

T

Dean Komel

War of Nihilism

The title of the article¹ might seem somewhat unusual, since, rather than focussing on the nihilistic mood that every war entails and leaves behind for a long time², it focuses on *war that is driven by nihilism*. If nihilism is understood according to the standard definitions, that is, as the devaluation of all values and the nullifying of life's meaning, War of nihilism means a *war for nothing*. In the case of many wars, if not of all, we can conclude that they started, ran their course and ended for nothing, that there was no need

¹ The text is published as part of the implementation of the research program *The Humanities and the Sense of Humanity from Historical and Contemporary Viewpoints* (P6-0341), the research project *The Hermeneutic Problem of the Understanding of Human Existence and Coexistence in the Epoch of Nihilism* (J7-4631), and the infrastructure program *Center for the Promotion of the Humanities* (I0-0036), which are financially supported by the Slovenian Research Agency.

² Already Thucydides wrote in *The Peloponnesian War*: "So then civil war spread among the cities, and those who came to it later took lessons, it seems, from the precedents and progressed to new and far greater extremes in the ingenuity of their machinations and the atrocity of their reprisals. They reversed the usual evaluative force of words to suit their own assessment of actions. Thus reckless daring was considered bravery for the cause; far-sighted caution was simply a plausible face of cowardice; restraint was a cover for lack of courage; an intelligent view of the general whole was inertia in all specifics; and impulsive haste was enlisted among the manly virtues, while full consideration in the light of possible dangers was a specious excuse for backsliding. People of violent views won automatic credence, and any opposing them were suspect. To lay a plot and succeed was clever: smarter still to detect another's plot. Anyone whose own plot was to remove the need for any plotting was thought to be subverting the party and scared by the opposition. In short, the currency of approval was damage done – either the pre-emptive strike before an opponent could do his own intended damage, or the instigation of those who otherwise had no thought of doing harm", Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, translated by M. Hammond, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, p. 170; orig. <http://data.perseus.org/texts/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0003.tlg001>.

for victims, that the war had no aim, etc. However, War of nihilism does not mean a *war for nothing* in the sense that it is about nothing, that it is without a goal, or that nothing is achieved by it, but that *some nothingness itself drives the war*. Accordingly, it would be more accurate to say: war *from* nothing and *for* nothing.

Such characterisation of War of nihilism gives rise to a further question: what is it that defines the nothingness that drives war and in what way does this modify the very “essence” of war? There are various “types” of wars, such as world wars, civil wars, religious wars, wars of conquest, defensive wars, wars of liberation, clan wars, star wars, wars of nerves, etc., but such a typology is of itself not sufficient to provide us with a unified and relevant essential definition of war³. Actually, each new war has new characteristics and entails new meanings of war. In contrast, War of nihilism, which is driven by nothing, cannot be attributed essence and meaning but merely *inessentiality and meaninglessness or even humanlessness rather than inhumanity*. The less present humanity is as an essential factor in fabricating wars, the more the destructive power of the various war machines and their techno-scientific mobility is galvanised, and the more the threat of general destruction grows. These new-war circumstances are otherwise masked – in accordance with political, ideological and other interests – by putting the most human face on the facelessness of war.

In dealing with the topic “War of nihilism”, I am directly encouraged by a 1947 note by Wittgenstein:

Science and industry, and their progress, might turn out to be the most enduring thing in the modern world. Perhaps any speculation about a coming collapse of science and industry is, for the present and for a long time to come, nothing but a dream; perhaps science and industry, having caused infinite misery in the process, will unite the world – I mean condense it into a single unit, though one in which peace is the last thing that will find a home.

Because science and industry do decide wars, or so it seems⁴.

³ R. Johnson systematically addresses this problem in his article *A Typology of Wars and How They End*: “We may conclude that war is a manifestation of power and the various criteria of its execution, listed in the table above, shape its general type. War is an assertion of power by one entity against another”, R. Johnson, *A Typology of Wars and How They End*, in *How Wars End. Theory and Practice*, edited by D. Kingsbury and R. Iron, Routledge, London 2022, pp. 28–44, p. 43.

⁴ L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value. A Selection from the Posthumous Remains*, edited by G.H. von Wright in collaboration with H. Nyman, translated by P. Winch, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1984, p. 63e. This edition also contains the German text that appeared in 1977 under the title *Vermischte Bemerkungen* at Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main.

Wittgenstein's note was adopted by Peter Trawny as the motto for his book *On Freedom. Technology, Capital, Medium*, though he left out the final sentence, which mentions the deciding on wars. However, in the discussion itself, Trawny frequently devotes space to thematising its context, especially in terms of the description of the groundbreaking social, historical, military-strategic and technological effects of the First and Second World Wars, the subsequent Cold War and the threat of a third, nuclear war⁵.

Wittgenstein's note is supplemented by another note from the same year:

The truly apocalyptic view of the world is that things do not repeat themselves. It isn't absurd, e.g., to believe that the age of science and technology is the beginning of the end for humanity; that the idea of great progress is a delusion, along with the idea that the truth will ultimately be known; that there is nothing good or desirable about scientific knowledge and that mankind, in seeking it, is falling into a trap. It is by no means obvious that this is not how things are⁶.

In Wittgenstein's view, science and technology decide about wars, though he meaningfully adds that such seems to be the case. Of course, there are other deciding factors to consider, primarily politics, its ideologies, its economic interests, etc. In the second note, Wittgenstein states that the age of science and technology can prove destructive for humanity, that the progress science and technology makes possible does not in itself guarantee the future of humanity; quite the opposite: it entails the threat that humanity will essentially be rendered futureless, such that its essential possibilities and perspectives are nullified. Here, Wittgenstein is not adopting an anti-science or anti-progress position but is pointing out some nihilistic traits of an epoch in which technoscience advances unbridled, while humanity can essentially regress⁷. How is this possible, given that technoscience contributes

⁵ P. Trawny, *On Freedom. Technology, Capital, Medium*, translated by Richard Lambert, Bloomsbury Publishing, London-New York 2017; orig. *Technik. Kapital. Medium. Das Universale und die Freiheit*, Matthes & Seitz, Berlin 2015.

⁶ *Culture and Value*, p. 56e.

⁷ "Commitment to an optimistic progressivism has long been characteristic of mainstream politics of both the left and the right. Thus, whether one is socialist or social democratic, neo-liberal, or even neo-conservative, the tendency is to assume that we can shape the world according to our interests and desires – we can make the world 'better' – and that this is possible through our increasing mastery of various forms of technology. The improvement of the world – even the achievement of some sort of utopia – is thus seen essentially to be a technological promise. Technology is progressive – even utopian – and progress is technological. Yet, there are good reasons to suppose that the optimistic progressivism associated with technological modernism is misplaced, and that regardless of the various instantiations of modernity with which technology is associated, and regardless, therefore, of whether technology is associated

to the standard of living, to communication between people, to health care, etc.? Does not every denial of this lead to an incomparably larger dehumanisation? In what way is technoscience an essential threat to humanity? Well, there is the very real threat of a total war of annihilation that is looming over us, as well as, of course, the threat of the consequences of climate change and other natural disasters, famines, epidemics, etc. All of these and other threats could, it seems, be limited, if not eliminated, through political will and public efforts. There are countless calls for this. However, in an age when power alone – political, economic, techno-scientific and of course military power – is being bolstered there is a symptomatic lack of strength for such endeavours. Certainly not just in order to ensure, maintain and defend peace and prosperity. Of course, it is also significant that, in spite of the violent furore over the state of the world, we remain calm, that we soothe and placate ourselves to the right degree.

The entire sedative industry – the largest of all industries, not only medical, but also and above all media, digital, sports, tourism, religious, film, publishing, cultural, academic, public opinion, consumerist, narcotics industries... – is a *murderous means* of War of nihilism, especially when we do not understand it only as being merely *destructive*, but above all as being *war of nihilisation*. This does not mean that it does not trigger violence against people, but rather that it is in the first place violent in the way of *erasing essentiality of human being*. Man is essentially no longer required for war, or: he remains useful to the extent that he has essentially become unuseful. There is still sufficient human material to last for some time. Since the human essentiality has become fundamentally unnecessary and useless, human resources can be endlessly used and abused, whereby no ethics or morality helps. The more ethics and morality accumulate, the more redundant they become.

And yet, the fact that man is essentially no longer an important military factor in War of nihilism is somewhat difficult to fathom. Who then is war's protagonist and who are the executors? Which military forces and weapons come into play? In whose interest and against whom does such war take

with a social democratic or neo-liberal agenda, and regardless, too, of the many benefits of particular technological advances and devices, the essential structure of technology nevertheless conceals a danger within it. Indeed, the argument I will make here is that the danger is one that threatens the very nature of the human, and since I will argue that the human and the ethical are tied together, it is also a danger that threatens the possibility of a genuinely ethical mode of life", J. Malpas, *The spatialization of the World*, in «Phainomena», 27, 106-107 (2013), pp. 91-107, p. 93.

place? Is it controlled, as the Greek myths relate, by some gods, or as science fiction relates, by some extra-terrestrial beings? Could it be a battle of Armageddon that determines whether good or evil prevails? None of that, or precisely *none of that*.

A war in which the human factor is no longer crucial is probably more reminiscent of war games – the most popular among video games – than of any wars that are actually fought. We can of course all agree to this, but we must ask ourselves: where, despite all the wide and loud simultaneous anti-war propaganda, education for peace, appeals for justice and solidarity, etc., does this extraordinary popularity stem from? But perhaps this very obsession with digital war games is a signal that a War of nihilism is taking place.

Still, it seems that we cannot equate digital war games with games that, in the framework of tactics, manoeuvres, espionage, Blitzkriegs, manipulation of the public and the like, are being played by various war machineries. The world of digital war games, however, is not a war that plays with the actual concreteness of the world, where a person can of course turn out to be an ordinary plaything – precisely because they are no longer an essential player. Rather, War of nihilism does not merely blur the line between virtual and actual war, it essentially *erases* the difference so that it is possible to manipulate with it without *any real reference*. This sort of manipulation is particularly characteristic of War of nihilism. It lies in its power to make the assumption of reality worthless at any time and place, so that *nothing can be realised*⁸.

The management of the various military conflicts we are witnessing today, or of past conflicts, attempt to erase as much as possible the negative and raise the positive sides of war, to protect itself as much as possible from

⁸ In his analyses of technological or technopolitical speed, P. Virilio notes that at the end of the last millennium, *war of space* was replaced by *war of time* and *speed* became its key means of combat, while “nuclear explosive completed the cycle of spatial wars, at the end of this century the implosive (beyond politically and economically invaded territories) inaugurates the war of time. In full peaceful coexistence, without any declaration of hostilities, and more surely than by any other kind of conflict, rapidity delivers us from this world. We have to face the facts: today, speed is war, the last war”, P. Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*, Semiotext(e), New York 1986, pp. 154-155; orig. *Vitesse et Politique. Essai de dromologie*, Éd. Galilée, Paris 1977. Cf. S. Breuer, *Der Nihilismus der Geschwindigkeit. Zum Werk Paul Virilios*, in «Leviathan», 16, 3 (1988), pp. 309-330. As references we can cite a number of Virilio's other works, among them: *The Information Bomb*, Verso, London 2000; *Ground Zero*, Verso, London 2002; *Desert Screen: War at the Speed of Light*, Continuum, London 2002; *Pure War*, Semiotext(e), New York 2008.

public criticism, to conceal acts of violence, and to show how everything is happening at a distance, just onscreen, somewhere off in another world, so to speak. Is the use of unmanned aircraft and drones any less violent than the use of standard bombers, since those seem entirely safe and, above all, are cheaper for the attackers⁹? Special emphasis is also placed on the “accuracy of the hits”, which is no less accurately digitally recorded, so that there is no public unease about possible innocent victims. Subsequent incriminating data which might show a different situation; if “leaked” to the public, it can turn out to be scandalous, but in the end *who cares*? There are, however, numerous instances of scandalous news.

However, all possible evidencing of war violence does not reach what comes with the “most terrifying of all guests”, nihilism, about the violence of which there is absolutely no data. Nihilism *erases the horizon of the world*, which cannot be seen either on small or large screens, since these screens themselves serve as erasers, whether they are emitting news, documentaries and feature films, commentaries, social networks, and in general everything that can be liked.

The cancelation of the world and human being-in-the world is decisive when we speak of War of nihilism, which can, like any other war, be destructive, but what defines it is *nihilisation, nullifying, in-essentiality, worldlessness*. This almost imperceptible and at the same time most intense *affect, effect, infect* and *disinfection* of erasure must be held onto as determining and decisive. However, it is a most difficult thing to retain this determination and decisiveness of the eventuating of nihilisation, which cannot be reduced to some type of levelling, nor can it be qualified as “eventuating”. Consequently, just as we cannot talk about natural eventuating, but only about processes, should we speak of the nihilisation that characterises War of nihilism as a process? But can a *nothingness* inject a process? The Christian tradition, for example, speaks of the world being created from nothing, but nihilism does not contribute to the world. Rather, it takes it away, like the winds of war do. War of nihilism is a *recess* rather than a *process*. Therefore, rather than nihilisation, it should be considered as *nihilation*. This nihilation does not mean the destruction of the world or an apocalyptic end of the world, nor does it arise from sins that man has committed and must pay for, as can be seen, for example, in environmentalist interpretations of the world situation. By cancelling the horizon of the world and nihilation, which

⁹ See G. Chamayou, *A Theory of the Drone*, translated by J. Lloyd, The New Press, New York 2015; orig. *Théorie du drone*, La Fabrique Éditions, Paris 2013.

is at work in War of nihilism, *total power over the world* and *bare obtaining of power* are simultaneously being established. Hence the fiction, which is already universally fixed, stating that the advancement of this power is shaping a *brave new world* in exchange for the old, decrepit, incapacitated, and misguided one.

Nihilism, as a recess of immersing into nothing, at the same time makes possible domination over the world as a whole, namely, by completely eradicating it. Together with the nihilistic recess, planetary and interplanetary processes are unleashed, and among these, of course and in particular, are, according Wittgenstein, the science and industry that give rise to wars. The reciprocity of recess and process and the resulting reciprocity of regress and progress that Wittgenstein refers to (and after him a whole row not only of social philosophers, but also of scientists themselves¹⁰) raises the question: *on what do we – as humans who are squeezed between regress and progress – stand and where are we? Is War of nihilism taking place “with us without us” precisely on that line in between, that is, on the battle line between recess and process, regress and progress?* Could this perhaps be the line that Ernst Jünger and Martin Heidegger discussed about in their correspondence about the possible and impossible definition and the very *finis* of nihilism? Heidegger, referring to Jünger’s formulations in *Across the Line*¹¹, which Jünger dedicated to him on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday in 1949, offered the insight that nihilism along the line had passed into the final phase of its consummation (*Vollendung*). In his replay on the occasion of Jünger’s sixtieth birthday, he defines it as follows:

¹⁰ “No world has ever faced a possibility of destruction – in a relevant sense annihilation – comparable to that which we face, nor a process of decision-making even remotely like that which is involved in this. Those of you who have been in battle know how tangled, unpredictable, and unamenable to prior planning the course of a battle often turns out to be, even when it was well planned. No one has any experience with warfare in the nuclear age. These are some of the reasons for acrimonious differences as to what fraction of a population may survive if you do this or do that, or what you may trust our antagonists to do and what you must suspect them of doing. In addition, the community of physicists is certainly no more than any other free of evil, free of vanity, or free of their own glory; we must expect rather ugly things to happen and they do”, R.J. Oppenheimer, *War and the Nations*, in J.R. Oppenheimer, *Atom and Void: Essays on Science and Community*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1984, pp. 133-142; p. 141.

¹¹ E. Jünger, *Across the Line*, in M. Heidegger, E. Jünger, *Correspondence*, translated by T.S. Quinn, Rowman & Littlefield International, Lanham 2008, pp. 69-102; orig. E. Jünger, *Über die Linie*, in *Anteile: Martin Heidegger zum 60. Geburtstag*, V. Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 1950, pp. 245-284.

The line is also called the “zero meridian” (p. 29). You speak (on p. 22 and 32) of the “zero point”. [2 14] The zero indicates the nothing, indeed an empty nothing. Where everything presses toward nothing, nihilism reigns. At the zero meridian it approaches its consummation. Taking up an interpretation of Nietzsche’s, you understand nihilism as the process whereby “the highest values become devalued” (The Will to Power, aphorism no. 2, from the year I 887)¹².

*The front line of nihilism*¹³, which runs along the *zone of its consummation* and which Heidegger, in the further deliberations, confronts with the crossing out of being, is not a battlefield on which two opposing armies clash, but a *regime* that presses everything “toward nothing”.

The War of nihilism can have anyone or no one as its enemy. It does not choose opponents and enemies, nor does it need adherents and supporters, and especially not means, since it has an infinite number of wills at its disposal; it wants nothing but nothing itself, and is total in this, so that everything and anything can be at its disposal – above all, of course, a human being who has essentially become nothing in nothingness and someone who is no *one* and no-*body*¹⁴. The biggest problem is precisely apprehend-

¹² M. Heidegger, *On the Question of Being*, in *Pathmarks*, translated by W. McNeil, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp. 291-292; orig. *Zur Seinsfrage*, in *Wegmarken*, V. Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 1978, p. 408.

¹³ The term is introduced here on the basis of this formulation by Heidegger: “Are the human component realities already in transit *trans lineam* or are they only entering the wide field in front of the line? But perhaps we are being held spellbound by an unavoidable optical delusion. Perhaps the zero-line is suddenly emerging before us in the form of a planetary catastrophe. Who will then still cross it? And what can catastrophes do? The two World Wars neither checked the movement of nihilism nor diverted it from its course. What you say (p. 36) about total mobilization provides the confirmation”, *ivi*, pp. 47-48. Otherwise, Heidegger uses the term “movement of nihilism” in connection to Jünger’s “total mobilization”, while Jünger, following Nietzsche, writes “process of nihilism” (“Across the Line”, p. 85). See also: Ž. Pač, *Permanent Condition of War-and-Peace: From “Total Mobilization” to the Absolute Construction of Event*, in «Filozofska istraživanja», 37, 1 (2017), pp. 15-37.

¹⁴ “Remember what Commander Salt of the ‘Sheffield’ said about that devastating missile attack: ‘It’s staggering. It’s a new kind of war, unknown to experts’. This last sentence perfectly illustrates the present revolution in modes of destruction. The doctrine of production has replaced the doctrine of use on the battlefield. The computer already has the last word. If the use of weapons is no longer taught at the Military Academy, it’s because the time for decision is now insufficient. We no longer need the man of war, just as we no longer need the proletarian who was also a man of war, a man of industrial war in the large steel industries of the past where they worked on the assembly line. The progressive elimination (which is already quite advanced) of the proletariat in the industrial machine runs parallel with the elimination of individuals in the war-machine”, P. Virilio, S. Lotringer, *Pure War*, introduction by P. Virilio, translated by M. Polizzotti and B. O’Keeffe, Semiotext(e), New York 2008, p. 179.

ing this *totality and totalisation of war*¹⁵, which has been under discussion since the beginning of the Great War in 1914 and which obscures the “war status” of the military forces and the civilian population, as well as the state of war and peace. At the same time, we must confront the rise of totalitarianisms in 20th Century must be taken into consideration, which have created social conditions that, in terms of their consequences, are even worse than those caused by the violence of war. We are by no means protected from them within “democratic societies” – in relation to which it is not enough to deal with the “crisis of democracy”, which the Cold War actually served well.

What we understand today to be a clash among superpowers for global supremacy and what also determines all “local” military conflicts, despite all its enormous display of power and supremacy, takes place only for the sake of War of nihilism, which – rather than wanting anything – wants *nothing in nothing*. Such a claim tends to provoke objections, as it seems to make a mockery of the serious political, military, economic, ecological and social conditions in the world and ignores the threat of planetary destruction. Of course, one has to ask how these serious and terrifying situations came to be and how, despite all the fuss and tumult that occurs around them, they are not actually taken that seriously and deemed frightening. Would not, then, the will somehow be found to overcome and eliminate these horrible conditions? What if it is the case that nihilism essentially robs us of such a good will, insofar as it imposes on us a malevolent will for war out of nowhere? How else are we to explain that, despite all the declarative support for peace in all corners of the world, an unstoppable arms race is taking place? Never before have so many weapons been accumulated and sold as they are today, if of course we do not mention the appearance of new military conflicts around the world, where this weapons are being used to advantage.

Bewilderment at the fact that there is nothing we can do about it, that even peace initiatives and anti-war protests are in vain, can of course remind us that in War of nihilism *the human being is good-for-nothing*. The *human being is deprived of his essentiality and of his essential freedom of action*, what provokes resentment towards what rules in the way of total domination over the world. One of the key levers of this total dominance is that

¹⁵ See U. Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, translated by C. Cronin, Polite, Cambridge 2006; orig. *Der kosmopolitische Blick oder: Krieg ist Frieden*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2004; Z. Bauman, *Liquid Times. Living in an Age of Uncertainty*, Polity, Cambridge 2006; cf. H. Zaborowski, *Abschied vom ‘ewigen Frieden’? Neue Kriege und Ihre Frühförderung für Moral und Recht*, in «Phainomena», 23, 88-89 (2014), pp. 157-173.

the world in its entirety is no longer on the horizon; it is removed from the screens. The total representation of power tolerates no essential presence, especially not the presence of the world, since it is a “strategic goal” to be annihilated by the otherwise aimless War of nihilism.

Is then the only way to act and resist to do nothing and simply wait for what will happen? This certainly cannot be waiting for War of nihilism to atrophy and end by itself, if there is no one who has the power to end it, since nobody even had the power to start it. And thus this *no-body* participates in a power that circulates within itself without a beginning and end¹⁶, which implies manic intolerance, because: there is and must be nothing essential to it, nothing that cannot be put to nothing. However, at the same time, this means that the decision about the essential is taken away from the power in order to empower itself as a power and pull everything under itself. The total empowerment of power is the only true “master of war”. All others are merely its maintainers and essentially *nothing*.

In contrast, waiting for what *will come to pass* could mean: *waiting for what essentially comes and promises an essential future, the advent of being*, which would *en-com-pass* the human essence and free it from the dark dungeon of nihilism. But perhaps – we don’t know – it is the darkness of nothingness and the night of nihilism that hides the light of the enlightenment of the human essence and the bright day of the world. Waiting, which fulfils such an essential expectation of human self-understanding, is marked by an endurance to that which is essentially inclining to the human being and is liberating in the way that it releases the very *nothinging of nothing* (*das Nichten des Nichts*) which the will can only will and strengthen to grasp for power. Power is nothing more than nothing that has been fixed by the will in order to confirm itself as power, which makes it fundamentally impatient. As a result, patience and waiting are hought to entail listlessness, helplessness,

¹⁶ In this context, Bernard Stiegler introduces the concepts of the “Neganthropocene” (Open Humanities Press, London 2018) and “Neganthropology”: “The *situation* of disruption and *strategy* of transhumanism together constitute the new stage of exosomatization in which noetic organogenesis consists. Exosomatization is now generated according to the development strategies of the *lords of economic war without limit*, that war in which this disruption precisely consists and whose result has already been intense *de-noetization*. Only a neganthropology can constitute a *rational* critique of this situation and of the stakes of this war – with a view to an *indispensable and sustainable noetic peace*. The question is the *revaluation criteria* that must, therefore, be actively extracted from this nihilism, in order to leap not towards the overman, but towards *Neganthropos*” (B. Stiegler, *Nanjing Lectures 2016-2019*, Open Humanities Press, London 2022); cf. D. Ross, *The End of the Metaphysics of Being and the Beginning of the Metacosmics of Entropy*, in «Phainomena», 29, 112-113 (2020), pp. 73-100.

nothingness and indecision. However, any possibility of acting involves *holding onto* the situation in which we act, which Aristotle already refers to with his definition of virtue as *hexis* (“state”, “condition”, “disposition”, “habit”, *habitus*, *Nicomachean Ethics* (1106a 11). Any “hold on” means a moment of waiting, however short-lived. Waiting that endures, as long as it is not seized by boredom, can grow into *awareness of what awaits us and remains distant from what is there today*. Such waiting is also a truly invitation and expectation.

War of nihilism – by erasing the horizon of the world on the whole line – takes away the time and space for decisions and decisiveness itself, so that all searching for decisions and boasting about resoluteness is essentially in vain. But no one is in the least ready to accept such a truth about reality; we prefer to remain without the truth, because of which, in our epoch of cold, global, and superpower conflicts, even nihilism turns out to be unreal. In its accomplishment, nihilism does not mean only the devaluation of truth or – which is all the same – the inflation of truths but also the abolition of the very truth about nihilism.

“Waiting on the essential” in a nihilistic state of war forms the deliberation counterpoint of “the emergency of the lack of urgency” (*die Not der Notlosigkeit*)¹⁷, which, according to Heidegger, marks the as-yet-undefined phase of complete nihilism. In this regard, he offered an “apology” for waiting on the essential in his war record entitled *Evening Conversation: In a Prisoner of War Camp in Russia, between a Younger and an Older Man* (first published in 1994 in the *Gesamtausgabe*)¹⁸. The text was fuelled by Heidegger’s considerable personal distress at the approaching end of the Second World War and the defeat of Germany, and directly, of course, by the fact that at that time both his son Jörg and his stepson Hermann were prisoners of war in the Soviet Union¹⁹. To the extent that Heidegger’s personality is burdened by his at least temporary adherence to National Socialism, and since the publication of the diary entries between 1931 and 1970, entitled *Black Notebooks*, as well

¹⁷ Cf. R. Polt, *The Emergency of Being. On Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2006.

¹⁸ M. Heidegger, *Evening Conversation: In a Prisoner of War Camp in Russia, between a Younger and an Older Man*, in M. Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, translated by B.W. Davis, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2010, pp. 132-260; orig. *Abendgespräch in einem Kriegsgefangenenlager in Rußland zwischen einem Jüngeren und einem Älteren in Feldweg-Gespräche (1944/45)*, GA 77, edited by I. Schüßler, V. Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, pp. 203-240.

¹⁹ Cf. M. Heidegger, *Letters to His Wife 1915-1970*, translated by R.D.V. Glasgow, Polity Press, Cambridge 2010, p. 187; orig. “*Mein liebes Seelchen!*” *Briefe Martin Heideggers an seine Frau Elfriede 1915-1970*, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, München 2005, pp. 234-235.

as “being-historical anti-Semitism”, of course the reference to Heidegger in this regard can easily raise concerns and is probably unacceptable for many. Here, we are not dealing specifically with “Heidegger’s case” and evaluating the relevance or irrelevance of the reception of Heidegger’s personality and thought²⁰. Our assumption is that what Heidegger was dealing with at the time he was writing the *Black Notebooks* and all other texts throughout the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s – texts which he hid at his brother Fritz’s, who opposed Nazism and who had warned for years about the danger of a second world war breaking out²¹, and which were published in the *Gesamtausgabe* half a century later – is in many ways indicative and instructive regarding what is defined in this discussion as War of nihilism²².

The aforementioned *Evening Conversation*, whose title is linked to the German word for the West, *Abendland*, *Evening Land*, which is still awaiting its being-historical destiny²³, concludes with a note dated when the Second World War ended:

Schloß Hausen im Donautal, on 8 May 1945.

On the day the world celebrated its victory,
without yet recognizing that already
for centuries it has been defeated by its
own rebellious uprising²⁴.

²⁰ Cf. D. Komel, *Bianco-nero e chiaro-scuro nei Quaderni neri di Heidegger*, in P. Trawny, J.A. Escudero, A.R. de la Torre, D. Komel, A. Fabris (eds.), *Metafisica e antisemitismo. I Quaderni neri di Heidegger tra filosofia e politica*, ETS, Pisa 2014, pp. 73-80; D. Komel, *Zur ‘Hermeneutik der Überlegung’ in den Schwarzen Heften*, in *Jenseits von Polemik und Apologie. Die “Schwarzen Hefte” in der Diskussion*, Heidegger-Jahrbuch 12, edited by A. Denker and H. Zabrowski, Karl Alber, Freiburg-München 2020, pp. 36-47.

²¹ H.D. Zimmermann, *Martin und Fritz Heidegger. Philosophie und Fastnacht*, Beck, München 2005.

²² During this time, Heidegger sought to elucidate the epochal essence of nihilism, but he did not want to avoid the long-term characterization of war events in the epoch of elaborate nihilism. The most concise form of this is given in Heidegger’s accounts, which arose when the strategic pact between Hitler and Stalin was established (thus including a longer discussion of communism) and the beginning of the Second World War in 1939. Published under P. Trawny’s editorship in 1998 as the 69th volume of *Gesamtausgabe* under the title *Die Geschichte des Seyns. 1. Die Geschichte des Seyns. 2. Koinon. Aus der Geschichte des Seyns*; English translation: *The History of Beyng. 1. The History of Beyng. 1938-1940. 2. ‘Koinón’. Out of the History of Beyng (1939 to 1940)*, translated by W. McNeill, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2015.

²³ Cf. M. Heidegger, *Language in the Poem. A Discussion on Georg Trakl’s Poetic Work On the Way to Language*, translation by P.D. Hertz, Harper & Row, New York et al., 1971, pp. 159-198.

²⁴ M. Heidegger, *Evening Conversation*, p. 157.

The note could, of course, be interpreted as indicating that Heidegger refused to admit the German defeat and thus declared it the defeat of the whole world²⁵. Heidegger was not indifferent in the face of the German defeat. However, from the context of the conversation as a whole it can be understood that he did not want to justify the German defeat in terms of world conditions, nor did he advocate the defense of the national²⁶ in this regard. At the same time, he does not explicitly highlight “German guilt”, which otherwise enters as a topic within the post-war correspondence with Jaspers²⁷, or broach the sacrifices required for the victory over Nazism – to which we must of course also add the millions of victims of Nazi concentration camps. But if we pay regard to what followed and what continues to follow in terms of “world history” after May 8, 1945 Heidegger’s quotations certainly give us to think, particularly considering what we point out as War of nihilism, as a result of which the world itself and what we understand as “world history” is the loser, perhaps even more precisely the loser of its own victory. Three months later the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima – an event remembered not as the end of the Second World War but as the announcement of a new Cold War²⁸.

²⁵ See R. Mehring, *Heideggers “große Politik”. Die semantische Revolution der Gesamtausgabe*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2016, pp. 225-228.

²⁶ Older Man: You mean that by becoming those who wait, we first become German? Younger Man: Not only is this what I mean – since early this morning, it is what I know. Yet we will not become German so long as we plan to find the ‘German’ by means of analyzing our supposed ‘nature’. Entangled in such intentions we merely chase after what is national, which, after all, as the word says, insists on what is naturally given (*Evening conversation*, p. 153).

²⁷ *The Heidegger-Jaspers Correspondence (1920-1963)*, edited by W. Biemel and H. Saner, translated by G.E. Aylesworth, Humanity Books, Amherst NY 2003, pp. 252-362; orig. *M. Heidegger, K. Jaspers, Briefwechsel (1920-1963)*, edited by W. Biemel and H. Saner, V. Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, Piper, München 1992, pp. 166-220. See also: K. Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, translated by E.B. Ashton, with a new introduction by J.W. Koterski, Fordham University Press, New York 2001; orig. *Die Schuldfrage*, Lambert Schneider, Heidelberg 1946.

²⁸ After VE Day 8 May 1945 we also witnessed mass extrajudicial executions of members of Yugoslav Quisling units, as well as of ordinary civilians who were handed over to the Yugoslav army by the British military authorities in Carinthia, where they had retreated for fear of reprisals (cf. D. Komel, *Den Nihilismus verwunden. Ein slowenisches Postscript zum 20. Jahrhundert*, Verlag Traugott Bautz, Nordhausen 2012, pp. 9-32). These cruel circumstances, which were further stamped by systematic communist terror in the first years after the end of the Second World War until today, and – which seems particularly frightening – *today again* condition political divisions and the entire social discussion in Slovenia, as well as the regulation of international relations with Italy, Austria, Germany and Croatia, although after the first democratic elections in 1990, the then newly elected president of the Slovenian Parliament France Bučar declared the end of the civil war and it was expected that a process of civil reconciliation would take place in independent Slovenia. Instead, at every opportunity there is an attempt to either elevate or challenge the historical validity and significance of the resistance against the occupiers between

Nihilism is explicitly emphasised in the *Evening Conversation*, specifically, in connection with the devastation which “is in no way a consequence of the World War, but rather the World War is for its part only a consequence of the devastation that has been eating away at the earth for centuries” (p. 136). This devastation is not the devastation of life, as the desert is imagined, but on the contrary the fact that “under the appearance of a secured and improving life, a disregard – if not indeed a barring – of life could occur” (p. 138). Nihilism emerges from the abandonment of beings from being, whereby the being nevertheless still and increasingly “subsists” and consolidates the permanence of its subsistence as unconditioned power²⁹.

How are we to understand the “abandonment of being” that defines the nihilistic era of desolation of the Earth and therefore also what devastates as War of nihilism? This war from nothing and for nothing is, as the younger interlocutor in *Evening Conversation* suggests, a matter of evil (böse) and malice (that which is bösertig) in the manner of “the rage of insurgency, which never entirely breaks out”³⁰. However, malice and evil cannot be attributed to the *nothinging of nothing* itself, rather they are connected to what in *nihilisation* in the way of *nihilation*, squeezed between and causes distress – the *emergency without emergency*, which characterises nihilism as a *compression of nothingness*. The abandonment of being corresponds to the total dissolution – which can also be systematically or systemically controlled – of what we are squeezed into, what presses upon us, oppresses us, abandoned in our own essence, and from which we try to escape with all our might.

From an existential perspective, Heidegger’s 1929 “What Is Metaphysics”, to which he returns in an earlier letter to Jünger, discusses compression of human Dasein in the ontological difference which defines our self-being as one who *endures* the difference between being and beings and, insofar as being is nothing of beings, the one who holds the lieutenant of the noth-

1941 and 1945, whereby, it should be emphasized, it was not only those who followed the directives of the communist revolutionary leadership that took over state power in Yugoslavia after the war victory in 1945.

²⁹ “[...] nihilism can only ever be something historically actual when something like the abandonment of beings by being occurs, an abandonment which nonetheless still lets beings be” (p. 138).

³⁰ P. 135. In what follows he adds; “For it could be the case that even morality [die Moral], for its part, together with all the peculiar attempts to envision a worldorder and make certain of a world-security for the national peoples [Völkern] by means of morality, are only a monstrous offspring of evil; just as the much-appealed-to ‘world’s general public’, in its essence and in its manner of emergence, presumably remains a construct and product of the process that we are calling the devastation” (p. 135).

ing³¹. However, the abandonment of being, that “there is nothing to being itself”, places the human being in a different position, one that endures and sustains the nihilation of nothingness. This is precisely what a no-body subject is, because of its subjection to nihilistic power. In this sense, this is not a different position, but a *displacement*³², or, as Heidegger says, the *homelessness*³³ of nowhere humanity on the zero frontlines of War of nihilism³⁴, which recognises the only positioning of power. Since this no-body cannot withstand the *polemos*, which, following Heraclitus, finds place in the disclosure of being in the beings, which is hiding by itself and in this way brings an essential decision, world wars are breaking out³⁵. Abandonment

³¹ “Being held out into the nothing – as Dasein is – on the ground of concealed anxiety makes the human being a lieutenant of the nothing”, M. Heidegger, *What Is Metaphysics*, in *Pathmarks*, translated by W. McNeil, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp. 82-96, p. 93; orig. *Was ist Metaphysik*, in *Wegmarken*, pp. 103-122, p. 118.

³² “The danger of technology, which becomes a danger only with the radical form of spatialization that emerges with modern technological development, lies in its obscuring of place – in its obscuring of that bounded but open realm that gives room to the simple presencing of self, others, and world. When that placed-ness is covered over through the rendering of place as mere position, through the effective obliteration of difference, through the transformation of the human, the non-human, the instrument, and the thing into elements within a system of consumption and production, of transfer and accumulation, of benefit and risk, then what remains is a world of alienation, displacement, and disorientation. Technology does not abolish place, but rather forgets and obscures it”, J. Malpas, *In the Brightness of Place. Topological Thinking in and after Heidegger*, SUNY Press, Albany N.Y. 2022, pp. 265-286.

³³ M. Heidegger, *Letter on ‘humanism’*, in M. Heidegger, *Pathways*, edited by W. McNeill, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp. 239-276; orig. *Brief über den Humanismus*, in M. Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, GA 9, V. Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 2004, pp. 233-296.

³⁴ “That’s really what nihilism is, this instance of destruction that makes the present uninhabitable, ‘uninhabitable’ meaning not affording enough time to be habitable, not creating a dwelling place, where ‘dwelling’ means the possibility of confronting something. You could say, using Heidegger’s lingo, that there is a withdrawal of unconcealment, a dissolution of the present. This dissolution is also the destruction of the incorporation of the past, not of its memory or history but at any rate of its present vitality. You know how important the possibility of making present what is precious about the past is, in politics, for example. Because addressing this suffering means bringing in thinking where it needs to be brought in, which ultimately amounts to creating it as a possibility of bodies, as something available through bodies. That’s not easy to do, and, what’s more, it’s outrageous to ask the schools to do it by themselves. It can only lead to destruction and absurd disciplinary procedures. I think that this is the true figure of contemporary nihilism”, A. Badiou, *Images of Present Time*, translated by S. Spitzer, introduction by K. Reinhard, Columbia University Press, New York, p. 185; orig. *Le Séminaire – Images du temps présent: 2001-2004*, Fayard, Paris 2014, p. 325.

³⁵ In *Black Notebooks* we can read the following relevant passage: “(114) Struggle as war is not the ‘father’ of all ‘things’, if this latter term names everything which in the most preeminent sense is not *nothing*. Such struggle is never the begetter and master of *being* – but always only of *beings*. Beyng knows no begetting and cannot be mastered. Beyng ‘is’ incomparable and nonrelational – as appropriation into the abyss. (115) How restful is the alleged ‘struggle’ on the basis of

from being leaves the human being to the soulless complex of beings, which in its pursuit of nothingness is driven into War of nihilism.

It is not our purpose here, or at least not our main purpose, to analyse in detail Heidegger's reflections on war in a being-historical context. As we have already emphasised, he offers important insights for defining War of nihilism. War of nihilism should not be understood in such a way that the beings fight with being and try to drive it as far away from themselves as possible, quite the opposite. Annihilation comes from the farness of being itself. The more distant the being, the more the beings become distanceless, the worse their mutual disturbance. The weakness of being fortifies the manipulation of the power of the beings³⁶ and mobilises the will and reluctance of the human being, which Nietzsche calls the "das noch nicht festgestellte Thier" (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, KS 5, 81), "the still unfixed animal".

a 'truth' that is never questioned and is declared to be 'eternal'! Here struggle is merely an 'occupation', the filling of the days with ever newly prepared occasions for the satisfaction of ambition and of vanity. If the measure of a 'struggle' is the power and competence for 'decisions', then of what avail is that 'struggling' in the service of 'ideas' of power politics, state politics, and ecclesiastical politics? But for most of us it may be good that such activities are taken to be 'struggles', M. Heidegger, *Ponderings XII-XV. Black Notebooks 1939-1941*, translated by R. Rojcewicz, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2017, pp. 110-111; orig. *Überlegungen XII-XV (Schwarze Hefte 1939-1941)*, GA 96, edited by P. Trawny, V. Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 2014. Also in his other writings Heidegger maintains a differentiation between struggle (*Kampf*) and war (*Krieg*); he conceives of the latter as the nihilisation of the former.

³⁶ M. Heidegger, *History of Being*, p. 43: "Machination empowers power into its essence. This essence, however, is overpowering. In overpowering there lies a suppression and annihilation. Annihilation here does not mean elimination or merely doing away with something on the basis of whatever is present at hand and holds validity; yet nor does it refer to a destruction or demolition in the sense of smashing into pieces what is at hand in the manner of a fragmentation. To annihilate here carries the 'positive' sense of conducting into the nihilative. Because, however, the empowering of power as the unconditional must itself be such in kind, overpowering too is a complete annihilation. Completeness here does not have the character of summation, but of essence; it does not first take hold merely of all beings, but before that, of being itself. Complete annihilation is *devastation* [*Verwüstung*] in the sense of an instituting of the wasteland [*Wüste*]. Accordingly, devastation in no way refers to a merely consequential laying 'waste' and empty of what is at hand, but rather to configuring the secured undermining of every possibility of any decision and of all domains of decision. In this wasteland nothing 'grows' anymore; beings no longer enter into the decision of being. Devastation does not create an empty 'nothing', but is its ownmost kind of ordering: an instituted coercion into what is decisionless. Devastation is not lawless confusion or blind disintegration but has the assuredness that belongs to the self-instituting of power and indeed of unconditional power. The ordering force of devastation is wrath". Cf. A. Fabris, *Il problema della decisione in Heidegger, con riferimento ai Beiträge zur Philosophie*, in *I trattati inediti di Heidegger. Temi, problemi, bilanci, prospettive*, a cura di A. Ardovino e V. Cesarone, Mimesis Edizioni, Milano-Udine 2020, pp. 105-120.

The question arises as to how and whether everything we have specified about War of nihilism can contribute, if not to the prevention, then at least to a better understanding of the military conflicts that we are witnessing today, at the moment also in Europe – an area which, since the end of the Second World War, has boasted about the prosperity of peace. Certainly little, or even nothing, of course, as long as we do not grasp this nothing from the machination of nihilisation, which has the power to drive War of nihilism. Then its alleged insignificance in terms of confronting current war conflicts might prove to be essential in a different way, namely, in this regard that today the inessentiality of human is being forgotten, which leads to humanitarian oblivion. But it seems that we are still quite far from such an essential reminder and admonition, or even growing further and further away from it. Perhaps we simply do not know how close we are. That this is not in our power may be the only thing that can save the human being from the grip of a power which, in order to subjugate total everything, is itself caught in a war *for nothing from nothing*.

Although this is probably not the right place for storytelling, stories are useful because they remind of things. Let us fleetingly refer to Plato's myth of Er, which concludes his *Republic* (X., 618b-619a). Plato calls Er, a soldier who died on the battlefield, a Pamphylian (*pamphylos* literally means "of mingled tribes or races"). The myth tells of a series of demonic trials that Er's soul had to endure on its return to this world. The last of these trials comes when he, parched with thirst, travels to the Plane of Oblivion. The less water a thirsty soul drinks from the river Ameles ("careless"), whose water cannot be held by any vessel, the greater the chance that the soul will remember the essential in the next life.

Today, when the river of oblivion runs through all information and communication channels, we can ask ourselves the following: what should awaken in us the concern that the oblivion of the essential does not completely overwhelm us?

Abstract

Unlike other destructive wars, War of nihilism is characterised by the fact that it destroys the very essence of man. This nihilisation of the essence of man and the horizon of the world enables limitless disposal of human and other "resources" and accelerates the totalisation of bare power. In this respect, in principle, every moral condemnation of seizing power in order to struggle for

world domination proves insufficient. The second part of the paper is related to Heidegger's being-historical understanding of the "conditions of war", which were written between 1939 and 1945; they offer a series of relevant bases for defining War of nihilism. Additional support for this, particularly regarding the technology of "cold" and "hot" warfare from the end of the Second World War onwards, could found in Paul Virilio's studies. The War of nihilism is not a threat of a great destructive war, as we speak of the threat of World War III, but is epochally at work in new and new (uni)forms of war violence.

Keywords: nihilism; nihilisation; war; Heidegger; Virilio.

Dean Komel
University of Ljubjana
dean.komel@ff.uni-lj.si