Nuclear Power Thoughts

To the Editor:

The seventy signers of the letter, "Don't Take Risks with Human Lives" published in The Tech Dec. 2 make a valuable point, then misapply it. Agreed, let us not crusily cost human lives in simple dollars, as sticks of wood at so much per bundle.

But as they struggle perilously against nuclear power, these seventy writers in search of their theme neglect to ask, "Compared to what?!" Do they know that present methods of generating electricity using coal (the only other substantial present resource) kill between 20 and 100 times as many people per unit of energy as does nuclear power? Do they realize that all reasonable coal cleanup measures will not make coal environmentally or epidemiologically as safe as nuclear power has proven to be? Those facts have been little publicized and less appreciated, partly because the fossil fuel industry and the general public just took such matters for granted. I have had enough of talking nonsense for granted, and try to persuade my colleagues at this oecumenical Institute to do likewise.

Even to replace worn-out electric generating plants and to provide the minimal energy growth envisaged in the most conservation-minded studies, new electric power plants will be required. Nuclear electric power causes less public health damage both in the short and long term than does fossil fuel; despite what the seventy signers might wish.

This letter is written primarily for the readers of The Tech and hopefully due to the seventy signers of the previous one.

David J. Rose
Professor of Nuclear Engineering
December 3, 1975

Metaphysical Madness

To the Editor:

It seems that metaphysical madness has been elevated to a positive virtue in the nuclear safety debate. The relevant questions are not being asked; the arguments are being conducted in a manner that seems divorced from the real world.

Unquestionably in these complex social and political issues one cannot divorce empirical knowledge from moral considerations. But it is not a simple matter to resource both to testing philosophical issues.

The energy requirements of this country give us little choice for alternatives. Looking over the next 30 years it comes to a choice between coal or nuclear energy sources. If any option is rejected it should be because it is unsafe compared to its alternative, not because in the abstract it is morally wrong. Only the sciences can answer this question.

You may now correctly ask, what about humanities? The humanities provide a framework for the discussion. The energy requirements of this country do not come from scientific considerations but from people's attitudes about their needs and their society.

The relevant question is in what kind of society do we wish to live? But once having decided that question it is only a matter of whether we can get from where we are to where we want to be. If we want cars, dishwashers, air conditioners and televisions, we must be prepared to pay the price.

If we are frightened at the prospect we better realize that we will have to learn to live in a different world.

Michael D. Stiefel
Dec. 12, 1975

Is it Art?

To the Editor:

With the recent controversy over "Transparent Horizons," I think it's time to take a second look at all MIT art. MIT is the best school in the country, one of the best in the world. It represents the highest achievements in mankind in many fields from science to art. Because of this, I think that art should represent the character of the school. It should be an expression of a high achievement, a thing of beauty. In other words, it shouldn't look like a three-year-old did it.

Some will argue that art should be viewed subjectively. This is a true part, but I think many artists use this as an excuse to cover up lack of talent. Good pieces of art have an appeal to everyone. And I think the similarity between these works of art is that they show "idealized" man, man reaching his highest goals.

MIT has a variety of art works ranging from triangles thrown on the ground to scrap metal erected in the air. I think it's time for the MITCommittee to stop looking at the surface. Because of the trend of modern art, MIT may take another look at the pieces they have and those they plan on getting. They must answer the question that if the artist has a "transcended" himself and created something better than others in the past, or if he's ripping them off. And they must try to answer the question of whether in twenty or thirty years MIT art will be looked on as beautiful or worthless pieces of garbage.

The Tech