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**Space, Time, and Death in the Ethics of Charbonneau and Ellul**

*I. Introduction*

Good morning everyone. I'm delighted to be with you today in-person, *en présentiel*; right now (perhaps more than ever), it seems obvious that our shared presence in time and space is neither ethically neutral, nor to be taken for granted. In proper homage to Ellul and Charbonneau's manner of conceiving freedom, if *necessity* instigates us as organizers to supplement our presence here today with an online portion of this conference—a virtual, asynchronous and place-less “gathering”—our incarnate presence here today in the flesh despite the difficulties and challenges posed by a global pandemic might count as a testament to our *freedom*. Furthermore, our presence today signifies that *this conversation matters*, and by extension, that time and space are worth fighting for.

Before I move to the content of my presentation, please note that I consider my contribution to be an essay, in the etymological meaning of this word—an attempt; it is not a finished product, but an exploratory proposal. Perhaps the most noteworthy element of our theme is that it constitutes an attempt to think Ellul and Charbonneau together. As in Frédéric Rognon's recent book on *Le défi de la non-puissance*, or the new volume *La nature du combat*, francophone scholarship is increasingly attending to the inextricable link between our two friends. With the very notable exception of the works of Christian Roy, anglophone scholarship in general and on Ellul in particular has largely ignored Bernard Charbonneau. This conference hosted by the International Jacques Ellul Society together with the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul constitutes a recognition of this crucial oversight and a step towards its remedy. In this light, I hope that any poor scholarship or missteps (especially in my reading of Charbonneau) can be graciously corrected by you in the dialogue afterwards, and for the rest of our time together.

I will be exploring the themes of time, space, and death in Charbonneau and Ellul's shared ethical thinking, their “pensée commune”. From my doctoral studies, I have some familiarity with Ellul's approach to space and time as a major component of what he means by “presence,” which I read as *the* driving theme of Ellul's volumes of theological ethics. Today I will try to discern both similarities and differences between Ellul's and Charbonneau's approaches to time and space, then to situate our present ethical situation in the tension of this dialogue. I would also like to note that my topic prefigures the forthcoming presentations from Prof. Frédéric Rognon, and Jean-Sébastien Ingrand, insofar as Kierkegaard is an important ethical source for Ellul and Charbonneau and death is a clear limiting factor in human space-time. I look forward to learning much from both of their contributions.

My presentation will be divided into three main sections. First I will highlight significant similarities between Ellul and Charbonneau's ethical thinking on space and time, focusing on an important moment in their lifelong dialogue; then I will turn to some of the differences between them. I will end by proposing

some possible pathways for further discussion of what ethical resources this consideration might yield in our present situation.

## II. *Situating my Study*

The first thing to note, very simply, is that Ellul and Charbonneau do indeed spend significant time thinking and writing about time and space in a way which forms their deepest ethical impulses. If, in coming to his famous *cogito ergo sum*, René Descartes began his thinking by minimizing his own body, sentiments, and temporal situation, Ellul and Charbonneau represent a totally opposed way of thinking, one in which the thinker's insertion in space and time are absolutely essential. While they are not the only ones to do so, for us, they represent forerunners whose thought gave positive weight to the temporal and spatial dimensions which constitute human life, precisely at an historical moment when these latter were threatened in a hitherto unforeseen manner. In observing this, I am echoing Frédéric Rognon, Daniel Cérézuelle, and Christian Roy, among others.

For Ellul, this figures into his ethics of “presence;” Charbonneau speaks more often of “incarnation.” These two terms are different but related, and reflect different emphases, though both terms are present in the works of both thinkers. For both Ellul and Charbonneau, humans are not merely material creatures, but spiritual, living things which breath air, which exist in time and in space. In « *La technique et la chair*, » Daniel Cérézuelle has rightly noted that Ellul and Charbonneau (along with Ivan Illich) all “measure daily life in modernity by the Judeo-Christian values of incarnation,” and that for Charbonneau especially, because humans are incarnate spiritual beings, the conditions of the material environment in which we live matter immensely.

Reflection on their human spatial and temporal environments is found throughout both thinkers' corpus. For Ellul, reflection on conditions of time and space translate into his focus on *presence*. His early essay on the “Dialogue of Sign and Presence” prefigures the introduction to his whole corpus, “Presence in the Modern World.” I have argued for presence as one of the driving criteria around which the rest of Ellul's work turns, seeing his works on *la technique* as motivated by his underlying concern for *presence*. Early on, Ellul establishes a tripartite “dialogue” between body/spirit, space/time, and sign/presence, a dialogue to which he returns later in both *Hope in Time of Abandonment* and *Humiliation of the Word*.

For Charbonneau, thinking on time and space is expressed more often in terms of *incarnation*. I have read less widely in Charbonneau's corpus than in Ellul's, but significant remarks on time, space, and incarnation occur, for example, in his magnificent treatise *Je fus*, in *Quatre témoins de la liberté*, in his short essay *Lexique du verbe quotidien*, in *Le Système et le chaos*, in numerous essays in the recent publication on *Totalitarisme Industriel*, in *Le feu Vert* (translated by Christian Roy as *The Green Light*), and, certainly, in Ellul and Charbonneau's tandem conversation in *Combat Nature*.

For my considerations, I would like to focus on the essays written by our two friends for a 1960 edition of *Foi & Vie* examining precisely this topic. The September 1960 edition of *Foi & Vie* contains both Charbonneau's essay « *L'homme en son temps et son lieu* » and Ellul's essay « *Notes en vue d'une éthique du temps et du lieu pour les chrétiens* ». Like their later interventions in *Combat Nature*, these two articles

represent a moment in dialogue, a shared venture undertaken by two thinkers with unique perspectives, as well as ‘ecological’ interventions in the broadest sense. While Charbonneau devotes considerable sections of other texts to time and space, Ellul rarely treats these themes as directly as he does here. In this light, examining this pair of essays might give us a concise way to compare and contrast our two friends’ spatio-temporal ethics.

*Foi & Vie*, faith and life: to the novice, it might sound surprising to see Charbonneau, a ‘post-Christian agnostic,’ publishing with relative comfort alongside explicitly confessional Protestant Christian essays. However, this apparent contradiction makes more sense in light of Charbonneau’s late admission that over time, he had become aware of the « Christian origins of my love for nature and freedom. »<sup>1</sup> I do not know his life or work well enough to say *when* this awareness came about. In any case, as far as I can tell, Charbonneau’s theological agnosticism never abandons its spiritual quality.

Having now set the stage, let’s move onto our two essays.

### III. Similarities in Ellul and Charbonneau on Space and Time

A first similarity between these two essays is an ostensibly Kierkegaardian inheritance. Both Ellul and Charbonneau draw deeply on the well of Soren Kierkegaard’s thought in their approach to understanding time in particular. This Kierkegaardian filiation, noted by Frédéric Rognon in *Le défi de la non-puissance* (and about which we will certainly hear more shortly) can be observed in at least the several following characteristics.<sup>2</sup>

First, the dialectic between time and eternity, which is a staple of Kierkegaardian thought, is present in both Ellul’s and Charbonneau’s treatment of time. Among Kierkegaard scholars, it is a matter of debate how best to interpret the Dane’s employment of the distinction between time and eternity. Is Kierkegaard actively applying a schema taken from Plato to understand the relationship between divine and human temporality? Or is it a sort of awkward argument with Hegel? Either way, this way of thinking human temporality in tension with eternity is present throughout Kierkegaard’s work, and central in the essays of both Charbonneau and Ellul. For both friends, however, ‘eternity’ is not a metaphysical postulate, but an existential reality.

Second, For Kierkegaard, Ellul and Charbonneau, the limits of time and space are not to be fled from, nor dominated in an expression of power, but confronted, taken seriously, accepted, and inhabited. For Kierkegaard, humans ought to accept the limitations which space and time constitute for their lives before God. In the closing lines to his book *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard writes: “In relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it. This formula... is the definition of faith.” We might say that in applying this formula, *willfully* and *actively* inhabiting one’s own time and place is an integral part of the human self wanting to be its creaturely, fragile, temporal, limited, and dependent self. Ellul and Charbonneau both reflect this Kierkegaardian emphasis in their essays. Ellul’s essay even explicitly talks of the need for lived freedom as a response to the “Sickness unto death which has struck

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1 Charbonneau and Ellul, *La nature du combat*, 41

2 See Rognon, *Le défi de la non-puissance*, 60.

all of society.” It is clear that for both Ellul and Charbonneau, space and time constitute *limits* to humans, and that these limits are not dampers to human freedom, but constitute this freedom.

Third, Ellul and Charbonneau borrow from Kierkegaard in their conception of the present moment. For Kierkegaard, the present moment is not an empty or mechanical progression; the present is not simply the moment that comes after the previous moment and before the next one. Instead, for Kierkegaard, the true present required the subject to actively bring together past and future through *memory and hope*. That the subject must be actively *remembering the past* and *hoping for the future* in order for the present to be a true present comes through very strongly in both Ellul and Charbonneau’s essays.

Fourth, Charbonneau and Ellul both employ an updated version of Kierkegaard’s critique of falsifications of the present moment, of ‘false presents’. Kierkegaard directed many acerbic critiques against the newspapers of his native Copenhagen. Brian Brock has described Kierkegaard as our contemporary, seeing Kierkegaard’s critiques of the ‘developing mass media culture’ as a very deep insight.<sup>3</sup> Brock notes that the newspaper constituted the first major *acceleration* in media production since the printing press, situating it as a precursor to today’s ubiquitous digital media environment. Brock describes how the anonymity and speed offered by the newspaper created an “inflated moment” which falsifies lived experience. Ellul and Charbonneau’s essays both include critiques of various ways of ‘fleeing the present’ moment, including immersion in *actualité*—which in French implies both the *news*, as in the newspapers, and ‘current events’, what is going on now.<sup>4</sup> One can flee the present through immersion in the unending stream of current events. Brock writes that for Kierkegaard, “Genuine communication... should invite people to... live the questions of their existence,” saying that God can only be addressed concretely and personally. This insistence on the need for the individual person to rediscover their existence in a localized time and place, detached from the crowd submerged in the flood of ‘real-time’ news created by mass media, represents a fourth Kierkegaardian inheritance in both Ellul and Charbonneau’s approaches to time and space.

Less directly in the Kierkegaardian vein, both Charbonneau and Ellul spend significant time criticizing Marxist conceptions of history which were widely touted in their time. Ellul often decried how Marx “betrayed revolution” by mechanizing time, by making history a train with a defined direction and meaning. Ellul reads Marx’s time as a secularized Messianism, a bourgeois narrative of historical progress. Charbonneau’s essay includes critiques which implicitly include Marxist time, criticizing any temporality which sacrifices the present to a coming future. He suggests that adherents of such ideas will end up sacrificing all the humans living in the present along with it. Ellul and Charbonneau both saw such progress narratives as a danger, a failure to properly confront the challenge of the present.

So far, most of our analysis has focused on time; this is no accident, since it seems to me that both thinkers tend to elaborate their thoughts on time more than their thoughts on space (even if Charbonneau’s approach to space is more developed than Ellul’s). Both are opposed to technique, which represents an ex-

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3 Drawing on Brock’s essay “Kierkegaard, Theology, and the Information Society,” chapter 26 in *T&T Clark Companion to the Theology of Kierkegaard*.

4 See Charbonneau, *Le système et le chaos*, 174ff.

pression of power, a conquest and domination of space with an aim to ‘saving time’. I have suggested elsewhere that for Ellul, technique is the nemesis of true presence; for Charbonneau, the west’s constant acceleration is a clear flight from the reality of their own time and place, a destruction of the conditions required for incarnate human freedom. Resistance to the space-time regime imposed by *la technique* means for both friends that humanity must actively seek rootedness in a given place, to restore to place its true meaning—and to put place back in a lived relationship with time. Elsewhere, Charbonneau speaks of a “‘politics of space-time’ which would measure one by the other, and both in relation to the subject.”<sup>5</sup> This conception closely resembles how space and time are intertwined in Ellul’s “dialogue of sign and presence”.

Next, both Charbonneau and Ellul focus on human *consciousness* or *awareness* as a *sine qua non* of true incarnate presence in space and time. At its most basic level, this is a call to freedom, a call for humans to recognize, evaluate, and respond to their situation. But this freedom is unthinkable outside of or apart from human experience of time and space. Conversely, for both Ellul and Charbonneau, space and time are inconceivable apart from human experience, and are not themselves apart from lived human freedom. This implies that for Ellul and Charbonneau, the time measured by clocks lacks the quality of human experience of time.

Lastly, both Charbonneau and Ellul draw on the biblical book of Ecclesiastes in their approach to time. This is no surprise for Ellul, who writes a commentary on Ecclesiastes as the thematic “last word” of his authorship, saying that he had been reading Ecclesiastes carefully and regularly for over fifty years. In Charbonneau’s book *Je fus*, the “desire for eternity” mentioned in chapter 3, verse 11 of Ecclesiastes becomes a central part of Charbonneau’s explication of human freedom. In the essays I am discussing here, Charbonneau speaks of an incarnate “volonté d’éternité,” a “will to eternity.”

With these eight points, I have tried to sketch out the shared terrain in one element of our two friends’ “pensée commune,” their shared thinking. With Kierkegaard in the background, our two friends jointly emphasized the need for recognizing time and space as the proper domain of human freedom. They agree that humanity must reject the space-time stranglehold promised by *la technique*, along with the incessant acceleration it entails, in order to clear the ground for rediscovering human time lived at the rhythm of creation in a definite place which definitely matters. The human will to eternity cannot lead to fleeing or crushing space or time, but to consciously inhabiting them and orienting them towards freedom and flourishing.

#### *IV. Differences in Ellul and Charbonneau on Space and Time*

Against this backdrop of their lifelong dialogue and significant agreement, I will now turn to the important differences in our two friends’ approaches to space and time.

Unsurprisingly, the most noteworthy difference which englobes and underlies all others relates to their difference in *theological* perspective. Ellul’s confessional Protestant faith situates his ethics rather differently from the orientation offered by Charbonneau’s post-Christian agnosticism.

Charbonneau recognizes the Christian origins of his love for freedom, which allows him at times to use distinctly Christian language: for example, when he speaks of the “call of Christ” or God illuminating the

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5 See Charbonneau, *Le Totalitarisme Industriel*, 59.

shadows in connection with the individual's awakening—a theme which reappears in *Je fus*—or when he writes that “memory is indispensable for the constitution of the person and the upkeep of the man created by God.” Or again, one can hear the theological undertones in this essay's final lines, which gesture towards the “nostalgia” of another kingdom where “the tiniest speck of dust and the humblest second will be gathered in the triumph of an infinite love.” That time has a created origin and needs orientation already places Charbonneau on theological footing which actively pushes against modern and contemporary conceptions of time. Charbonneau's “theology” might be seen as a sort of *negative* theology, in which god or gods are something beyond, above human limits, but which are known as a necessary origin or consequence of human freedom, rather than as something apart from human freedom. This means that the beating heart and active subject in Charbonneau's philosophical and literary exploration of space and time is not God, but the individual human. Charbonneau can thus write: “A humanity without memory, who would renounce imposing their mark on the future, would refuse their destiny, which is to accomplish man.”

In contrast to the strongly *anthropological* orientation of Charbonneau's space-time, Ellul's space-time is more explicitly *theologically* oriented. The “creaturely” nature of time and space makes them dependent on God, and submitted to human care, like the rest of creation. God is the active subject—both in the past (through Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection), in the future (through the coming eschaton, the approaching Kingdom of God), and even in the present. It is because of *God's* faithfulness that the present moment is not cut off from the past. And if Ellul shares Charbonneau's emphasis on human freedom, he situates it differently. Despite their apparent similarity, it is as if the two friends read God and freedom in opposite directions: while Charbonneau writes in *Je Fus* that “God himself is freedom,” Ellul says that “there is no true and ultimate freedom except that of God himself.”

For Ellul, the Christian “present” is ultimately *God's* decision to bring “eternity and totality into the fallen creation.” The present is the only place where we can encounter God. If Ellul sees the present as the time and place where the individual can meet God, it would be difficult to imagine Ellul saying, as Charbonneau does in *Quatre témoins de la liberté*, “Present: whether to God or to the void, it matters very little.” (“*Présent: à Dieu ou au néant, peu importe*”).<sup>6</sup> The present moment exists purely in God's patience, and the present place is the point of insertion of the presently active “kingdom of heaven,” drawing on language from the gospel of Matthew.

This theological difference allows us to discern a further difference in our two friends' use of their common Kierkegaardian heritage. If we noted that both structure their analyses around Kierkegaard's dialectics of time and eternity, what ‘eternity’ means is not necessarily the same thing; in fact, neither Charbonneau nor Ellul's use of “eternity” seem to correspond to Kierkegaard's; all three differ. Kierkegaard's “eternal” retains a static element of philosophical fixity, something divine and unchanging. Ellul's eternity removes the ‘static’ quality of Kierkegaard's eternal. The closest Ellul ever gets to defining ‘eternity’ is “from where grace comes,” adding that “we need to put aside our time-related notions of eternity.”<sup>7</sup> For Charbonneau,

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6 Charbonneau, *Quatre témoins de la liberté*, 151.

7 Ellul, *On Freedom Love and Power*, 44.

eternity seems to function as that which lasts over time; this eternity is only knowable *in* time, as a struggle in the face of time which alone can will and discover what will last over time.

As a consequence of this difference, our two friends also differ in their use of Kierkegaard's *memory* and *hope* as constitutive of the present. For Ellul, *memory* is essentially faithfulness to God's past act, and *hope* is hope in the eschatological future of God's promise, hope in the resurrection. For Charbonneau, the 'faithfulness' of memory is faithfulness to oneself: both in this essay and later in *Je Fus*, he speaks of "the continuity of a man who is faithful to himself throughout his life," or says that "the meaning [*sens*] of his life is to find himself."<sup>8</sup> He writes: "Man only exists in continuity, and his spirit says: in faithfulness to himself." This thrust towards anthropological unity is notably absent from Ellul's essay. On the contrary, emphasis on *divine* faithfulness across time frees Ellul from the search for a unified *human* life. In stark contrast with Charbonneau, Ellul writes: "For this man situated in the *hic et nunc*, the continuity of time no longer depends on his own continuity; it is not his faithfulness to his values or to himself, or to his past which ensure that the present moment is not purely incoherent with the past."

At this point, I will venture a description of Charbonneau's ethic about which I am not totally sure: it seems to me that Charbonneau's ethical thrust towards faithfulness toward oneself might be described as an ethics of authenticity, insofar as a conscious and properly active relation towards awareness of one's own *death* is a crucial factor for Charbonneau. (In this way, at least, Charbonneau's thought shares concerns with Martin Heidegger's notion of authenticity in relation to death.) Indeed, Charbonneau and Ellul's differing approaches to death are also clearly connected to their differing understandings of Jesus Christ. In *Je Fus*, Charbonneau writes that "Awareness of death is the measure of personal existence."<sup>9</sup> For Charbonneau, Jesus is the "sublimation of death in the person of a God-man who conquers it." Death, which is "never natural", must be accepted as final, an acceptance which is the "supreme act of freedom"; "Death is the end of the person." Ethically, one should not fear the anguish of death; death is the "spiritual truth birthing from physical reality." Death even takes on somewhat divine qualities: Charbonneau writes that the "hour of death" is the "hour of truth", speaks of the "Revolutionary power of death," and notes that while death unites all humans as our only enemy, it is also the "source of love for all men", since it is the only universal which could unite us without abolishing our differences. The section of *Je Fus* devoted to considering death concludes considering Christ as an example of one who assumes his death, and notes that the "sepulcher is the place of resurrection."

Akin to their converse readings of God and freedom, Ellul and Charbonneau speak of death and resurrection in similar but converse ways. We could imagine that same sentence—the sepulcher is the place of resurrection—coming from Ellul's pen, but with the opposite emphasis. In the recent edition of Ellul's previously unpublished biblical study on *Death and Hope of the Resurrection*, Ellul unambiguously proclaims his belief in the reality of a *bodily* resurrection, for which "death is no longer the limit."<sup>10</sup> If both anecdotally and

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8 See Charbonneau, *Je Fus*, 66.

9 Ibid., 88.

10 Cf. Ellul, *Mort et espérance de la résurrection*, 20, 23.

in the content of some of his writings, one might sustain a hypothesis in which Ellul's approach to resurrection (and the connected topic of universal salvation) developed and changed over time, at least in this book, Ellul heavily insists that the biblical message is that death is not the end—and that reducing this proclamation of resurrection from a reality to a myth is a grave error.

If Charbonneau's space-time ethics might be called an ethics of *authenticity*, Ellul's ethics are clearly organized around *signification*. Drawing on the Old-Testament description of the Levites as a priestly clan, the form of whose life communicates the Israelites' relation to God, Ellul writes that the Christian space-time vocation "supposes less a participation than a re-signification and re-situation of the events of history." This ethics of signification is developed in *Presence in the Modern World*, in which the Christian's first vocation is "to be a sign."

Naturally, these significant differences in outlook and orientation lead to further notable ethical differences. As developed in *Presence in the Modern World* and *To Will & To Do*, Ellul takes his cues from the New testament language of "Redeeming the time." "Redemption," or "buying back," implies orienting present time and space in relation to Christ's redemptive work. By contrast, Charbonneau finds this "buying back" to be impossible: he writes that "Time gives [man] a price which absolutely nobody can pay." Additionally, if the two friends can agree that rootedness in a given place is a proper response to the place-lessness of the technological system, For Ellul, this rootedness is only one stop on a journey of continual wandering as "strangers and pilgrims," later developed in his *Ethics of Freedom*. Indeed, both essays contain nearly identical phrases towards the end: Charbonneau writes that a man who rejects materialism and idealism will seek rootedness "in order to penetrate this place in depth rather than be dispersed on the surface." At the end of his essay, Ellul writes that "The Christian life is made up of this double movement, constantly repeated, of rooting with an aim to make the power of the kingdom of heaven penetrate this place..."—a clear parallel with Charbonneau's essay—but then he adds, "...and of uprooting in order to walk towards our only true homeland, which is prepared for us by God." So while Charbonneau's ethics are directed towards rootedness, Ellul's ethics seek rootedness as a dialectical moment on an onward journey.

#### *V. Contemporary Considerations*

Having now revisited this rich moment in our two friends' dialogue, this seems the right moment and the right place to ask: what does their dialogue give us today, in our *hic et nunc*? I will make a preliminary comment, then conclude with several suggestions which can be explored at more length in the discussion afterwards.

As a preliminary comment on our reception of these two thinkers, it is worth clearly stating the extent to which Charbonneau and Ellul are *ecological precursors*. A major vector of Charbonneau's current re-discovery by French publishers relies on his status as a forerunner of political ecology, which has already been strongly noted by Christian Roy. However, this observation is most profoundly true when 'ecology' is not restricted to thinking about the natural world, about the 'environment', but when it is heard in the most holistic sense: Charbonneau and Ellul are forerunners of 'media ecology' as well, in that they take seriously not just natural or created *objects*, but also human experience of them, and the *communicative environment* in



which humans *and* nature find themselves. This line of thinking allows us to echo recent work by Michael Morelli rightly exploring<sup>11</sup> the lineage from Ellul to Paul Virilio, who develops their thinking on the effects of acceleration on lived space-time. Additionally, Charbonneau's description of humans in the technological society as "all together, yet separated by walls" prefigures Sherry Turkle's famous description of humans under social media conditions as "Alone Together."

Less academically, it seems to me that our current spatio-temporal situation is marked by several important elements. First, the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic is essentially a *social* malady, literally a sickness of *society*. Its contagious nature means that shared space is the biggest threat; this threat is generally confronted with a program of bodily isolation—that is, a political modification, fragmentation, or suppression of shared space—and supplemented with increased socialization via the internet—which is literally nothing other than a technologically constituted alternative to bodily space-time, a drastic shift in the proportions of bodily experience and life. Ellul and Charbonneau's focus on necessity and freedom allow us both to understand the *necessity* of this political response, and warn us against inevitable political exploitation of this unavoidable situation. Charbonneau and Ellul give us a way to understand these necessary responses, *as well as* the frustration of those who rebel against governmental responses which employ such divisive spatio-temporal politics. But even moreso, their emphases on *incarnation* and *presence* offer powerful ethical resources for combatting the internet's increasing colonization of our bodily space-time. At a very concrete level, this means a re-evaluation of the rise of Zoom, Vizio, and other tele-conference facilitators—even in our own IJES online conference. We can accept it as a temporary solution, but it is by no means a glorious advance. If 'working from home' is often seen as a luxury which allows the employee to be freed from geographic constraints, its inevitable corollary is the message that 'your body and your physical presence are unimportant.' This, Ellul and Charbonneau remind us, is a lie, and is unacceptable.

Secondly, we cannot avoid the nearly apocalyptic sentiments raised by consideration of climate change, of the anthropocene—in short, of the increased ability of humanity to control, dominate, and potentially fatally upset our own lived environment. An honest look at human technological manipulation and overriding of natural rhythms can easily lead to despair. In Charbonneau's words, "The earth is merely a point if our weapons can destroy it in an instant." If our two friends' theological differences mean that they hold out differing *hopes*, the dialogue between these hopes is already an antidote to our own hopelessness. Their legacy in the face of ecological apocalypse will mean an unflinching evaluation of the reality of our situation, followed by a hopeful call to lived freedom in relation to God, nature, or both. They might be seen as a contemporary version of the Psalmist's words: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult." If the anthropocene is new, the idea of the end of the world is not. But to again cite Virilio, "The end of the world is an idea without a future."

Finally, and in conclusion, this return to the question of theology allows me to highlight what I consider to be one of the most urgent legacies of our two friends: their commitment to lifelong dialogue, to unity

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11 See Morelli, *Theology, Ethics, and Technology in the Work of Jacques Ellul and Paul Virilio*.

*in* difference (and not in opposition to it), is an element which is sorely absent from much of modern life. To quote Ellul in *The Political Illusion*, “The common measure of what we have to say to ourselves (and which renders communication possible), of what we have to live in common (and which renders the communal work of differentiation possible) is always to be rediscovered, ceaselessly recreated, because it is lost so quickly, either in generalization (Humanity, Science, etc.), or in banalization. This exhausting quest for the common measure in differentiation is the very mark of man.”<sup>12</sup> Much of my paper has highlighted the theological difference between the two. The questions raised by theology take on new urgency in this “apocalyptic” situation. As recalled by Jean-Luc Nancy on the occasion of his acceptance of the Prix Jacques Ellul before his recent death, even Martin Heidegger can suggest that ‘only a god can save us.’ While our two friends differed on this question, Charbonneau bequeaths a thinking in which freedom is itself practically divine, in which temporality struggles with eternity, yet for which true human freedom is found in refusing to take oneself for a god. Ellul reminds Christians that their theology is less a privilege than a responsibility, not a status but a vocation, and that their proclamation is not to judge or condemn, but to call to reconciliation, hope, and lived freedom. Even Ellul’s proclamation of a bodily resurrection, scandalous as it is in 20th and 21st century France (and everywhere, always), is not a cheap proselytism; to paraphrase Virilio, “Propagation is of the nature of faith. Propaganda is not of the nature of faith.” No, Ellul’s is a declaration that even now there is a hope which will not be cut off. In biblical language, “reconciliation” is a communicative aspect of divine salvation.

Against the backdrop of breakdowns in communication, of entrenched political divisions across the western world, we should be grateful already if Charbonneau and Ellul could serve as a model for serious and committed disagreement in conversation.

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12 Ellul, *L'illusion politique*, 331.