

Chapter I

The (Non) Event of 1984

1984 is an ominous year. It is the symbol of the future. This, of course, is in reference to George Orwell's book *1984*; the future dystopia which has still not occurred. Although the calendar tells us that we have long since passed the date, in many ways *1984* still remains in the future. All futures, it seems, must fall prey to this flaw, be they utopian or dystopian. The future can never be now. It is always future futurity, forever to-come and never present. A certain way of thinking about the future is revealed here, the future anterior, where a future event is talked about as if it has happened already and can now be observed from a time after its happening: 'the future will have been like'. However, this is only one mode of thinking about the future, a mode that may have ended in 1984. In fact, it is possible to say that the beginning of the future will have been in 1984. This event of the future has in many ways been forgotten, or worse still is destined merely to be remembered, to become part of history.

In 1984 a small colloquium took place at Cornell University on a newly created type of criticism called Nuclear Criticism. This period of time was possibly the hottest the Cold War ever became aside from the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Just a year before President Regan had denounced the USSR as the "Evil Empire" and instigated the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) or 'Star Wars', a plan to create a defense shield over America to protect it from potential nuclear attack.¹ Subsequently, this plan was reinvigorated by George W. Bush and is still being implemented across Europe, much to the disgust of Russia. Only three years later in 1987 the nuclear stockpile of the USSR reached its maximum at 40 723 weapons, while the USA had 23 490.² Amidst this climate the Cornell colloquium sought to examine how these

conscious and unconscious nuclear fears played into various texts, and what might be the critical response to these texts.³ At the spearhead of this new discourse was Jacques Derrida who presented a paper entitled 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)', which in many ways may be regarded as the founding manifesto of nuclear criticism. As the term 'founding manifesto' implies, the colloquium and the subsequent discourse of nuclear criticism saw itself as an important new mode of discourse which would change the nature of criticism itself, bringing forth a new age of critique.

However, only a handful of years later the Cold War was to come to a sudden end with the collapse of the USSR; an event which Francis Fukuyama was to describe as the end of history. Certainly, to the extent that it depends on the threat of imminent nuclear destruction, it seems that the end of the Cold War was indeed the end of nuclear criticism. More importantly, what also seemed to end was the very utopian impulse at the core of nuclear criticism. For Fukuyama, what the end of history represented was the end of change, the end of new modes of thought, of ideology. The production of ideology, and the violence associated with these differing ideologies found its apotheosis in that which was the very subject of nuclear criticism. Fukuyama writes:

The twentieth century saw the developed world descend into a paroxysm of ideological violence, as liberalism contended first with the remnants of absolutism, then bolshevism and fascism, and finally an updated Marxism that threatened to lead to the ultimate apocalypse of nuclear war.⁴

Of course there is much more to the idea of the end of history than the avoidance of nuclear war. But what this shows is that with the collapse of the Soviet Union came an apparent end of the nuclear issue. The conditions that seemed to define the

domain of nuclear criticism also collapsed. The future of nuclear criticism, in both senses of the word, was abandoned to the history of ideas. Many would say that the disappearance of the small movement of nuclear criticism is a fair enough price to pay for the end of the threat of imminent nuclear war. However, for Fukuyama, there is much more at stake in the end of history. He concludes: "In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history."⁵ The end of nuclear criticism is merely indicative of the wider ends of philosophy and art, which are much more troubling thoughts.

Along with the end of history, the end of art has been mentioned many times before Fukuyama took up the idea. Notably, Arthur C. Danto suggested it in the pivotal year of 1984. Danto himself was well aware of the Orwellian importance of this year, and in fact was to play on this very fact in his in depth examination of the end of art.⁶ For Danto the year 1984 was defined by the symbolic non-event of Orwell's dystopia. This represented the end of Orwell's fictional historical progression. 1984 was no longer the future, and the future, now a reality, was part of history.

Danto's thesis on art is similar to Fukuyama's, that there can no longer be any historical progression within art. This does not mean that art will stop being produced, but that the history of art has come to its conclusion, that art as an historical progression had arrived at its final point. All art produced after the end of art will not not be art but will be *post-historical* art. What this means for Danto is that "[n]o art is any longer historically mandated as against any other art. Nothing is any more true as art than anything else, nothing especially more historically false than anything else."⁷ The reason for this, Danto argues, is that art has become completely self-conscious and has completely exhausted its own historical possibility, that is, it has realized its own conditions of possibility. Any art is now possible and it is permissible

that anything is art.⁸ It is no longer the domain of artistic production to discriminate between something as art and something that is not. Although Danto did not identify this end of art until 1984, the event itself had taken place some twenty years before against the backdrop of the sixties. Danto writes:

The sixties was a paroxysm of styles, in the course of whose contention, it seems to me - and this was the basis of my speaking of the "end of art" in the first place - it gradually became clear, first through the *nouveaux realistes* and pop, that there was no special way works of art had to look in contrast to what I had designated "mere real things."⁹

The ultimate example that Danto gives is Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box*, an exact copy of the Brillo boxes that could be purchased at any supermarket. It is interesting to note that Danto uses the same language to express events in the art world as Fukuyama uses to express those in the ideological world - the various paroxysms which appeared before the supposed end of these narratives.

In particular what these two events, Warhol's *Brillo Box* and the violent paroxysm of styles, indicate are the death spasm of what Danto calls the age of manifestos. The age of manifestos was characterized by an attempt to define what exactly art was and to give an articulation of how one form of art, be it dada, surrealism, or the *maschinkunst* of Tatalin, was the ultimate form of art. The various manifestos and their statements on art were the way in which artists grappled with the philosophy of art, the way in which they sought to define their art as the truth about art. What Danto sees as the end of art is the end of the possibility of any such claims, the ultimate truth about art is that anything is permissible, the philosophical justification is no longer an artistic endeavor, but is explicitly philosophical. This is the Hegelian notion that in the movement of *Geist* art will be simili-

mated by philosophy (the full Hegelian influence and implications of these 'end of' narratives will be returned to in Chapter 11). In a certain way, as Fukuyama's triumph of ideological freedom represented the end of history, the stylistic freedom that the violent paroxysm of the sixties gave way to is the ultimate representation of the end of art. After the end of art the manifesto will become redundant, because it is philosophically invalid to claim the philosophical superiority of one form of art over another. It will no longer be possible to judge artwork by the historical situation or movement within which it is located.

In many ways Danto's theory on the end of art ties up with what is often called the crisis in the avant-garde. Theorists such as Peter Bürger and Andreas Huyssen have suggested that the avant-garde is now merely of historical significance.¹⁰ This idea is more empirical than that of Danto, it is merely necessary to point to the appropriation of various avant-garde moments by the culture industry. The progressive and radical nature of the avant-garde and its search for the new has been sold out. The art industry, by the very freedom Danto rejoices in, has made experimentation impossible. To co-opt Fukuyama's phrase, and give it a somewhat literal meaning, all that is possible is the caretaking of the museum that is the culture industry.

Another theorist, Krzysztof Ziarek, rejects the idea of this crisis along with any idea of the end of art. In his book *The Historicity of Experience: Modernity, the avant-garde and the event*¹¹ he connects the Heideggerian notion of the artwork as an event, and his analysis of technology, with Benjamin's critique of the art work in the age of mechanical reproduction. As a result of this conjunction he develops a theory in which the avant-garde artwork reveals the historicity of its own event as a critique of modern technology. Rather than Danto's view that the manifesto driven avant-garde was driven by its own historical context, Ziarek claims that the experience of the avant-garde artwork is engaged in an active historicization and critique of its own

historical context. In particular, he sees this in terms of the critique of modernity and the technological experience of the world. For him, avant-garde artwork is still possible, there has been no end of art although there may well have been a decrease in truly avant-garde art, as a result of the process of the technological domination of the world, which does not allow the world to be revealed in its historical context, but merely as the Heideggerian notion of standing reserve. For Ziarek, although not necessarily therefore for Heidegger, this dominance of the technological mode of thought would indeed be the end of history in terms of the possibility of any historicist critique as by its very essence, technology does not reveal its own historical conditions of possibility. Hence, it is up to the avant-garde in some form to rail against the technological. This ideological conflict between the technological mode of thought and the avant-garde is played out by the fascination that avant-garde artists have always had for various forms of technology. The full importance of these similar yet conflicting theories of art and the explicit connection to Heidegger's thought on technology will be explicitly addressed in Chapter 7.

To view these synchronous events of 1984, the year, reveals what was identified above as the problematic of 1984 as a symbol of the future. On one hand the Cornell colloquium celebrated the creation of a new discourse. On the other, Danto announced the end of the possibility of new discourses; an end which only a few years later would engulf the domain that defined nuclear criticism. This is the event, in time, and also the non-event of the future of 1984. The end of history is also the end of the future, the end of the possibility of the new. Is it still possible to have such a conception of the future after the (non) event of 1984, and if so how would such a future manifest itself and contrast itself with the idea of the end of history in particular as the end of historical, or historicist art?

Chapter 2

The New Beauty of Speed

The small early twentieth century artistic movement known as futurism provides a problematic point for the theory of art and the avant-garde as put forward above by both Danto and Ziarek. Futurism emerged in 1909 with the publication of its founding manifesto, which was also possibly the very founding of the artistic manifesto, on the front page of the Parisian daily *Le Figaro*.¹ Written by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the self-proclaimed "caffeine of Europe,"² this manifesto was an organized attack on the history of art. It declared a new form of art, an art of the future which would embrace dynamism, speed, violence and, above all, the machine and technology.³ Futurism is problematic for the above theorists due to its declaration of total war against history. It neither seeks to give itself some sort of historical mandate against other forms of art in the way which Danto claims is characteristic of the age of manifestos, nor does it seek to create some sort of historicist critique in the way which Ziarek describes. In fact, futurism's championing of technology contrasts in almost every way with Ziarek's characterization of the avant-garde. The key to this problematic lies in the fact that futurism rejects history and historicism of all sorts in favor of the future. Futurism did not create itself as a style (although undoubtedly a futurist style did exist albeit in a highly problematic form). Rather, it set itself in opposition to other styles. It did not take part in the growing paroxysm of styles in the age of manifestos, but in fact drew its energy from this paroxysm itself. It was from this violent and dynamic confrontation that the destruction of history and the arrival of the future would grow. In exactly this way nuclear criticism did not set itself up as a new ideology against the two sides of the Cold

War, but instead located itself at the very nexus of their confrontation, in the middle of the ideological paroxysm itself. Nuclear criticism emerged and proclaimed itself the criticism of the future at precisely the moment when the nuclear tension was the greatest, in an identical way in which futurism declared itself the art of the future amidst the growing tension amongst the proliferation of styles such as cubism, expressionism, fauvism, and impressionism. Interestingly there are many further points of comparison between these two discourses of futurism and nuclear criticism. In many ways both are set against the problematic of the (non) event of 1984, both are the paradoxical champions of the future, which have been doomed to history and forgottenness. However, by examining this comparison it is perhaps possible to reinvigorate both the ideas of the future and of the avant-garde.

The above similarities between nuclear criticism and futurism are what might be called formal similarities, that is, similarities between the conditions within which they functioned. However, the real points of interest arise when what might be called the similarities of content are examined. These will reveal how these two discourses actually function. There are three main points of similarity. The first of these is the idea of technology as the catalyst of the future. The futurists saw the future in all forms of modern technology and machinery; however they themselves were not engineers or mechanics competent in the maintenance and development of this Promethean technology. Likewise the domain of nuclear criticism is fundamentally defined by a technological innovation, the nuclear weapon and its use in modern warfare. With this technological innovation, however, there is a much more imminent risk. However, like the futurists, the people who are engaged in nuclear criticism are not themselves involved in what Derrida identifies as the technoscientifico-militaro-diplomatic configuration of nuclear warfare. They are philosophers, theorists, poets and authors of the

This technology of total nuclear destruction reveals the second point of similarity, which is the idea of the destruction of history.

This idea is very literal for the nuclear critics; a total nuclear war would be one of remainderless destruction. Quite simply, it would wipe out every trace of human history. For the futurists this idea was much more metaphorical. They wanted to escape the burden of artistic convention in order to produce an art that could reflect the way in which technology allowed an escape from the bondage of the past. In his founding manifesto Marinetti writes:

It is from Italy that we launch through the world this violently upsetting, incendiary manifesto of ours. With it today we establish *Futurism* because we want to free this land from its smelly gangrene of professors, archaeologists, ciceroni, and antiquarians.⁴

This idea was of particular importance in the historical context of an Italy, which bore the heavy legacy of both the Renaissance and the glory of the Roman Empire, and was attempting to forge a new identity in the modern era. Despite this destruction, neither futurism nor nuclear criticism are purely negative doctrines.

This leads to the third point of similarity, that is, the importance of speed as the force of the new. This is a point so important to Marinetti that he makes it twice in his founding manifesto. Firstly, at point four, he writes:

We say that the world's magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty; the beauty of speed. A racing car whose hood is adorned with great pipes, like serpents of explosive breath - a roaring car that seems to ride on grapeshot - is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*.⁵

The aesthetics of futurism are clearly defined by the conjunction

of speed as an aspect of technology. However, this is not the only way in which speed is important. It also has a much more radical metaphysical implication. At point eight of the manifesto Marinetti writes:

We stand on the last promontory of the centuries! ... Why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed.⁶

There are three important elements of this statement. The first is the proclamation of the death of time and space, two of the great pillars of philosophy, and in particular of the way in which the world is experienced. The second is the manifestation of the absolute, which itself is an important philosophical idea (this point will arise in Chapter 10, which is concerned with the connection between art, the absolute and the sublime). Finally, it outlines the way in which these two elements are a result of speed as the new defining feature of the world: not just as the technological speed of the racing car, but as an ontological condition. This distinction fits within the Heideggerian schema of the ontico-ontological difference, that is, the difference between particular scientific, technological, cultural or historical knowledge of the world (which is ontic) and the conditions of possibility of both the world and that knowledge (which is ontological).⁷ The experience of the speed of the racing car is a purely ontic understanding of speed, which is intimately connected to a deeper ontological understanding of speed. It is by examining the connections between this ontico-ontological difference that a new logic of speed may be arise.

This is exactly what Derrida is getting at with the nuclear aphorism of his first missive, "[a]t the beginning there will have

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'Founding Manifesto of Futurism' the way in which Derrida formulates speed is two fold. Firstly, he points out how the logic of nuclear war as an arms race is defined by speed. He writes:

Whether it is the arms race or orders given to start a war that is itself dominated by that economy of speed throughout all zones of its technology, a gap of a few seconds may decide, irreversibly, the fate of what is still now and then called humanity - plus the fate of a few other species.⁹

Like the racing car of futurism, the technology that nuclear criticism is engaged with is defined by speed on every level. This includes the speed at which new weapons are developed, the speed at which strategic decisions are made and the speed of the weapons themselves as they fly towards their targets. Nuclear war, more than any other sort of war, is defined throughout by the experience of speed. However, as with futurism this logic of speed cuts deeper still. With the omnipresence of speed within the nuclear discourse also comes the rethinking of time and space as prefigured by Marinetti. To quote Derrida at length:

Are we having today, *another*, a different experience of speed? Is our relation to time and to motion qualitatively different? Or must we speak of prudently of an extraordinary - although qualitatively homogenous - acceleration of the same experience? And what temporality do we have in mind when we put the question that way? Can we take the question seriously without re-elaborating all the problematics of time and motion, from Aristotle to Heidegger by way of Augustine, Kant, Husserl, Einstein, Bergson, and so on? So my first formulation of the question of speed was simplistic. It opposed quantity and quality as *if* a quantitative transformation - the crossing of certain thresholds of acceleration within the general machinery of a culture, with all the

techniques for handling, recording, and storing information - could not induce qualitative mutations, as *if every* invention were not the invention of a process of acceleration or, at the very least, a new experience of speed.¹⁰

Here Derrida explicitly spells out what is at stake in this new double experience, both as a reformulation of the idea of speed and as a new experience which will be speed itself. What is required is a rethinking of the very foundations of temporality itself, or, to give a literal meaning to Marinetti's catchphrase, time and space died yesterday.

In his first missile/missive where Derrida declares, in his own way, the possible death of time and space and the new experience of speed, he also returns to the problem of the future that is central to the (non) event of 1984. This is most obvious in the strange phrasing of the nuclear aphorism 'at the beginning there will have been speed.' As Ken Ruthven points out this rather curious idiom reveals the way in which nuclear criticism does not think in terms of the future anterior but in the future perfect.¹¹ 'At the beginning there will have been speed', itself a rewriting of the moment of Genesis' 'in the beginning was the word', does not allow any space between the beginning and the end, within which the present tense could operate. Nor does it speculate something beyond the end; that would both open up the future tense - 'there will be speed and then *x*' - and allow the beginning to be referred to in the past tense.

This very phrasing is a critique of the way in which the temporality of the future has been considered since the time of Plato. It is exactly this point that Richard Klein picks up on when he speculates on the future of nuclear criticism in the immediate period after the end of the Cold War. Under these conditions, when Klein writes about the future of nuclear criticism the phrase has a double meaning. On one hand he is speculating on what sort of a future there is for the discourse of nuclear criticism

in the world after the end of the Cold War. On the other hand he is examining how it is that nuclear criticism envisions, or possibly re-envisions, the idea of the future within its discourse. The future perfect of nuclear criticism replaces the future anterior that has dominated thought of the future.

The idea of the future anterior has its roots in Plato's *Philebus* where thought about the future is understood as a form of mimetic representation. As a re-presentation the future must already be understood as having a past; as anticipation that which is anticipated must be understood as already having happened in order for it to be represented in the present.¹² As an aside, it is interesting to note that this mimetic understanding of anticipation as future memory also implicitly contains a correspondence theory of truth and a mimetic understanding of art. This configuration between the future, truth and art will become a central issue of this book, which will be returned to several times. Understanding nuclear criticism via the paradigm of the future anterior has developed into the theory of the nuclear sublime. The sublime is an aesthetic theory about the way in which the unthinkable may be represented in art; this emphasis on representation shows how the idea of the nuclear sublime is still within both the mimetic framework of representation and the correspondence theory of truth.

Klein's proposal is much more radical. The possibility of remainderless destruction that nuclear criticism presents does not allow for it to be understood in terms of the future anterior. Quite literally there is no anterior to the possibility of total nuclear war because nothing will be left, there will be no after, and definitely no possibility of any such viewpoint. For Klein, what this possibility provokes is a need to rethink the way in which the future is considered, a way in which a logic of the future may function in the face of total nuclear destruction, and this is precisely the task of the future of nuclear criticism.¹³ In precisely the same way, the (non) event of 1984 is a representation

of the disintegration of the future anterior that is the utopian mode of thought. However, the year 1984 and the advent of nuclear criticism also saw the rethinking of the future in terms of the future perfect of speed. In order to understand how the future may be rethought in terms of speed, and also to draw out the conjunction of nuclear criticism and futurism, it is necessary to understand the process that led Derrida to his proclamation.

Chapter 3

The Fabulously Textual Nuclear War

Derrida's discussion of the nuclear issue is structured around what he calls the *aporia* of the nuclear referent.¹ The term referent implies that this argument is structured around a textual understanding of the nuclear issue. As has been pointed out above, an apparent problem for the nuclear critic is the fact that he or she is not directly connected with the techno-scientifico-militaro-diplomatic configuration of nuclear warfare. Instead, the nuclear critic is an expert in discourse and texts. However, as Derrida points out, this conflict of competence is not as problematic as it first appears. This is because the nuclear issue is "a phenomenon whose essential feature is that of being *fabulously textual*, through and through."² As with the above formulation of speed, this textual nature of nuclear criticism works within the two levels of the ontico-ontological difference. At the ontic level nuclear warfare is utterly dependent upon structures of information, communication and language.³ As the different elements of the nuclear configuration, at the levels of diplomacy, intelligence and research, all function through these structures. This is the level at which most nuclear criticism functions; the critique of the various rhetorical structures which surround the nuclear issue, be they, fictional, diplomatic, scientific, etc. Analysis at merely this level is problematic because by its rhetorical nature it falls into the mode of gossip and *doxa* (opinion). This is where the techno-scientifico-militaro-diplomatic incompetence of the nuclear critic is revealed as they descend into sophistry and psycho-rhetoric.⁴ In order to avoid this, the way in which the essential textual nature of the nuclear issue goes beyond merely the ontic and reaches to the level of the ontological must be taken into account.

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Nuclear war as the total engagement of nuclear warfare, rather than the extension of regular war by a single nuclear action such as the bombing of Japan at the end of the Second World War, is fabulously textual precisely because it has not taken place; it is only possible to talk and write about it. The result of this is that "the terrifying reality of the nuclear conflict can only be the signified referent, never the real referent (present or past) of a discourse or a text."⁵ It is textual because that is all it can be - a text that is its own self-referent. It is fabulous because as a pure text it is a story, a myth, a fiction, a fantasy. This is the ontological nature of nuclear war as fabulously textual. There is a clear schism at work here. This 'ontological' nature of nuclear war seems to go against the very meaning of ontological itself: What of the 'reality' of the nuclear missiles sitting in their silos, the 'reality' of the sheer destructive power of these missiles. This cannot be denied, but the distinction between the nuclear age and the fiction of nuclear war must be maintained. The missiles may be real but this reality is determined by the fiction of a text. It is the fiction of nuclear war which motivates both the techno-scientific inventiveness and also the politico-diplomatic structures and strategies. This ontological formulation of nuclear war as fabulously textual allows the nuclear critic to not only critique the nuclear discourse but also the ontological itself. As Derrida writes:

"Reality," let's say the encompassing institution of the nuclear age, is constructed on a fable, on the basis of an event that has never happened (except in fantasy, and that is not nothing at all), an event of which one can only speak, an event whose advent remains an invention by men (in all the senses of the word "invention") or which, rather, remains to be invented.⁶

The play on the senses of invention here refers to firstly the technological nature of invention and secondly the fantastic, or

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phantasmal, nature of the text as a work of fiction. By situating this play on invention within the above critique of ontology - the way in which the 'real' inventions of nuclear techno-science are determined by the fabulous invention of a text - Derrida is also foreshadowing a critique of the essence of technology as *techné*. The integration of the ontico-ontological difference within the textuality of nuclear war means that while at one level the text will *be* and at the same time *produce* 'reality,' at another it will also allow a way of understanding and interpreting reality, a way clearly within the domain of the nuclear critic as a mechanic of texts.

The competency of nuclear criticism, and indeed the textualization of nuclear war itself, reveals the importance of nuclear criticism and the way in which it must relate to philosophy in general. This is not only because it deals with the possibility or anticipation of the remainderless destruction of humanity, but because "the anticipation of nuclear war (dreaded as the fantasy, or phantasm, of a remainderless destruction) installs humanity - and through all sorts of relays even defines the essence of modern humanity - in its rhetorical condition."⁷ This is a sort of symmetry between the textual nature of nuclear war and the essence of modern humanity as rhetorical, which defines the competency of the nuclear critic as a scholar of the humanities. This symmetry also, and this will become more apparent below, means that nuclear criticism as textual analysis is also a way of critiquing the structures of technology and diplomacy which it contains. This is precisely the point which Derrida is making in the second of his missives/missiles when he writes: "We [nuclear critics] can therefore consider ourselves competent because the sophistication of the nuclear strategy can never do without the sophistry of belief and the rhetorical simulation of a text."⁸ It is thus through Derrida's rhetorical exploration of the nuclear issue as a textual one that the critique of time and space will develop.

In this way, by examining the rhetorical simulation of the text

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of nuclear war, Derrida is able to develop what he calls the "aporia of the nuclear referent."⁹ Examining the conditions of literature motivates Derrida's first formulation of this aporia. There are two important elements or conditions to literature, without which it would not be possible. The first is the stockpiling and building up of "an objective archive over and above any traditional oral base."¹⁰ This is the continual collection and storage of texts in the various institutions of archives, which means that the text is objectified in a way in which oral texts cannot be. The second condition is the "development of a positive law implying authors' rights, the identification of the signatory, of the corpus, names, titles, the distinction between the original and the copy, the original and the plagiarized version, and so forth."¹¹ In short, this is the judicial archive of the legality of the author, which inextricably entwines the author and the text. These two conditions are vital to the continual existence of literature. However, these two conditions point toward an interesting relationship between literature and nuclear war. As Derrida points out:

Now what allows us perhaps to think the uniqueness of nuclear war, its being-for-the-first-time-and-perhaps-for-the-last-time, its absolute inventiveness, what it prompts us to think even if it remains a decoy, a belief, a phantasmatic projection, is obviously the possibility of an irreversible destruction, leaving no traces, of the juridico-literary archive - that is, total destruction of the basis of literature and criticism.¹²

While humanity, and thus in some sense poetry and the sciences, may survive the total destruction of the archive, literature may not. This is because poetry and the sciences are not dependent upon the archive but have a referent beyond their own conditions of possibility. Whereas literature, insofar as it is dependent

upon the archive, can only produce itself as a fiction dependent upon the possibility of this archive; and indeed is itself constituted by the story this archivizing act tells.

The "phantasmatic projection" of this quote also foreshadows the figure of the specter or ghost, which will appear some 10 years after the presentation of 'No Apocalypse, Not Now' in Derrida's book *Specters of Marx*.¹³ The specter, as the return of a ghost who also appears for the first time and the last time, sets out more explicitly what is at stake in the disjunction of temporality and the disruption of ontology that functions not just in Derrida's engagement with the questions of nuclear war, but also within his philosophical project as a whole. Befitting its temporal logic, this figure will return in Chapter 5.

Derrida sees a strong affinity between this hypothetical total and remainderless destruction of the archive and his own philosophical method of deconstruction. In much the same way as the destruction of history was the very condition of possibility of the futurist doctrine of the future of art, deconstruction seeks to reveal the fantastic nature and radical historicity of the texts it is deconstructing: texts that in their totality are none other than literature. What the hypothesis of the total and remainderless destruction of the archive reveals is the immense threat to literature by nuclear catastrophe. This radical precariousness in turn reveals the radical historicity of the conditions of literature. However, at the same time, the possibility of the absolute destruction of literature allows the totality and completeness of literature to appear, that is, to think it as the wholeness of its self as nothing other than self-reference (although it must be remembered that the nothing is just as important in this statement). What the combination of these two elements produces is an understanding of the historicity of literature as a sort of historical fiction, or, as literature itself. The possibility of understanding literature in its totality is dependent upon the hypothesis of its total destruction. This is what prompts Derrida to declare that the

"historicity of literature is contemporaneous through and through, or rather structurally indissociable, from something like a nuclear *epoch* (by nuclear "epoch", I also mean the *époque* suspending judgment before the absolute decision)."¹⁴ Here, as Ruthven points out, Derrida is playing on the etymological root of the word epoch, in the Greek *epokhe* meaning stoppage. Hence Derrida is not merely referring to the nuclear epoch as merely one stage in historical progression, but at the epoch, which marks the end of such a progression.¹⁵ Although, 'end' is a loaded word with perhaps too many connotations to Fukuyama's 'end of history' discussed above. Derrida's conception of the *époque* is much more delicate and he himself rejects this Hegelian conception of the end of history. He writes:

The nuclear age is not an epoch, it is the absolute *époque*; it is not absolute knowledge and the end of history, it is the *époque* of absolute knowledge. Literature belongs to this nuclear epoch, that of the crisis and of nuclear criticism, at least if we mean by this the historical and ahistorical horizon of an absolute self-destructibility without apocalypse, without revelation of its own truth, without absolute knowledge.¹⁶

This is the suspension of 'truth' as absolute knowledge - apocalypse means revelation of truth. There will be no end of history due to an understanding of absolute truth; especially not in the clumsy way which Fukuyama sees absolute truth as liberal democracy. Rather, the very possibility of absolute truth is blocked by the historical and ahistorical (because it has not yet taken place) horizon of nuclear war. What remains in the present, remains before the event of remainderless destruction, is the epoch of literature.

Hence literature becomes vitally important to the nuclear age, and vice versa the nuclear age becomes vitally important to literature, in fact even essential. This relationship announces the

fundamental nature of literature. Derrida writes:

In what I am calling in another sense an absolute epoch, literature comes to life and can only experience its own precariousness, its death menace and its essential finitude. The movement of inscription is the very possibility of its effacement. Thus one cannot be satisfied with saying that, in order to become serious and interesting today, a literature and a literary criticism must refer to the nuclear issue, must even be obsessed by it. That has to be said, and it is true. But I believe also that, at least indirectly, they have always done this. Literature has always belonged to the nuclear epoch, even if it does not talk "seriously" about it.¹⁷

Literature comes to life when faced with its own death; this means it must be fascinated by this possibility. This does not necessarily mean that literature must always be about nuclear war explicitly. Derrida states that he thinks that the works of Joyce, Mallarmé and Kafka all deal with the nuclear epoch more "seriously" than works about "real" nuclear war. This is because these texts - Joyce, Mallarmé and Kafka - are all part of the deconstructive movement of nuclear literature: The way in which they deal with the possibility of their own death, the death of literature. This is the way in which literature deconstructs itself via its confrontation with its own essential finitude.

This is another interesting point of comparison between nuclear criticism and futurism. Marinetti also put forward a program of experimental literature in a series of manifestos. His aim was to destroy 'traditional' literature by a process of grammatical and linguistic experimentation. While Derrida points towards actual outcomes for literature, the explicit discussion of such outcomes will come later, after the full expression of the aporia of the nuclear referent. The result of this essential marriage of literature and nuclear war is the first

version of the paradox of the referent. Derrida expresses this in two points:

1. Literature belongs to the nuclear age by virtue of the performative character of its relation to the referent, and the structure of the written archive.
2. Nuclear war has not taken place, it is a speculation, an invention in the sense of a fable or an invention to be invented in order to make a place for it or to prevent it from taking place (as much invention is needed for one as for the other), and for the moment all this is only literature. Some might conclude that therefore it is not real, as it remains entirely suspended in its fabulous and literary *époque*.¹⁸

The first point concerns the necessary relationship between literature and the possibility of nuclear war as the destruction of the archive. Literature is dependent upon the juridico-literary archive, and understanding of literature, the very job of the critic, only becomes possible as a result of the idea of completeness which the end of the archive, that is, its destruction by total nuclear war. As a result, on one side the possibility of criticism is the very nature of nuclear criticism; and on the other, literature exists as the deconstruction of its own possibility, that is the performative action of its own self-reference. This is made more explicit by the second point, which refers to the textual nature of nuclear war. Nuclear war itself is a textual fiction, that is, it is literature. Hence, the literature of nuclear war is literature *par excellence*. However, because it can never refer beyond itself and its own possibility it cannot be 'real', and cannot get beyond its own fabulous *époque*. Here the self-referential nature of nuclear criticism begins to explode. This leads to the second formulation of the aporia of the nuclear referent, its totality.

The central contention of the aporia of the nuclear referent is the idea that at the same time its conditions of possibility are also

its conditions of impossibility. Because literature is conditioned by the stockpile of the archive and because it is only possible to conceive of this archive in its totality because of the threat of its total destruction, then literature itself is conditioned by the fable of total destruction. However, because total destruction has not taken place, it itself is only possible in literature. This means that the referent of any possible literature is intimately connected to its own fictional destruction, all literary reference, and hence all nuclear reference is an absolute fabrication, there can be no nuclear referent other than its own self-reference. The converse side of this is that while there is no "real" referent of any nuclear discourse, this means that all reference is real and there can be no other possible reference/referent. Derrida writes:

If we are bound and determined to speak in terms of reference, nuclear war is the only possible referent of any discourse and any experience would share their condition with that of literature. If, according to a structuring hypothesis, a fantasy or phantasm, nuclear war is equivalent to the total destruction of the archive, if not of the human habitat, it becomes the absolute referent, the horizon and condition of all others.¹⁹

Because the only way to engage with the essence of literature is to talk of its destruction, which can only take place in literature, the self-reference of this nuclear referent is the only real referent possible, i.e., the only one which contends with its own conditions of possibility. As such, it is the totality of the nuclear referent that makes any literary reference possible. Hence, the nuclear referent is the absolute referent of all possible reference; yet at the same time it is the destruction of all possible literature. This is the aporia of the nuclear referent.

Derrida highlights the significance of this aporia by contrasting symbolic nature of the total destruction of nuclear

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war with the relatively minor destruction of the death of an individual. An individual death is intricately connected to the symbolic work of mourning and monumentalization.²⁰ This work of memory, or remembrance, which works on the remainder of society, is important because of the way in which it softens the "reality" of death by placing it in the realm of the symbolic. This is a particular function of literature, both in the way in which the death of an individual can be represented in advance and the way in which it can be mourned in retrospect, which is defined by the function of the symbolic (or reference).²¹ The nuclear issue reverses this process of remembrance and monumentalization. This is exactly the point made by the J.G. Ballard quote that is an epigraph to this book. Because there is no after of the nuclear catastrophe the temporal logic of remembrance must be reversed and the monument must beckon the disaster which will destroy not create it, the stress is always pre-traumatic, not post-traumatic. The total nuclear war will irreversibly destroy the entire archive, and with it all symbolic capacity. There will be no possible memorial because the very possibility of the symbolic itself will be destroyed. A memorial always requires a survival, which is the very symbolic nature of the monument, it is always to that which survives not that which dies. The nature of this symbolic gesture is reversed by the aporia of the nuclear referent. Derrida writes:

This absolute referent of all possible literature is on par with the absolute effacement of any possible trace; it is thus the only ineffaceable trace, it is so as the trace of what is entirely other, "*trace du tout autre.*" This is the only absolute trace - effaceable, ineffaceable. The only "subject" of all possible literature, of all possible criticism, its only ultimate and a-symbolic referent, unsymbolisable, even un-signifiable; this is, if not the nuclear age, if not the nuclear catastrophe, at least that toward which nuclear discourse and the nuclear

symbolic *are still beckoning*: the remainderless and a-symbolic destruction of literature.²²

Here is the aporia of the nuclear referent in all its deconstructive splendor: Firstly, it represents both the destruction of the trace and the absolute possibility of the trace. This is the double movement of all writing, the effacement of all previous writing and the necessity of that same writing. Or, to use the deconstructive terms, the differing and the deferral that together make up *différance*.²³ Secondly is the explicitly futural nature of the nuclear referent. The only possible "subject" of literature, the absolute referent, which holds literature in its epochal suspension, is still beckoning from the future. It is this future as futural, which makes possible all literature; the still beckoning of remainderless destruction, which can be none other than the future perfect.

It is through an understanding of the aporia of the nuclear referent that nuclear criticism is able to rethink the future in terms of the future perfect and hence confront the problem of the (non) event of 1984. Instead of considering the utopian future anterior of 1984, if 1984 is thought in terms of the epochal suspension of the aporia of the nuclear referent then the (non) event is no longer problematic, because the event has no longer not happened, but is merely suspended. It is in this sense that it was possible to say at the start of the book that the beginning of the future will have been in 1984. This is the beginning of the future perfect, which is held in epochal suspension by the aporia of the nuclear referent, a suspension which is always futural. In many ways this point has added nothing to the above discussion on the future and the (non) event of 1984. However, what must be remembered is the other important event of 1984 discussed above; that is, the end of art. Several similarities between the discourse of nuclear criticism and the artistic movement of futurism have already been defined. The most important of these

is the connection between the destruction of history and the production of something new and futural. This points towards a second important development in the conjunction of 1984. The way in which by synthesizing the two futural discourses of nuclear criticism and futurism a new idea of the avant-garde as some sort of nuclear futurism may overcome the idea of the end of art. The way in which this is possible is by examining the various consequences which Derrida draws from his discussion of the aporia of the nuclear referent, the synthesizing these with various elements of futurism in order to critique criticism itself, literature, art, the avant-garde and the end of art.

The most immediate consequences of the aporia of the nuclear referent stem directly from the second formulation of the aporia: the idea of the absolute referent. Because literature and literary criticism can speak of nothing else apart from the nuclear referent, the only thing that they can do is multiply and invent their strategic maneuvers in an attempt to assimilate the wholly other of the absolute trace. This is most obvious as the sort of 'double talk' and rhetoric that defines the diplomatic strategy of nuclear politics.²⁴ Such as the ideas of the strategic use of nuclear weapons, the rhetorical discussion of 'prevailing' in a nuclear war, and, most specifically and with the most deconstructive overtones, the idea of deterrence, which is a sort of deferral. Alongside this practical outcome is a much more philosophical one. The absolute "subject" of the nuclear referent is an unnamable one, and the same goes for the referent itself. This means that the perspective of nuclear war, and the discourse of nuclear criticism, re-elaborates the very question of the referent itself - what is a referent? Derrida directly connects this re-elaboration of the question of the referent with a simultaneous re-elaboration of the question of the transcendental ego or transcendental subject.²⁵ This connection seems to stem from the equivocation of the word "subject" as both subject of the discourse and the discourse of subjectivity. This correlation becomes much

more apparent in the seventh missile/missive where Derrida plays on another equivocation, this time between nuclear criticism and Kantian criticism. He writes

"Nuclear criticism", like Kantian criticism, is thought about the limits of experience as a thought of finitude. The *intuitus derivativus* of the receptive (that is, perceiving) being, of which the human subject is only one example, cuts its figure on the (back)ground of the *intuitus originarius*, of an infinite intellect which creates its own objects rather than inventing them.²⁶

The nature of both forms of critique is an exploration of conditions of possibility as thoughts of limit or finitude. Kantian criticism is concerned with the possibility of the human subject, whereas nuclear criticism is concerned with the subject of reference. However, considering these two forms of criticism together highlights the problems of Kantian criticism when its subject, the human subject, is conflated with the subject of nuclear criticism. Nuclear criticism reveals that the conditions of possibility of the nuclear referent, and hence all reference in general, are also their own conditions of impossibility. The result of this is that nuclear criticism

forecloses a finitude so radical that it would annul the basis of the opposition and would make it possible to think the very limit of criticism. This limit comes into view in the groundlessness of a remainderless self-destruction of the self, auto-destruction of the *autos* itself. Whereupon the kernel, the nucleus of criticism, itself bursts apart.²⁷

There are two pertinent points here. The first is that when this logic of nuclear criticism is applied back to Kantian criticism, that which is destroyed by this self-destruction is exactly the self as the transcendental subject, the subject capable of self-reflectivity.

The destruction of the *autos* itself disrupts the possibility of autonomy and apperception, which together ground the Kantian subject, although it must be said in a mysterious and not entirely unproblematic way to start. This is the kernel of Kantian criticism. The second point is the consequences which this has for criticism, for the self-destruction of the self that is criticism is also its own self-destruction, the nucleus of criticism, its very possibility, is destroyed. The bursting apart of the kernel of criticism is also the explosion of philosophy. This is in many ways the apocalypse of philosophy that can never arrive, which is always held in epochal suspension. However, what remains in the present is the proliferation and invention of strategic maneuvers which prefigure this apocalypse; that is, philosophy in an apocalyptic tone. Although Derrida explores this point in more detail elsewhere,²⁸ it is this point which he concludes with via the biblical reference of the war of the name and the writing of the apocalypse.²⁹

The concept of philosophy as the apocalyptic foreshadowing of its own destruction seems to go against the futural nature of the conclusions already drawn from the aporia of the nuclear referent. With regard to philosophy, in his sixth missile/missive Derrida presents a quite different set of corollaries to the aporia of the nuclear referent. Rather than focusing on Kantian criticism and its relation to nuclear criticism, these set of corollaries are based around the Heideggerian formulation of the essence of metaphysics: namely, the question 'why is there something rather than nothing?'³⁰ For Heidegger this question - the question of metaphysics - is the primary concern of philosophy, and as such is the search for ground. This philosophical task is, for Heidegger, an extended elaboration on the logic of the ontico-ontological difference. The ontico-ontological difference was exactly where Derrida's nuclear criticism started, with, 'at the beginning there will have been speed'. The speed of nuclear criticism both unites the two elements of the ontico-ontological

difference and also, by echoing Genesis, echoes the explicitly Heideggerian investigation into origins and essences. The Heideggerian interpretation of the corollaries of nuclear criticism is expressed when Derrida writes:

If the ontico-ontological difference ensures the gathering up of the sending (*le rassemblement de cet envoi*), the dissemination and *destinerrance* I am talking about go so far as to suspend that ontico-ontological difference itself.³¹

The important move at work here is the introduction of the idea of sending or giving, an idea that has been implicit within Derrida's paper all along in the idea of *missivity*. These interconnected ideas of sending and giving are significant elements of Heidegger's later work. This has particular relevance to the way in which he considers the future of thought. For example both 'The Question Concerning Technology' and 'The End of Philosophy and The Task of Thinking' conclude with a sending or giving forth into thought that signal a path for thinking to take.³² Derrida takes up this idea in the form of *envoi*, which is sending or a dispatch, and the associated *destinerrance* (a wandering of its own end). The flip side of this is the idea of gathering, which, for Heidegger, is the task of philosophy, and is more commonly termed bringing to presence (although the bringing of this gathering is just as important as the eventual presence). This gathering is always watched over by the ontico-ontological difference and the search for ground. Derrida's contention is that the radical speed of the nuclear missile/missive results in both a sending and a *destinerrance*, which will suspend the ontico-ontological difference.

These two sides, the gathering and the sending, are co-dependant upon one another. This means that the 'Kantian' interpretation cannot be dismissed, the *destinerrance* will in some sense always be apocalyptic; philosophy will be trapped

wandering within the limits of the ontico-ontological difference. However, by activating the Heideggerian motif of the sending there is the possibility of a path beyond critique. The shape of this path is the speeding missile, the *missivity* of nuclear criticism, which explosively strikes at the ground zero of literature and philosophy. Derrida writes:

Just as all language, all writing, every poetico-performative or theoretico-informative text dispatches, sends itself, allows itself to be sent, so today's missiles, whatever their underpinnings may be, allow themselves to be described more readily than ever as dispatches in writing (code, inscription, trace, and so on). That does not reduce them to the dull inoffensiveness that some would naively attribute to books. It recalls (exposes, explodes) that which, in writing, always includes the power of the death machine.³³

This speeding missile can be none other than literature; but note, it is a literature that has expanded and engulfed every gesture, every maneuver, into the text of writing, specifically the poetico-performative discourse of art and the theoretico-informative discourse of science. All of this, all literature, is watched over by death. What is of importance here is not the drawing out of the proximity of the essence of literature with death, but the way in which, as a result or outcome of this, the sending of the text always includes the power of the death machine, and that a text will always send forth this machine of death. The connections between death, literature, writing and philosophy are central to the philosophy of Derrida, and themes that he has approached from a variety of angles, and yet which all together underpin all of his work.