our perspective of ourselves, others, and the world?

2.2 The Essence of Modern Technology (and the Postmodern)

The essence of technology took on a transformation as modernity took hold. God was dead, and the perspective on value and meaning through him decayed. As the west continued its desire for understanding technology became the means (and the ends) by which to begin assigning value and meaning. The essence of technology was transformed to fit our ever-expanding physical “needs,” and, through it, our metaphysical needs. Heidegger discusses what this transformation looks like, and how there is a growing danger in the essence of modern technology. As he claims, “it too is revealing,”²⁶ but with differing characteristics and outcomes. Heidegger argues that the bringing-forth of modern technology does not operate with the same sense of ποιησις (poiesus) as it did before but instead a kind of revelation based on a challenge to nature. Modern technology challenges nature by putting demands on it to open up and reveal itself for its aims. Nature “must” position itself in a way as to be stored and exploited for use. I will be addressing the two key terms Heidegger uses to describe this challenging nature of modern technology. I will examine the terms *Bestand* (standing reserve) and *Gestell* (positionality, or enframing) and the reasoning for how they produce the destructive perspective modern technology imposes on us.

For Heidegger, the development of modern technology created a different perspective of the universe on us. What was once a plot of land for the cultivation of crops by a peasant, for instance, was now seen as a potential mineral deposit. The plot of land is challenged, pushed into being seen as something else. Where before the peasant sowed the seeds, aided in, and watched over the growth of their crops, now “the field has come under the grip of another kind of setting-in-order, which sets upon nature.”²⁷ This setting-upon nature challenges it to unlock and expose itself to the potential we see fit, according to Heidegger. This expediting of nature is always toward furthering something else, something that was decided in advance. The causes responsible for the creation of modern technology operate in a more oppressive form of τέλος (telos). This oppressively decided ends cultivates a view in which the world is a stockpiled resource, ready for use whenever called

²⁶ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. 14.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

upon. The concealed-ness of nature's being as a potential resource for our use is unlocked through the continuing development of modern technology which transforms its being into something lesser and is then stored up. While this could be argued to be the same of pre-modern technology, as people have always sought to extract nature as a resource, Heidegger argues the difference is that the revealment and operations of modern technology "never simply comes to an end" and "neither does it run off into the indeterminate."²⁸ It is a constant cycle of challenging, unlocking, transforming, and storing up. Everything becomes ordered in a way to be immediately at hand. It becomes what Heidegger calls *Bestand*, or, standing-reserve, which he argues makes things appear not as simply objects.²⁹ Instead, this challenging modern technology in places on nature is something more belittling. Things become options, in a sense. Trees are lumber. Fields are mineral deposits. Even the human body becomes something to serve modern technological needs, like physical labor in industrial production.

Invoking and relating this discussion to my previous example of social media in our postmodern age, I argue that humans are becoming more of a standing-reserve through the use of online data given over by our social media activity. By stockpiling every click, like, and view, who we are as people are being simplified down to an equation and supposedly reflected back to us. It's a quantified equation which challenges online users into becoming a recipient for online advertisements. Users are transformed from being humans using the internet into a product for economic and political exploitation, as is discussed in Zuboff's work *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.³⁰ In the work Zuboff discusses how the use of data profiles has created an economic and political relationship with users in which data is used to create an understanding of an individual user to be used as a basis for further interaction. When a data point indicates a particular interest, the user's data profile is put on auction for various businesses, and perhaps even governments, to see which party will win the rights to interact with the user online through advertisements or search results. Through this interaction, the capacity of human choice and will is positioned into this technological framework. We, the online users, are viewed as a standing-reserve, awaiting the agency of those in the positions of power to come and use us in accordance with their aims. While modern technology challenged the world and perhaps even the human body into standing-reserve for profit and supposed "advancement," it is now the human mind, our behavior and decision-making, which

²⁸ Ibid., 16.

²⁹ Wrathall, Mark. "The Task of Thinking." 2019. Wendland, et al. *Heidegger on Technology*. Routledge. 2019. 18.

³⁰ Zuboff, S. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. London, Profile Books. 2019.

is the oppressed resource for the taking. A question to consider now is how is this challenging forth a product of modern technology (and postmodern technology) and not humans themselves, since they themselves are the ones creating and using the technology?

Heidegger answers this question by arguing that the unconcealment we perceive through modern technology, and now postmodern technology I argue, is something that has already come to pass by those ways of revealing already presently working. As he claims, “when man, investigating, observing, ensnares nature as an area of his own conceiving, he has already been claimed by a way of revealing that challenges him to approach nature as an object of research, until even the object disappears into the objectlessness of standing-reserve.”³¹ Something has already determined the way by which man understands the unconcealed nature of the world, and, this something, is modern technology. It forces us to order the world in accordance with the desires modern technology cultivates within us, namely, into standing-reserve. Modern technology revealed entities in the world to be seen as something lesser. They become objects of inquiry forced into a position or framework which disallows for a genuine *ποίησις* to occur. This forcing of entities which are viewed as standing-reserve into a specific position or framework is what Heidegger calls *Gestell*. There are two interpretations of *Gestell* which are related but each carry with it a differing aspect which is worth noting, especially in relation to postmodern technology. The first interpretation is that *Gestell* is “positionality.” The development of modern technology forces entities to be seen as standing-reserve and positioned within a certain technology system in accordance with the desires of that system. It is a decision in advance of what goal that standing-reserve will satisfy. It disallows for that entity which has been deemed a standing-reserve and positioned to appear as anything other than what ends they serve in that system. Within our postmodern context, we as users of social media have been positioned in a way that makes our ability to choose at the behest of those who control the technological system. Our most fundamental human characteristic of agency is one that has been decided in advance, based off our data, to produce some expected end result. Advertisers wish for users to purchase some product, the desired end, and thus our data profiles force us into becoming standing-reserve, positioned in such a way that advertisements push us to the desired ends of that system. The other interpretation of *Gestell* also holds significance for the essence of modern and postmodern technology, that being “enframing.” To see the *Gestell* of modern and postmodern technology in this way has the image of a framework, similar to that of the technological system

³¹ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. 19.

standing-reserves find themselves in. Trees find themselves enframed within the framework of lumbering goals. The revelation of trees as a potential source of lumber challenges the trees to appear as such, and this revelation forces them to appear only in this way. The enframing of trees in this framework holds their being hostage, disallowing for the trees to appear any other way. Trees are captured into a certain viewpoint, or picture, of what they are, lumbers, and are then enframed, conserving and reinforcing the picture. Much in the same way now, data has been shown to be a huge potential for economic gain.³² Because of this potential, users are enframed in such a way that any action taken online is one that can be stockpiled for later use by advertisers. Online users are not seen in their whole being, but rather only what they can produce in that specific technological system or framework. The snapshot of a human being as an online user which can be compiled into a data profile and used to satisfy some desire ends is seized and enframed, ensuring its longevity and status. *Gestell* is at the heart of the essence of modern technology as it challenges humans to gather things together as standing-reserve and order them accordingly.³³ It stood, and still stands, as a stark shift in the way we perceive the value and meaning of things in the world. Stripping them down to be viewed only as some resource to be stored up and used when needed. Heidegger even refers to the emergence of modern physical sciences and modern technology to be interconnected, at a time similar to that of the death of God.³⁴ This connection between modern technological thinking and the death of God will be the focus on the next subchapter. Modern physics, argues Heidegger, “is challenged forth by the rule of *Gestell*, which demands that nature be orderable as standing-reserve.” Modern physics shrinks the phenomenon of the world into a standing reserve - something that can be simplified down for an intended and decided in advance purpose. For modern physics that purpose is inquiry and understanding. The positionality and enframing pushed by modern physics challenged the world to be ordered, positioned, and enframed in such a way. From this *Gestell* of the physical sciences, the essence of modern technology was born since it operates through these exacting physical sciences. This creates the illusion that modern technology is simply applied science, an illusion which is maintained through the unquestioning acceptance of modern technology. An illusion which I argue has persisted because of nihilism. The essence of modern technology holds sway over our ability to reveal and understand the world. It challenges us and the

³² Rayome, A. “Digital transformation leads to better profits for 80% of companies that pursue it, says report.” TechRepublic. 2017.

³³ Merwin, Christopher. “Introduction: Heidegger’s Thinking Through Technology.” 2019. Wendland, et al. *Heidegger on Technology*. Routledge. 2019. 5-6.

³⁴ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. 22.

world to be viewed as standing-reserve, to be positioned and enframed in a way as to optimize some desired output.

What is brought-forth through modern technology is at the hands of a new τέχνη (techne) which, I argue, now operates similar to that of φύσις (physis). Where in pre-modern times τέχνη had a clear end, once the craft was completed, now modern technology continues to grow. This is also what is meant by modern technology developing beyond our control. Its challenge is one which provides no end goal, only more. It is not enough to simply construct mining equipment for mineral extraction, one must also build a factory to process it, markets to sell the products, consumers to buy and use it, and so on. The τέχνη of modern (and postmodern) technology has no rest, which could explain the ever growing and rapid industrialization of the world. Coupled with the obvious capitalistic benefits of resource exploitation and use, modern technology has revealed to us the opportunity of hegemony and economic gain which blinds us to its consequences of use.

The direct consequences of modern technology are already being seen today, as the world moves closer to annihilation through climate change. The continued development of modern technology pushed the view that the world is a standing-reserve awaiting exploitation. The positioning and enframing locked this perspective in place. The supposed benefits (usually economic) ensured this system's survival. By disallowing the natural entities of the world to appear to us in their fullest being, we disrespected what they were in the grander scheme of things, outside their energy supplying purpose that *Gestell* presupposed. The continued adherence to the challenge modern technology imposes on us will only guarantee the death of the natural world. So, what of postmodern technology? If the challenge modern technology imposed on us led to a neglectful view of the world which has resulted in the scarring of the Earth, what will the imposed challenge of postmodern technology bring? I will argue in the third and fourth chapter of this work that postmodern technology's challenge has resulted in the creation of the hyperreality. That, by our ability to think, act, and be being positioned and enframed as a standing-reserve we have run the risk of being unable to decipher reality from a hyperreality. This may (or already has) result in an ever more difficult obtaining of genuine being through active nihilism. For now, I will conclude with the deeper danger that Heidegger argued modern technology has that goes on to create these more obvious issues.

According to Heidegger, the way modern technology challenges us to view entities as *Bestand* and through that to be positioned and enframed through *Gestell* results in the determination of what

those entities are and will be. In a sense, modern technology determines the fate of entities in advance, as Heidegger says, “we experience Gestell as a destining of revealing,”³⁵ and this, he claims, carries the most extreme danger of modern technology. When the fate of entities is decided in advance, in accordance with some technological system or framework, they are bound to such. This comes to dominate the fate of entities. As technology continues to develop in this way, that domination becomes deeply engrained. Consider the fact that even efforts aimed at the preservation of forests need to justify their efforts in conjunction with the resource driven economies.³⁶ Even when one tries to resist the consequences this domination modern technology holds over us one still finds themselves unable to detach from the status quo it enforces. This domination of being at the command of technological thinking is known as machination, and I will argue that this machination found an easy acceptance into society due to our inability to combat a nihilistic world

2.3 Machenschaft and Nihilism

Through engaging with Heidegger it is clear that wherever technology is found to be at use in the world something is unconcealed to us. A certain truth is revealed. The development of modern technology took this revealment and began challenging this unconcealment, forcing entities in the world into standing-reserve to be positioned and enframed to ensure maximal exploitation for a desired end. The essence of modern technology cultivates a kind of thinking which results in a dominating perspective, what Heidegger calls *Machenschaft*, or, machination, which was allowed easy adoption as a collective viewpoint due to the rise of nihilism. There was a need for some meaning-making and value assigning entity in the world following the death of God, and so machination took his place.

Simply put, machination is the manipulative power that dominates the being of entities. These entities are seen through machination as something that is malleable through manipulation. The fates of entities are predetermined through the positionality of modern technological thinking. Anything and everything can be molded into products of the will to power, as even Nietzsche claims “will to power is the highest form of machination.”³⁷ What this means is the being of beings is something determined by what the will to power desires. The values and meanings given to entities,

³⁵ Ibid., 25.

³⁶ Glazebrook, Trish. “An Ecofeminist Reading of *Gestell*, *Gelassenheit*, and Sustainability.” 2019. Wendland, et al. *Heidegger on Technology*. Routledge. 2019. 243-260.

³⁷ Bernasconi, Robert. “Machination (*Machenschaft*).” Wrathall, Mark. *The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon*. Cambridge University Press. 2021. 324

humans included, is something created on the basis of power. The metaphysical void left after the death of God found a new occupant with machination. This desire to have some all-encompassing truth which guides our values, meanings, and actions led to the adoption of machination as this “truth.” In effect, Heidegger’s notion of machination is that technology became a new God. Iain Thomson notes such in their work “Technology, Ontotheology, Education,” when stating “What powers the micro- and macroscopic expansion of the technological understanding of being, driving enframing (*Gestell*) ever outward across the outermost edges of our global self-understanding, as well as ever inward into the increasingly interstitial minutiae of every existence? Heidegger’s answer, as we have seen, is that *ontotheology drives enframing*.”³⁸ The enframing which determines the fate of entities in a technological system is paramount to modern technology, and is driven by ontotheology, according to Heidegger. That attempt to understand our being (*Dasein*, as Heidegger puts it) coupled with the ongoing adherence to some higher “objective truth” by which to do so enables machination to assume the position in society as the decider of truth. That thing which all value and meaning is based. Beings under machination are viewed in a more cold and quantitative way, as it’s through this calculation that machination operates. Through this calculative approach entities become standing-reserve to be better manipulated to serve whatever ends the will to power demands. Continuing on with Thomson’s discussion, they state “What we call “technology” is thus a symptom of (and, when used uncritically, also often reinforces) our ongoing technologization of the world, our endless expansion of a technological understanding of being that is becoming so ubiquitous that we increasingly tend not to notice it, even as it ever more pervasively shapes our lives and so empties them of meaning, turning friends into “friends,” students into “educational outcomes” to be optimized, our days and nights—and indeed our creatively disclosive capacities themselves—into “productivity resources” awaiting technological optimization.”³⁹ What is deemed optimization is that which best serves the will to power. To accept this optimization, allowed for by science and technology, those things which machination operates through, as the avenue by which we can achieve a concrete understanding of life is an example of Nietzsche’s passive nihilism. The supposed truth and certainty machination delivers becomes that faulty compass by which individuals and societies navigate the unknown waters of being.

³⁸ Thomson, Iain. “Technology, Ontotheology, Education.” 2019. Wendland, et al. *Heidegger on Technology*. Routledge. 2019. 183.

³⁹ Ibid.

A modern example of how the nihilistic environment gave way for the physical sciences and modern technology to harbor machination is with the eugenics programs of the 20th century. With eugenics, human beings are seen as malleable. The lens of machination misled scientists into justifying a hierarchy of races. The human essence of being was positioned as a standing-reserve, it became the object of inquiry and “discovery.” However, the desired ends were pre-determined, a superior race against the inferior, and the use of calculation and manipulation saw the being of those differing entities as something mathematical. It was a calculative approach to understanding the difference of people which eroded the whole being of those people. Any other supposed created meaning took a backseat to the machination of human being. The adherence to the illusion of modern technology being applied modern science, and even the adherence to modern science being the “best” interpretation of the world, continues to cultivate this neglectful, manipulative, and dangerous attitude towards the world and the entities that inhabit it.

A postmodern example of ubiquitous and prevalent machination can be seen with social media as well. The use of data to create profiles of online users forces the perspective of them being-standing reserve. They are positioned and enframed within this system aimed at satisfying some desired end. Online users become not the consumers of online information or business, but the products of such. Users become the barcode from which the will to power scans in order to understand in machination’s simplifying view, from which are then manipulated for some end. Postmodern technology shows how our being as humans is continuing to be diminished and objectified through machination. The following chapter will be arguing that the hyperreality is but just one example of postmodern machination, and how its presence makes any active nihilism increasingly difficult to obtain.

CHAPTER 3: Information Mediums and Hyperreality

The acceptance of machination at the behest of nihilism continued into the postmodern era. Where before the physical was manipulated to achieve some desired ends, now it was/is the mental and spiritual which has come under the guise of optimization. This has produced what Jean Baudrillard called “the hyperreality” in our postmodern era, though hyperreality has existed long before the postmodern era. Before delving into postmodern hyperreality it will be necessary to examine Marshall McLuhan’s thoughts on communication mediums in his *The Medium is the Message*

to provide the understand of how the medium of information plays an essential role in our way of understanding the world and ourselves. These mediums of information, like the television, are a product of postmodern machination. The continued development of information mediums through machination's dominating imposition of value and meaning explains how *the* hyperreality of postmodernity came to exist, entrenching the societies of the world into an understanding of the world, others, and themselves based off a simulation of the real. A simulation of the real which asserts itself as the real, giving little room for alternative understandings.

3.1 The Medium is the Massaging Message

The story behind the title of McLuhan's work, *The Medium is the Massage*, and the subchapter title, alludes to what McLuhan examines in his book, and the focus of this discussion. Initially, the work's title was *The Medium is the Message*, however a typo resulted in a misprint to "massage." McLuhan liked this misprint more, as his reflections found in the work are on how the mediums of information come to "massage" our minds, influencing and directing our thinking. He came to understand the industrializing nature of media, in which he even invokes the word "mechanization" several times, which can be connected to the previous discussion of Heidegger's machination. Essentially, the adherence to machination brought forth through a neglecting collective nihilism came to dominate our information exchanges. The mechanized advents of new information mediums, TV, radio, and now the internet, provided a new environment which came to shape our ways of thinking and being. For McLuhan, the medium of information carries more significance in the message than the content it holds.

In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, McLuhan first engages with the discussion of information mediums by looking at its evolution. Humans began first to exchange information through oral traditions. They shared stories and tales, and others listened. It was a public affair of information exchange. The primary sense used to acquire the information was through hearing. With the arrival of the alphabet came a new medium for information. Its change to our understanding was not only a shift of the primary sense used to exchange information, from hearing to seeing, but also consolidated our understanding into symbols. In order for us to collectively agree on the meaning of this symbols, we had to filter our information to fit into that medium. Here, McLuhan argues, is why the medium is an important factor in information exchanges, as he states

“...it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action.”⁴⁰ The content of the message must shape itself in relation to the medium its being presented through, creating a differing association to that content for an information consumer. The medium comes to filter the content which results in a different overall message, and, without a conforming to a medium, the content of a message risks becoming lost to its consumers who operate according to said medium. When a medium comes to force the content to abide, the overall message comes to be changed as well. If the message changes, then my understanding of what the message relays changes. If my understanding changes, then the way I perceive things changes. If my perception changes, then the way I interact and engage with myself, others, and the world changes. Thus, the mediums of information come to dictate the way we understand and interact and through that our environments. Communication was and continues to be one of humans’ most primary tool, and as Father John Culkin, a close friend of McLuhan, stated, “We shape our tools, and then our tools shape us.”

But what of this phenomenon of information mediums and their capacity to dictate my way of understanding once machination takes hold? If the goal of machination is an optimized output, how does this come to influence the messages consumers receive through information mediums? McLuhan states that, “the paradox of mechanization is that although it is itself the cause of maximal growth and change, the principle of mechanization excludes the very possibility of growth or the understanding of change. For mechanization is achieved by fragmentation of any process and by putting the fragmented parts in a series.”⁴¹ This discussion of “mechanization” likens itself to Heidegger’s work on machination, in which it presupposes the avenue by which to achieve some maximal growth and stifle any other way of understanding and obtaining value. Because of the overlap of similarity, I argue McLuhan’s mechanization is an offshoot product of Heidegger’s machination, in a more concentrated form. By fragmenting off a process, mechanization comes to see the pieces of a process as objects of malleability, disregarding the whole process for the optimization of its parts. In relation to information mediums, mechanization (through the framework provided by machination) comes to neglect the process of information exchange from producer to consumer in favor of maximized economic or political output. It makes the act of understanding a business or political venture where each segment of the process is manipulated to adhere the logic of mechanization. For instance, multiple media and content producers have

⁴⁰ McLuhan, Marshall. “The Medium is the Message.” In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. 1964. Pg 2.

⁴¹ Ibid, 4.

resorted to using clickbait titles which have been shown to increase click through rates, giving that producer more money. The titles themselves are designed not to accurately report information or consolidate the article, but to generate emotional interest.⁴² The mechanization of information mediums fragmented the process of information exchange and found the segment of attention to article titles to be a way to maximize the economic output. This domination has led to news articles to become increasingly based on emotional flair and excitement, rather than understanding some piece of information. It has pushed online news into a battle of competitive psychological manipulation for consumers' attention. In a similar way, social media users segment off the process of information exchange through sharing with the aim to maximize approval. Facebook and Instagram users will crop, edit, and filter their produced content in such a way where the process of exchange is made up of putting fragmented parts (each small change to yield the best results) into a series. Both click-bait titles and social media demonstrate the continued paradox mechanization produces in information mediums in the postmodern day. There is a specific desired optimized output which comes to overshadow all other avenues for possible growth or change. For click-bait titles, it becomes the norm simply by being the most attractive for click-through rates, not an accurate representation of information. For social media use, engagement becomes about disingenuous approval, not sharing. To simplify, truth is not the focus of the messages we produce and consume online. That's not to say true and factual information exchange was at the heart of society before the advent of newer information mediums (like yellow journalism and the Spanish American War), just that it is at least more evident now, if not more wide-spread. But this reformation of information mediums occurred even before the internet, as McLuhan focuses his arguments mostly on the television. While the development of new information technologies, such as the printing press and radio, each created their own differing effects on information exchange, it was the television, says McLuhan, that truly shifted the way mediums came to dominate messages.

Looking at his book now, *The Medium is the Massage*, McLuhan describes how the information medium of the television comes to affect a viewer. It stands as the major turning point in history of information mediums by its ability to demand participation from the viewer. As McLuhan states, "It will not work as a background. It engages you. Perhaps this is why so many people feel that their identity has been threatened."⁴³ The power the television holds over the one watching it is its ability to encapsulate. It demands attention from both the ear and eye. Machination pushed the

⁴² Brooks, Mike. "How Does Clickbait Work?" n.d. Psychology Today. 2019.

⁴³ McLuhan, Marshall. *The Medium is the Massage*. Gingko Press. 1967. Pg 125.

information exchange process into involving more of the whole being through the perceptual. As McLuhan says, “You have to be ‘with’ it,” continuing his argument saying “the images are projected at you. You are the screen. The images wrap around you. You are the vanishing point. This creates a sort of inwardness, a sort of reverse perspective...”⁴⁴ The television represents a shift in information mediums by its capacity to enthrall the viewer, turning the direction of the process into a cycle within the viewer. The television and viewer become one. It creates the feeling that the viewer is actively participating in what the television shows. This underlying “with-ness” McLuhan discusses about the television can sidestep the critical boundaries a consumer of information may have. In a sense, it is easier for a viewer of television to be convinced by the message the medium filters for maximized output rather than a listener of the radio or the reader of a book, as the conjoining of the senses cause a ubiquitous phenomenon in which the viewer is lulled into believing, rather than thinking. In postmodern times this phenomenon the television produced takes a deeper turn into changing our perceptions, and, thus, our environments.

Taking another look at the most popular medium of information exchange in the postmodern era, social media, we can see how its forcing of filtration and fitting of content comes to dominate messages and understanding even more than the television. It also creates its own phenomenon of “with-ness,” similar to that of what McLuhan discusses about the television, which puts further demands on consumer participation and involvement, as well as production. The postmodern information medium that best exemplifies this all is Twitter. On Twitter, content must fit itself into a minuscule character limit. It must squeeze itself down into a bite-sized chunk of information for easy, quick consumption. Our way of understanding through the medium of social media cultivates a perspective of instantaneous and surface level information exchange. In a quite literal sense, the information exchange environment of social media makes us less rational in engaging and considering the messages we see, similar to that of television. Empirical studies have shown internet usage, and more prominently social media use, exercises the parts of the brain responsible for first order thinking.⁴⁵ This first order thinking is used for quick and intuitive decision making. With such a focus on the first order thinking the second order thinking goes into atrophy, which is responsible for slow and rational consideration. In a manner, social media’s filtering of content to fit its medium makes the production and consumption of information shallow and pushes our cognition into behaving more reactively. We are bombarded by clickbait titles competing

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Naughton, John. “The Internet: Is It Changing the Way We Think?” The Guardian. The Guardian. March 22, 2018.

for our attention online, all the while we reduce ourselves to irrational consumers. Our minds are massaged in such a way that our environment comes to reflect this medium. We might come to walk and talk faster. Our patience may thin. Instant gratification might come to dictate our actions and being. We become a collectively attention deficit hyperactivity disorder society, where we pick up a message as quickly as we put another down, mindless scrolling to the next thing.

Twitter also presents itself as a public forum for the discussion of recent events. A user may want to feel included in the discussion and goes on to produce their own content which is filtered through the medium. An environment of supposed social and public interaction. To be a user on Twitter demands a certain level of participation and involvement. Why else would one create an account? Much the same with the television, the information medium that is Twitter engages users to the point where it feels like an extension of themselves. They want to participate in the discussion at hand, all the while incurring some of the same inwardness the television produced in its viewers. The technological framework of Twitter fades around the user, making their engagement with it feel natural. The process becomes one of user to audience, rather than producer to consumer, as the focal point of some discussion is to accumulate approval through likes and retweets and not active engagement of a digital public sphere. It becomes about the individual user, and not the collective in relation to information exchange, as even the presentation of certain information is auctioned off for data-driven advertisements. Taking a look at McLuhan's discussion of the television and its effects as an information medium, we can see Twitter is a further development in information mediums' power over our perceptions and environments. McLuhan would look at social media as the apex masseur of information.

3.2 Hyperreality

McLuhan's discussion of mechanized information mediums highlights the shift machination imposed on the act of understanding. This desire for optimized output for information exchange arguably led to the emergence of what Baudrillard called "hyperreality." This specific discussion of hyperreality is a product of the continued mechanization of information machination into the postmodern era. Postmodernism is (ironically?) a vague term, and so I will be utilizing Lyotard's definition for such, arguing that it is an "incredulity towards metanarratives,"⁴⁶ or, the period of time in which metanarratives, totalizing stories that ground and legitimize practices, are coming to an end.

⁴⁶ Lyotard, Jean-Francois. "The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge." Bennington, G (trans.) Manchester University Press. 1984. Pg xxiv.

Following the destruction of World War II, the world was able to see the dangerous potential metanarratives have, and thus, much like the death of God, people were reminded about the subjectivity of being. In this environment, with the addition of the development of information mediums like the television, a new hyperreality was born. Briefly put, hyperreality is a constructed perspective of the world. It is a viewpoint of human creation – an overlap between the real and the imaginary. It can come to influence peoples' interpretations about the world, others, and themselves. God was hyperreality, because things like “good,” “evil,” and “sin,” were a constructed viewpoint which came to influence the perspectives and interpretations of his followers. This newer hyperreality Baudrillard discusses, though, is a further production of such brought about through the mechanized advancement of information mediums. According to Baudrillard, one of the dangers of hyperreality is its translucent nature. Much in the same way of Heidegger's discussion on the status quo modern technological thinking enforces, hyperreality presents itself as the norm. Modern technological thinking cultivated the understanding which allowed machination to take hold over value and meaning assignment, and the postmodern hyperreality became one such example of this. Hyperreality is pervasive in this way. Our ability to distinguish between the “real” and the “hyperreal” becomes nearly impossible as the interpretations generated through the latter are taken as real. The postmodern hyperreality found itself operating mainly through our information mediums, in which the messages it provided became the basis of our understanding yet based off a further simulation of the real. Its hegemony over our sense of reality becomes how we assign value and meaning in things through its control over signs and symbols. If one adopts such value and meaning assignment through an imposed hyperreality, a hyperreality which in the postmodern era has become increasingly efficient and ubiquitous, it makes the nihilistic fork in the road between the active and the passive all the more elusive and uncertain. To understand why this is, we must understand what hyperreality is.

To begin, it will be necessary to provide my best interpretation of Baudrillard's view on hyperreality by looking at his work, *Simulacra and Simulation*, in which he takes a critical stance on the way media has come to dictate our perceptions of reality. A quote early on in the book poetically captures Baudrillard's thoughts on the hyperreality, which I will use as one of the foundations of my interpretation:

Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the

generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory - precession of simulacra - it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. The desert of the real itself.⁴⁷

Baudrillard likens the hyperreality to that of a map and territory. In ordinary circumstances, the territory or plot of land precedes any map. It is only when explorers and map makers find their way to this territory that they are able to interpret it as they see it. Others may find this map useful, but it is still an interpretation of another individual.⁴⁸ The territory itself exists as is in the world, and the map is a simulacrum of the territory, a copy or imitation of reality. What stands as a stark difference with the hyperreality is that the map has come to precede the territory in this situation. The interpretation and assertion of the simulacra becomes the basis of the reality, and so the territory as it was originally does not survive. Much in line with machination, the technological thinking Heidegger explored presupposes this viewpoint as well, as *Gestell* (positionality, enframing) comes to determine the fate of entities in a system. *Gestell* is the map that precedes the territory, and, in fact, the map and territory seem to become one. When such a system (map) has become so ingrained, it becomes difficult to separate it and the entity it determines (territory). When one cannot distinguish between the map and the territory, or more abstractly put, when one cannot differentiate between reality and a simulated view of reality, hyperreality is born. The supposed “real” the hyperreality asserts is on the basis of a simulation of this real. This simulation is “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality,” as Baudrillard says above. It is an interpretation formed into a model without any actual source found in reality, and it is this simulating nature which holds the reason behind hyperreality’s power and indistinguishability. Consider again the hyperreality faith in God imposed. In nature, there is no such thing as the moral concepts of “good,” “evil,” or “sin.” These ideas were created to provide the map for the territory of life followers were venturing through. Now the maps of hyperreal creation are at the behest of machination.

⁴⁷ Baudrillard, J. (1981). *Simulacra and Simulation*. Glaser, S. (trans.) Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 1994. Pg 1.

⁴⁸ A connection can also be made on this discussion of the interpretation of territory into maps with Nietzsche’s chapter “The Bestowing Virtue” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in which Zarathustra warns against believing others’ interpretations, even his own.

Later in his work, Baudrillard examines simulacra and the orders of simulacra to explain the emergence of the hyperreality by pinpointing simulation simulacra, the supposed final stage of simulacra. To reiterate in more detail, simulacra are interpretative imitations referring to some original thing. As simulacra continue to develop and are engaged with, they become interconnected, where simulacra are based on other simulacra. Interpretations about something based off prior interpretations of that thing. As these simulacra continue to be produced and refer to one another, they can come to inflate the distance between the original thing being imitated through such production. These continually connecting interpretations through simulacra can come to overshadow the thing they originally were interpreting. It is like copying a copy of a copy of some image. With each step, the original image becomes increasingly faded to the point of non-recognition.

There are three orders of this simulacra according to Baudrillard: the natural, the productive, and the simulated.⁴⁹ Natural simulacra are the kind aimed at harmonious imitation of the entity being interpreted, such as a painting made of a tree. The intention behind this order of simulacrum is to try and capture the ideal of the nature of the thing. It is an interpretation of some reality, aimed at genuine imitation, but still an imitation of reality. It is creating a map focused on the shapes, colors, and sizes of some territory. The second order of simulacra are the productive kind, based on energy and force. It operates in a system of production aimed at expansion. The productive simulacra find itself within the of Heidegger's thoughts on the emerging modern essence of technology, as the tree has become revealed to be a component in the production of something. The tree is seen as a resource, and the productive simulacra enframe it in such a way. While the first order simulacra are like that of a painting of a tree, this second order would be seeing the tree as an architect and conceptualizing what could be built from it. The map created through productive simulacra focuses on the potential for production and expansion – what resources can be utilized in this territory. The third order of simulacra are the simulated, based on information and modeling aimed at total control of an entity being imitated. In relation to the tree example, this third order of simulacra would be a global lumbering corporation employing algorithms in order to optimize locations for harvest, stocks, shipping details, etc. The aim of total control here is to utilize the lumber in the most efficient manner. The interpretation of the tree here is still based on reality, but the hyperreal understanding takes priority. The map created through simulated simulacra is one of pure hyperreal

⁴⁹ Ibid. 118

creation. The map is created prior to seeing the territory. The territory is now the map. While the second order of simulacra was that of the emerging modern essence of technology, the third order of simulacra represent the full modern (and postmodern) shift of the essence of technology, where *Gestell* is at the core of pure simulacra production, cultivating machination. With each jump in order of simulacra the original entity being imitated, like a tree, becomes increasingly dictated by the interpretations generated through simulacra production. We move gradually away from the real into the hyperreal. When we connect this discussion of simulacra to information mediums, we can see how the imitations provided through such mediums, like the television, have come to cultivate the understanding the third order of simulacra produces. By massaging viewers into complacency the television provided an interpretation of reality which based itself on total control. The simulacra given off by the eerie glow of the television were produced through the process of mechanization - a hyperreal approach provided by the crowning hyperreal producer: machination. Through this interaction the simulation of the real becomes ever more the status quo.

But what is a “simulation of the real”? Exploring further into Baudrillard’s argument we can answer this question to better understand how media representations have come to distance information consumers further from what is, into something which has a hyperreal relation to the real. A simulation of the real is a presentation of the “real” that has become copied and filtered to the point that is has lost any substantial connection to the original, similar to that of the order of simulacra. To explain this Baudrillard discusses the phases of simulacra of an image:

“Such would be the successive phases of the image:

it is the reflection of a profound reality;

it masks and denatures a profound reality;

it masks the absence of a profound reality;

it has no relation to any reality whatsoever;

it is its own pure simulacrum.”⁵⁰

With every successive phase of representation of an image there is a further divorce from the real it is meant to capture. The four phases seen above are: a reflection, a mask, a removal, and a

⁵⁰ Ibid 6.

pure simulacrum. With each, a subject is taken for representation, but increasingly malformed into something other. The first phase, a reflection, is meant to accurately represent the reality as best it can. However a reflection is not truly the thing in itself. A mirror image reflects, but distorts in a small way, reversing the subject. The next stage, a mask, “denatures” the reality by masking its origin. It captures a piece of the reality, but not the whole, consolidating understanding of the subject to this one aspect and overshadowing all other aspects. The next phase of removal divorces itself further from the subject by changing the subject into something other, but still with a basis on the original. It removes it from its initial position and essence. The final phase of pure simulacrum is that of a simulated image. It has entirely removed the subject from its relation to reality, both displacing it from its initial essence and its initial being. It becomes a pure simulacrum, a pure fabrication of meaning.

The images we once collectively consumed through the television pushed the presentation of reality through these phases, ending at the pure simulacrum of meaning. The news casts of the Vietnam War in 1970s America served as a way for information consumers to be presented the supposed reality of the war. The media presupposed it was presenting the war with the first phase, a reflection, but quickly delved deeper into the phases until ending in the pure simulacrum. This pure simulacrum of the Vietnam War was exemplified in the strategy known as “body count,” in which the perceived success of the war was being determined by counting up the bodies of dead enemy combatants and presented on the news to reassure American television viewers of the military’s effectiveness in the war.⁵¹ It was a fabricated outlook on the status of the war which created a hyperrealistic understanding. Numbers became the basis of understanding – the map of strategy was preceding the territory of war. The ability to be “with” the television, as McLuhan argues, made accepting this fabrication ubiquitous. How else could they understand the supposed success of the war if not in the form of an easily digestible number?

Our digital age has only exacerbated this final phase of image representation into a pure simulacrum, into a hyperreal simulation of meaning and understanding of information. The news media we utilize to form an interpretation of the world, the social media posts we produce and view, even the pages we visit, all can be a construction of this final phase of image representation. There is now a plurality of news source which online users can pick and choose to suffice their information consumption desires. It has evolved into an environment which further entrenches prior biases and

⁵¹ Burns, K, et al. *The Vietnam War: Volume One*. PBS Distributions. 2017.

understanding, or a manipulation into a differing understanding. An example of pure simulacrum in our digital age is found with the continued development of deepfake videos. While deepfakes are still in their infancy in regard to quality and effectiveness in misleading viewers, they are being improved year after year.⁵² While some videos are posted online clearly explaining their falseness, others have done so with the intent to mislead by distributing disinformation. Consider the example of the deepfake video of Ukrainian President Zelenskyy supposedly telling his armed forces to lay down their arms and surrender to the Russian military.⁵³ While the video itself is quite obviously a deepfake, if one of better quality were produced it would have led to mass confusion in Ukraine, and perhaps even some soldiers outright surrendering, leading to substantial Russian military gains. It is an example of pure simulacrum in the way it simulates a supposed reality. President Zelenskyy and the conflict within Ukraine is indeed a reality, but his supposed declaration of surrender is not, and the potential for a deepfake to assert the former is quite literally a simulation of reality. Deepfakes stand as the ultimate pure simulacrum because the messages they could convey may have no basis in reality whatsoever. President Zelenskyy has no plans to ever surrender his nation to an occupying force, and yet the deepfake video presents otherwise. The asserted reality this deepfake video presents is one of simulation, as even the President's face and words are a simulated creation using artificial intelligence. What will happen when deepfakes get to the point where internet users are completely unable to differentiate between a real video and a deepfake? What happens to our grasp and understanding of reality when reality itself can be simulated through the pure simulacrum of deepfakes? What would happen if there were five different videos of President Zelenskyy online, all looking seemingly the same, and yet each conveying a different message? Mass confusion and uncertainty would reign supreme, with the acceptance of a video being determined by the prior understanding and biases a viewer of the videos have. The result is a further distancing of individuals and collectives to the reality of what is, and closer to a simulated reality dictated by those who have the power and means to produce pure simulacrum. Connecting back to Nietzsche and the active/passive nihilist, if one were to be tricked by a deepfake video they may come to forge their own creation of value and meaning based off such. To that individual, it may seem as though they are behaving like a rational and critically thinking individual, an active nihilist, but in reality, they are adopting an understanding that is not based in reality. They are unknowingly behaving like a passive nihilist yet believing themselves to be active. The potential impact of deepfake videos as pure

⁵² Tucker, Patrick. "Deepfakes Are Getting Better, Easier to Make, and Cheaper." *Defense One*. August 6, 2020.

⁵³ The Telegram (March 17, 2022) *Deepfake video of Volodymyr Zelensky surrendering surfaces on social media*. [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X17yrEV5sl4>.

simulacrum resulting in hyperreal understanding represents a ubiquitous challenge to active nihilism in regard to social and political action, as the next chapter will explain.

The engagement of users on social media also exemplifies this pure simulacrum of image presentation and the creation of the hyperreal. Editing, cropping, and filtering of the reality of our individual and collective human experiences has become the status quo, so much so that the relation to the initial subject is dissipating. A meticulous choosing of what to share online not only gives other users a hyperreal understanding of the poster's life, but also cultivates a hyperreal understanding for the poster themselves. They may come to believe in their own pure simulacrum presentation of themselves. Falling victim to what Sartre called "bad faith," a surrendering to a singular aspect of ones' being, or an inauthentic evading of responsibility for discovering the true self.⁵⁴ Social media users present themselves through the constructed signs and symbols that they believe best portray who they are as people. But these consolidating signs and symbols are like that of the meaning and values discussed by Nietzsche, a human creation, with no inherit basis in nature or reality. People come to identify themselves with an understanding that exists outside of them – unknowingly adopting it, believing it to be their own. Without such signs and symbols by which to relate ones' life, internet users may feel lost in value and meaning. Social media activity can quickly become the faulty compass of passive nihilism Gertz describes in his work. This acceptance of understanding through human created sign and symbols have become more the reality than reality itself. Hyperreality has become more attractive than reality itself through social media usage.

A final connection to make with Baudrillard's argument is with Heidegger and machination. Machination of information exchange led to a hyperreal understanding of ourselves and the world by dominating the assignment of value and meaning. Under the framework of machination and its focus on fragmenting a series for optimal output, the third order of simulacra and the final phase of image representation became the basis of direction for the malleability machination aims to produce. By using data, information, and modeling, information exchanges have become a mathematical equation whose answers stray further from the real they are supposedly trying to represent in the exchange. The information in such exchanges is a pure simulacrum construction, like that of deepfake videos intended to deceive and mislead. Efficiency in the presentation and acceptance of such from information consumers becomes the goal under information machination. What consumers receive in an information exchange following the wide-spread use of the television, and

⁵⁴ Flynn, Thomas. 2011. "Jean-Paul Sartre (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)." Stanford.edu. 2011.

now digital media, is a carefully modeled, researched, tested, and sculpted message. Pure simulacra led to the medium demanding even more from the content of a message. By utilizing mechanization, content is fragmented into pieces for optimization, and the series that is produced after those pieces have been put back together strays further from the original content. Instead the series become simulated under such optimization. The filtering through the information medium backed by pure simulacra produces a hyperreal message. It is an understanding given to information consumers which is loosely based on something real or tangible, focused more on only what is efficient or profitable for some desired end result. What we might see on online news websites, social media, or even Netflix is not a fully genuine expression of some human experience or reporting of the facts, but a calculated and filtered message aimed at making you like it, and they know you'll like it.

CHAPTER 4: The Digital Challenge to Active Nihilism

By connecting the prior discussions of nihilism, technology, and the hyperreal, it is clear how a substantial challenge is occurring to active nihilism through digital technology. According to Nietzsche, to be an active nihilist means to engage the world and the self in a critical and destructive way in order to take on the individual and collective responsibility in the creation of values and meaning, rather than succumbing to the supposed ease of passive nihilism through numbing or avoiding said responsibility. As was previously discussed with Heidegger, the development of modern technological thinking gave rise to machination, the manipulative power that came to dominate the essence of entities within the system it operates. Machination, through *Gestell*, comes to view all entities as something malleable for some desired end goal, and so any individuals or collectives operating within a machination framework are vulnerable to having their values and meanings dictated by such. In a sense, relying on machination is passive nihilism, and the adherence to it into the postmodern era created information exchange mediums that continued to dominate and destine individual and collective value and meaning creation. The power of the television as an information medium, as discussed by McLuhan, resulted in the furthering of Baudrillard called hyperreality. Entire societies, and the individuals that make them up, were presented a simulation of the real that came to warp their perceptions and understandings of themselves, others, and their environments. Machination of information mediums has persisted into our contemporary era, where we can view digital technology as a continuation of the power the television exerted on viewers. But, while the television presented a hyperreal understanding that encapsulated a general society into one

kind of narrative, digital technology is individualized. The plethora of information, data-use, and individual aims means the hyperreality of today is one that is molded to fit the individual user. A feedback loop of data and personal agency entraps individual users into a simulation of the real which threatens their ability to engage in active nihilism. While on the surface it would appear such activity could be considered active nihilism, in actuality it creates an environment of understanding and acceptance which could disallow for users to engage in the kind of destructive behavior necessary to engage in active nihilism. Because of this, digital technology is truly passive nihilism, and the ubiquitous and concealed nature of such is a serious challenge for any who wish to be active nihilists.

4.1 Digital Technology – Individualized Hyperreality

Digital technology is a tool of hyperreal creation designed for the individual. Baudrillard looked at how the television warped the perceptions of the viewers of societies into their respective hyperrealities, while the internet takes a more personal engagement in hyperreality construction. The information presented on the television was viewed by the same peoples. The hyperrealistic understanding of information given off by the television as an information medium worked on a macro level, to a society. Digital technology, on the other hand, is on the micro level. It's connecting with individuals first, then societies. Using some contemporary works on data use and digital technology, I will show how internet users are living in their own individualized hyperreality, and how this environment produces the challenge to active nihilism in the digital age.

Every click we make, every website we visit, every video we watch, is recorded and given over freely as data to the various platforms we use online. Your phone tracks your location, records which restaurants or places you visit often, and can even record what you say without you knowing.⁵⁵ Every facet of our lives in the digital age are pieces of information businesses and governments want to have, because with this data they can come to understand us more, thereby satisfying their own economic and political aims. While understanding is the initial step, there is also an incentive to convince and manipulate. This is nothing new to business or politics. A business makes the most money when they're able to convince their consumers to buy. A government maintains their power when they are able to manipulate and sedate their citizens into obedience. However, the degree to which they are able to home in on their potential gains has exponentially

⁵⁵ Komando, Kim. "You're Not Paranoid: Your Phone Really Is Listening In." USA Today. Gannett Satellite Information Network, December 20, 2019.

increased. Machination has enabled businesses and governments the system by which to assign value and meaning which yields the optimal results for their desires. In continuing to allow machination's value domination into the digital age humans have ever more been positioned and enframed (*Gestell*) into a standing reserve (*Bestand*) to serve the aims of those in the positions of power. Modern technological thinking viewed the human body as an object of manipulation, now, with postmodern technological thinking, it is the human mind. The exploitation of body and mind has been a human endeavor stretching back to religion and ideology, and now technological thinking has taken the divine seat of power God once held in relation to value and meaning assignment. Our capacity to choose and want, to vote and buy, have become the object of malleability through postmodern technological thinking. The position an individual has in the equation of postmodern machination of businesses and governments through digital technology has now flipped. Instead of consumers or citizens, individuals have been positioned into products. Our ability to decide is at the focal point of understanding, connecting, and manipulating for businesses and governments. With enough user data a profile can be made of an individual which reveals and predicts their behavior – perhaps even better than that individual understands about themselves.⁵⁶ When this profile indicates a particularity that would be of some use to a business or government an auction is made behind the scenes of the online content. Who is willing to pay the most money to influence this individual user? This is how we have become the products, as it is us who are being bought. The free use of the internet and the various platforms do come at a price - the hidden price of our individuality. The vast amounts of wealth made by digital platforms is not from the individual users, but from the businesses and governments who wish to influence said individual users. The use of targeted advertisements is the tool by which they accomplish this. Since data profiles differ on an individual basis, this means the advertisements seen by two users differ as well. The content users are bombarded with online is molded to fit them. The total online informational experience is individualized. No two users experience their online activity the same, both because of the data profiles dictating said activity, and because of the differing aims individuals have online. This means, in essence, that digital technology has created individualized hyperrealities.

Two examples can be made to highlight the individualized hyperrealities, one from business, and the other from the political. The accumulation of profit from online click-through rates on Google pushed the most popular search engine to tailor its search results for individual users. If two

⁵⁶ “Show me my data, and I’ll tell you who I am.” The Internet Health Report. Mozilla. 2019.

users with different beliefs use Google to search for the same topic, it is very likely the differing data profiles of the two users will result in completely different search results. Such was (and perhaps still is) the case for Google and vaccination information. Depending on if a user's data profile hinted at their supporting or critical stance on vaccinations, they would be shown information that correlates with that stance.⁵⁷ The aim was for users of Google to click on results, as any clicks users do on search results generates revenue for Google. Using "click-through rates" (CTR), Google is able to calculate the likelihood of a user clicking on a particular search result. Whatever page, in conjunction with a user's data profile, which has the highest CTR will be presented first. In relation to the vaccine search results, this means an antivaxxer would almost entirely be shown antivaxx information, and vice versa for the user who supports vaccines. Data-profiles, CTR, and a focus on revenue generation has created an online information environment in which users are given a digitized mirror that furtherly entrenches their prior biases and understanding. It disallows for users to be challenged on their beliefs and understanding, disallowing for the necessary self-destruction of active nihilism, all in the pursuit of money. Machination into the postmodern era has given Google the framework by which to enframe, position, and engage with individuals. The process of online information exchange is fragmented by postmodern machination, where the fragmented parts of the exchange are constructed in a way as to produce the most profit. When these fragmented parts are put back into a whole, the initial message of the information exchange ceases to exist. The whole is now a message of economic gain, not genuine understanding of some truth. Indeed, Zuboff emphasizes this point in how data has become the basis of online activity.⁵⁸ The Google search results exemplify the individualized hyperrealities, as the information encountered through it is both tailored for the individual user, and is presented as the real, but is in actuality a simulation of the real. Even if what they present are the closest to the reality of some truth, the fact that their activity (as the biggest search engine in the world) is one dictated by an algorithm, a tool based off simulated value, highlights its pure simulacrum engagement. An understanding forged via online algorithmic decisions is one dictated by a simulation of value, and, thus, is based off a hyperrealistic understanding, one which a user has little say in. Today it is a difference between pro or anti vaccinations, tomorrow it could be something even more dangerous, as the political example will show.

⁵⁷ Ghezzi, P, et al. (2020) "Online Information of Vaccines: Information Quality, Not Only Privacy, Is an Ethical Responsibility of Search Engines." *Front. Med.* 7:400.

⁵⁸ Zuboff, S. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. London, Profile Books. 2019.

While economic gain is used to simulate value, and thus dictate action of companies online, resulting in differing individualized content, political actors use (and may continue to use) digital technology to position individual users into a standing reserve, thus reinforcing the individualized hyperrealities. In 2016 there were two major “democratic” decisions being made in the west: Brexit and the American Presidential Election. The results surprised many. England would divorce itself from the European Union, and Donald Trump would be President. While both were influenced by the long-standing anxieties and dissatisfaction of the respective socio-political environments, evidence now shows that the company Cambridge Analytica played a major role in both results.⁵⁹ Cambridge Analytica, a consulting firm, compiled online user data into profiles, much like Google, to identify individual supporters and opposition in the elections. When enough data was collected, a comprehensive online targeted advertisement campaign was launched which incited supporters to go out and vote, and for opposition to feel less motivated to do so. It also looked for individuals who were somewhat uncertain on the decisions and showed advertisements which would convince them to become supporters. Cambridge Analytica’s actions stand as another example of postmodern machination creating individualized hyperrealities, as users online would be presented an entirely different experience based off their (simulated) value in relation to the aims of the political actors. By identifying, targeting, and engaging with individual users based off their data, the human capacity to choose became the object of malleability. Individual decision making became a standing-reserve (*Bestand*), awaiting use and exploitation. When a supposed presentation of reality is dictated in such a way, it creates an individualized hyperreality. By luring users into these individualized hyperrealities, it makes producing some desired action or result more certain. For both businesses and governments a good deal of research has been done to try and understand how best to manipulate and convince people through targeted advertisements.⁶⁰ Using various methods and approaches, and enough data, an individual is susceptible to this scientifically-backed psychological warfare. This war is one not fought in the streets against an invading enemy, but instead fought in a blue-screen lit room within the mind of the user.

However it is not just businesses and governments who are guilty of individualized hyperrealities. Individual users, too, share some of the blame. When engaging online individuals have a variety of aims and goals for said engagement. The agency of the user dictates what they will search for. Given the plethora of information online, a user could find any information they want in

⁵⁹ Amer, K, and Jehane, N. *The Great Hack*. Netflix, 2019.

⁶⁰ Pontoniere, P. “Neuromarketing: The Booming Business of Pushing People’s Buttons.” *Neo Life*. 2021.

support of some prior belief or understanding they have. The information overload of the internet has allowed individuals to create their own individualized hyperreality through the careful picking and choosing of what sources of information to use and what people to listen to. Human biases push individuals into a comforting state of understanding and being when online. Even if Google didn't show vaccine information on a differing basis, an antivaxxer would still be motivated to gather more antivaxx information, and vice versa. Personal agency and a seemingly unlimited amount of information means any user can construct their understanding in any way they see fit, and this activity would go on to create the data profiles that businesses and governments will exploit for some profit, cycling the self-reinforcing individualized hyperreality, and entrenching passive nihilism.

4.2 Individualized Hyperrealities and Active Nihilism

Digital technology has created individualized hyperrealities through human greed and weakness. Whether it be profit or power, individual choice and behavior have been positioned as standing reserve under postmodern machination. Individuals, too, share some of the “blame,” as in a very natural sense humans seek comfort and stability, resulting in users engaging with digital technology in a narrowing approach. To abide by this digitized machination as a means of understanding or escape as an individual or collective is passive nihilism. In a sense, digital technology has made the already nihilistic world more so, and perhaps even more hidden. To be an active nihilist is to resist the lure of supposed comfort and ease passive nihilism presents by taking responsibility in one's own destruction and creation of value and meaning. While having the capability to “choose” one's own engagement online makes digital technology appear to be a tool of active nihilism, it is in fact passive nihilism, and is created and presented in a way as to appear as if one is behaving through their own volition. This is not to say active nihilism is not possible online, but that the ubiquitous environment of understanding is a direct challenge to an active nihilistic approach to being, for both an individual and a collective.

In order for active nihilism, the destructive behavior aimed at genuine self-creation of value and meaning through, to occur, an understanding must first be made. If one is to self-destruct and eventually self-construct, they must be able to question, critique, and eventually destroy, those values and meanings that were given to them. One needs information to forge an understanding by which to critically assess their groundings. This means that the source of information plays an intricate role in behaving as an active nihilist. If the source is tainted, then the understanding, and thus the self-destruction and self-construction, is tainted as well. One can still behave and act like an active

nihilist despite tainted sources of information, as understanding the contamination of the information ought to be one of the actions an active nihilist takes, but if one finds it difficult to see the contamination of information, or even forge a genuine understanding despite the contamination, it makes an active nihilistic approach more difficult in general. If one were to use Google to try and gather information to make an understanding, their data would factor into what information they would actually see. Their geographic location, their gender, their prior searches, all would mold the search results into something Google believes they would be more likely to click on, due to the CTR algorithmic decisions. The presented information is based off the simulated value of their data profile, and thus at the core of this phenomena is the hyperreal. If the information to be used in making an understanding is fueled by simulated value, it makes the overall presentation of results influenced by pure simulacrum. Not only this, but because of businesses and governments' push for cognitive dominance via data means that the user feels an almost natural acceptance of the presented information. Like the television, we, the online users, are "with" the Google search results, because they are us - our data, our thinking, our wants. In order to be an active nihilist, one must take a critical look at their current values and meaning. If the search results are constructed and presented in a way as to appeal to our current state, that means a critical reevaluation is problematic, if not practically impossible. If I was, say, an antivaxxer, and wanted to look up more information about vaccines, the search results would all be in opposition to vaccines. I would be unable to reasonably find information in support of vaccines using Google and its data profile on me. If I am unable to find information which challenges my value of being an antivaxxer, then I may be unable to critically assess that value, disallowing me to behave destructively as an active nihilist should initially do. The same could be true for socio-political issues, in which information in support or opposition of my beliefs would be presented in such a way as to not challenge my thinking. Following Nietzsche's metamorphosis of the spirit, the active nihilist's first dragon to slay is themselves, and digital technology keeps that dragon hidden, hoarding the supposed gold that is certainty in value and meaning. The use of data profiles for economic or socio-political aims creates an environment where individuals adopt value and meaning from others, but making it appear as if it is themselves. A stranger stands behind a digital mirror, mimicking the voice of the user. To neglect ones' own responsibly and adopt value and meaning from another is to be in spiritual atrophy - a passive nihilist. The other nihilistic path digital technology makes easily accessible is that through the numbing pleasure the Last Man seeks.

Social media and online entertainment content stand as another example of supposedly active nihilism but is in fact a masquerading passive nihilism. While social media can indeed be another example of the adopting of value and meaning, its ability to numb is perhaps more powerful. Both social media and online entertainment can be used as forms of escape from the responsibility expected from an active nihilist. Those individuals who have become spiritually weak and given up on genuine self- destruction and self-creation retire to themselves into what Nietzsche referred to as a “Last Man” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. They invent or discover happiness in light of the challenge of creating their own self. The Last Man is the archetypal passive nihilist in the way that they have knowingly given up on the struggle of active nihilism, opting for a life of numbing pleasure. On social media, a user can engage in a careful construction of presentation to optimize their pleasuring activity. Rather than finding self-value in themselves, they rely on and partition out this evaluation to others; desperate for likes, hearts, retweets - approval. The dopamine hit received from every digital thumbs up keeps these “Digital Last Men” hooked into their numbing behavior, as even the biochemical response to such is similar to that of cocaine – deeply addictive.⁶¹ The Last Man is an addict of supposed comfort and pleasure, and social media provides the means to continue this addiction, anytime and anywhere. The digital last man becomes so absorbed in the rush of approval that they may begin to internalize it. The feelings of self-satisfaction may appear on the surface to be genuine and beneficial but, like with any addiction, it is a transitory and fleeting feeling - requiring more and more as time goes on. For one to base their own value of self on others is to be a passive nihilist. To obtain some numbing pleasure from such is a Last Man. Seeking social approval is not a new phenomenon, but the quantifiability of social media approval creates a nuanced situation in which a user is left to come to their own conclusions. If one receives “enough” likes, then they are satisfied with themselves, or more likely, the hyperreal presentation of themselves the digital other has approved of. Another example of this numbing pleasure that neglects active nihilistic self-valuation can be found on dating apps, like Tinder, where users feel compelled to maximize the number of potential matches they will have. Tinder becomes less about trying to meet and date potential partners and more about approval, as the presentations users construct are ones intended to receive the most right swipes, and thus the most matches. Much like the seeking of social approval, seeking romantic/sexual partners is nothing new, but the way Tinder consolidates this human experience into a quantifiable and hyperreal environment cultivates the self-valuation of users which pushes them into passive nihilism, and perhaps even into Digital Last Men. If one has

⁶¹ Keane, S. “Facebook, Twitter are designed to act like ‘behavioral cocaine’.” CNET. 2018.

many matches on Tinder, they may come to view themselves as very desirable, and vice versa for only a few matches. The value they give themselves could be one based on others' opinion of their hyperreal presentation. If one was content in their own genuine hyperreal understanding produced by their own active nihilistic behavior, they would not be passive nihilists, but the naturalistic draw of approval lures users into such. This means the choosing of a user's hyperreal presentation is essential to play the Tinder game. And much like social media activity, this picking and choosing of presentation is one based on an individualized hyperreality that users themselves have been ubiquitously led in to. But there is a deeper level to Tinder which furthers the metaphysical threat to self-valuation, and thus active nihilism. Using a black-box algorithm, Tinder decides who sees who.⁶² The two most significant factors in this decision are whether the user has a paid subscription and how attractive their profile is. This means if a user does not pay Tinder for a subscription, and their profile received a certain percentage of left swipes (disapprovals) they will not be shown to the majority of other users. The opposite is true for paying and attractive profile users. The self-valuation takeaway from Tinder is one dependent on economic gain and the simulated value of what constitutes "attractive profiles." If one were to ground their self-value of attractiveness to potential partners from Tinder, it would be a hyperreal understanding existing outside of them, and, thus, passive nihilism. If one were to bask in the pleasure given to them through such, they would be Digital Last Men. Social media and dating apps have created an environment suitable for these Digital Last Men, where they are able to adopt and numb their responsibility of being and self-valuation. The individualized hyperreality of a Digital Last Man is constructed when their own agency pushes them to create a comfortable understanding of themselves and the world based off simulated values - likes, hearts, right swipes, black-box algorithms - and to remain in such for their own neglecting pleasure.

Online entertainment, such as YouTube or Netflix, is another example of an environment which can potentially cultivate passive nihilism and Digital Last Men. Similar to social media, a user of online entertainment content may engage with it with the aim to adopt value or numb through a pleasure overload. Both YouTube and Netflix operate with data profiles in a similar fashion to Google (because they all share data freely with one another). The entertainment content users see online is the exact kind these platforms believe the user will enjoy most. Why? Because if you like what you're seeing, you'll stay on longer, giving over more free data to be used and exploited later.

⁶² "Tinder Algorithm: How Does It Work & How To Hack It?" Boost Matches. 2020.

Whereas social media requires some effort on the part of the poster to construct a hyperreal presentation of themselves for simulated value accumulation, online entertainment is a much easier drug to obtain for the Digital Last Man. With the click of a button a user can become instantly enthralled with content which presses down and holds that dopamine button in their mind. The Digital Last Man can become completely lost in the near endless supply of online entertainment. The human struggle for self-becoming through active nihilism becomes invisible when such ease for comfort and pleasure is present. The most prominent example Digital Last Men can use for numbing pleasure through online entertainment can be found with porn. Much like the near endless supply of information, the internet is also home to an abundance of porn. In this very second, around 28,000 users are currently watching it.⁶³ Porn has become an easily accessible escape from the emotional and spiritual challenge of the human condition. Porn itself is a hyperreal presentation of sex aimed at mesmerizing its viewer, argues Baudrillard.⁶⁴ It can produce the same addictive phenomena as social media approval,⁶⁵ but with more ease for the user. The quick and easy accessibility of porn means a user of digital technology can completely submerge themselves in a numbing pleasure which comes to neglect the motivating issue behind such engagement, as well as cultivating their views on sex. Online porn can numb the pain which ought to be addressed as an active nihilist, while also insidiously tricking the user into adopting the value and meaning presented in such. Other online entertainment content can produce the same hyperreal challenge to active nihilism, but porn is perhaps the most significant (and interesting) example.

While the surface level use of digital technology is entirely up to the individual user, this does not mean it is a tool of active nihilism. Since the development and use of digital technology has the very real capacity to generate individualized hyperrealities, any understanding and valuation forged from such are based on the simulated value of data profiles, quantifiable approval, and hyperreal presentations. If one were to accept what they see on social media as a signifier of their value and meaning, they are either adopting or numbing the responsibility of their own self-valuation. Digital technology has not created the new desire for social approval, only exacerbated it into an online instantly gratifying environment which relies on quantity to determine value – a simulated value. The environment itself is based of simulated value as well, as black-box algorithms dictate what is seen and by who. Any valuation for an individual or collective based on social media activity is one

⁶³ “Internet Pornography by the Numbers; A significant Threat to Society.” Web Root. 2020.

⁶⁴ Baudrillard, J. “Seduction, Sex, and Pornography.” 2004.

⁶⁵ Love, Todd et al. “Neuroscience of Internet Pornography Addiction: A Review and Update.” Behavioral Sciences. vol. 5,3 388-433. 18 Sep. 2015.

dependent on pure simulacrum, external hyperreal presentations, and thus any understanding forged from such is one which is not self-created. To use digital technology threatens an active nihilistic approach, as any supposed self-creation of value or meaning is an insidious inception of value – an unknown adoption. The hidden use of data and algorithms, as well as the natural human desire for comfort and ease, creates a ubiquitous environment where users are lured into a feeling of safety from the angst of their responsibility to self-create value and meaning, as the active nihilist should. Social media, Tinder, YouTube, Netflix, and online porn all present themselves as an accurate and true representation of the world and the user but are grounded in simulated value. They are all a simulation of the real. A digital paradise for the Last Men who want nothing more but to drown themselves in pleasure to numb their human condition. An environment where any challenge to the self is diverted, reinforcing and adopting the values and meanings that continue to entrench us in spiritual atrophy.

CONCLUSION

The advent of digital technology has introduced a new environment of understanding which poses a ubiquitous metaphysical threat to individuals. While on the surface, digital technology presents itself as a tool for individualized engagement with the world, a seemingly active nihilistic way of being, such engagement actually entrenches the pervasive passive nihilistic approach to meaning-making in the world. Nietzsche characterizes passive nihilism as a lack of spiritual strength which leads an individual into avoiding their responsibility of genuine value and meaning creation by opting for an adoption or numbing of said responsibility. The use of data and personal agency entraps individual users, and through such a collective, into a hyperreal understanding of the world and themselves. Since active nihilism is characterized by an initial destruction in order to construct value and meaning, the use of digital technology disallows for self-destruction to occur by cultivating a comfortable individualized environment where value and meaning are less likely to be challenged, and, thus, less likely to be questioned or critiqued.

The basis for our digital environment is rooted in machination, and thus its use is one which carries the metaphysical risk that machination imposes. Machination comes to see entities found within a framework as malleable and manipulatable to achieve some optimized aim. Machination came to assign the value and meaning in the world through the emergence of the essence of modern technology, where the revelation of the world through technological thinking was based on a

challenge – a challenge that sought to maximize output by determining the destiny of entities within a framework through *Gestell*. The death of God left a collective void of meaning-making and assigning in the west, and machination was able to assume this position of power for such value and meaning creation. To abide by machination is to adopt some others' form of value and purpose. It is essentially a passive nihilistic framework of understanding. Machination continued into the postmodern era, where the desire for malleable optimization led to the development of newer forms of information exchange mediums, like the television. Digital technology stands as the latest development in postmodern machination, where entities (users) have been positioned (*Gestell*) into standing reserve (*Bestand*) for economic, political, and personal gain.

The use of digital technology, the postmodern product of machination's engagement in information mediums, cultivates a specific, individualized, data profile which is used as a basis of construction for a digitized mirror which lures users into a passive, complacent, and overall comfortable understanding. The plethora of potential pleasure sources stand as a direct gateway into the Last Man mentality, where individuals knowingly drown themselves in numbing, narcissistic contentment to avoid the responsibility set before them. While digital technology carries the possibility of being a tool for active nihilism, its continued development through data collective reflections and current wide range specific usage among individuals stand as a clear example of it being the ultimate tool of passive nihilism. One where a user can pretend, or perhaps avoid entirely, to forge their own destiny. The machine continues to operate its oppressive work, all the while individuals carry on with the false belief that they are the ones operating it. A gear can only feel itself turning.

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