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# Manifesto for an Archive of Nuclear Harm

N. A. J. TAYLOR

Future beings, whatever your form, I address you as a child of the nuclear age. Beginning with the weaponization of the atom in 1945, my fellow Earthlings continued to mark Earth in pursuit of various civilian and militaristic ends. For this, their nuclear past has violated the sanctity of my present, as it will your futures.

Several of these nuclear barons acted in the belief that their motives were noble and just. Such shared arrogance was variously permitted or encouraged by a somewhat benign and docile public under the guise of so-called peaceful purposes, rather than overtly militaristic ones. However, the war waged on Earth's biosphere from atmospheric, subterranean, and underwater nuclear weapons tests before I was even born will have followed me into death, in my teeth and bones. This is the true marker of a human chauvinism that continues to punctuate the nuclear age. Such scars on Earth's geological time have mutated not only living beings and things but the Earth itself—our “home.”

This is because among the most enduring materials of human heritage will be radioactivity, located at numerous contaminated sites but particularly inside permanent nuclear waste repositories. Some of this material must be isolated from people and the biosphere for anywhere between one hundred thousand and one million years, and much of it for more than ten thousand years.

Nuclear radiation is generally to be avoided in all its forms and independent of its source. The positive uses of nuclear radiation on bodies and the biosphere must take place under controlled conditions and

necessitate the production of negative effects through the mining, processing, and waste processes. The negative effects of nuclear radiation are irrefutable: nuclear harms violate bodies and the biosphere, mutating and tearing apart what was once whole.

Just as these nuclear barons come from many different cultures and worldviews, so too do the sources of this material derive from different nuclear processes and assemblages. They have left contaminated sites, such as Chernobyl and Fukushima, Hanford and Mayak, Semipalatinsk and Maralinga, as well as deposits of deferred harm in Earth's bedrock.

Regardless, every nuclear baron, whether a militarist or industrialist, deemed it responsible to defer this problem of nuclear harm into the far future. On behalf of the authors of this Anthropocene epoch, I plead for your forgiveness. I am among the majority of people who have had very little or perhaps even nothing to do with the production of nuclear harms or their deferral. Yet despite all my efforts to actively oppose nuclear technology, its presence in my life—however indirectly—is all pervasive.

One of the responsibilities that is assigned by the nuclear age is that of creating and preserving archives of such nuclear knowledges. Such an Archive of Nuclear Harm would collect and exhibit material on life and death in the nuclear age. Items in the collection would include artworks and other cultural artifacts that explore the full range of harms—both human and ecological—that are inflicted by nuclear weapons, accidents, and waste. This institution's mission would be to create an accessible resource deep into the nuclear future. Since the legacy of the nuclear age must be conceived on timescales of up to one million years and threatens the continued safe operating conditions of Earth's biosphere, the Archive of Nuclear Harm will be a memory institution like no other.

This Archive of Nuclear Harm must not only disseminate nuclear knowledges but democratize it across space and time. If no such Archive of Nuclear Harm exists or is wholly inadequate for your purposes, you are to rise to the challenge of building your own archive out of the rubble of mine. The responsibility for this unholy nuclear knowledge will, after all, be undeniably yours.

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lecturer in environmental and nuclear humanities at the University of New South Wales. He has published two books, *Athens Dialogue on a Middle East WMD-Free Zone* (Athens: European Public Law Organisation, 2013) and *Reimagining Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Nuclear Humanities in the Post-Cold War*, edited with Robert Jacobs (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2017), as well as three special issues, “Re-imagining Hiroshima” (*Critical Military Studies*, 2015), “Internal Relations” (*Borderlands*, 2017), and “Reimagining Maralinga” (*Unlikely: Journal for Creative Arts*, 2018). For more information, go to [www.najtaylor.com](http://www.najtaylor.com).