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Thomas Bright April 18, 2011

Technique and Hyperreality: Promoting a "New and Improved" Humanity

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Abstract

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This paper addresses the following three questions: (1) What are the leading characteristics of the technological society? (2) In what sense does this form of society depend upon a propagandistic thought form? (3) How is the individual to live within the technological society? These questions are addressed through the thought of Jacques Ellul and others in a struggle for a better understanding of the modern world and the best way to live in it.

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The Real and Perceived Characteristics of the Technological Society

"True, he said; how could they see
anything but the shadows if they were
never allowed to move their heads?"
-Plato (The Republic, VII)

Jacques Ellul provides a unique analysis of the modern world when he defines technology as a system. Unlike other writers, Ellul observes that the results of technological advancement are felt in every realm of human life. Attempts to reform any technological advancement inevitably fail, because they cannot attack the system as a whole. Within this system humans are constantly fooled. In all aspects of life, they are certain of their control and choice, but in reality they have neither. Ellul observes this fact in all aspects of the technological society. The characteristics of this society stem from a transition from traditional means of labor, thought, and creation to a technical consciousness. This consciousness, paired with the technical operation, makes up the technical phenomenon, and all other characteristics of modern technique and technology stem from this. In all these characteristics, man loses sight of reality and believes in the illusion of his freedom.

The Bluff

What Ellul means by the term "Technological Bluff" which he gave as the title of a work in 1990 is uncertain. In every aspect of the technological society, however, there is a bluff caused by confusion between the real and the apparent. In the most basic sense, Ellul explains that technique convinces man that it leads to progress, but in reality this is not progress at all.

This may be the extent of his idea of a “bluff,” but this theme exists throughout the technological society. Man believes he is in control of the technical world, but Ellul shows that technology exerts its will instead. Man believes everything in the technical world is guided by reason, but Ellul says this leads to unreason and disorganization. Man believes education is about learning and knowledge, but education becomes a mechanical transfer of data. Man thinks he has limited his work hours and will have more time for family and profound experience, but his work becomes meaningless, and his family becomes distant and jaded by propaganda and amusement. (In all things there is perception and reality, and Ellul implies that in the technical world man lives in dreams.) What follows will provide discussion of several characteristics of the technological society and give a sense of how they fit into the whole system of technique. While these characteristics mirror Ellul's terminology, the confusion of perception and reality is an implicit theme in Ellul and will come to the foreground here.

Operation and Phenomenon

At the foundation of the technical society are two complementary ideas, the technical operation and the technical phenomenon. The former is a way of doing things that guides members of a society. Ellul thinks that this has been part of every society. In traditional cultures, the operation included tool behavior and simple techniques like gathering fruit and other small-scale agricultural methods. In the technical world, the operation is similarly made up of tools, but these tools are machines and act according to the technical phenomenon. This phenomenon was not present in traditional society.

The technical phenomenon is divided into consciousness and judgment. Both of these are faculties that manipulate man's thought in the technical society. Ellul argues that traditionally

man worked to sustain himself and did so using creative faculties. In terms of creation, man would make items such as weapons or perform processes like food gathering based upon his imagination. This cannot be the case in the technological society, because creativity cannot stand up against technical judgment. When man created just for sustainability and out of imagination, his only standard was functionality. There was not, in other words, the need for constant improvement. Once man began to judge his work and his methods, the standard changed. Judgment exposes shortcomings or failures, and these must be improved or fixed. As this thought process grows, efficiency becomes the standard rather than merely functionality. Tools or methods must not only provide, but provide as much as possible as quickly as possible.

This is the technical consciousness, and it complements judgment simply by enabling man to see more clearly. With this consciousness, man becomes more aware of the advantages of viewing techniques via a judgmental lens, and he pursues further improvement of these techniques. This then leads man to develop a mindset that is almost fully technical. Man will ask himself, "If this technique makes this particular process more efficient, can it have the same effect on other processes?" So man pursues this question and finds out that he can implement techniques in various fields, despite how these areas were previously treated. Ellul notes that areas traditionally left to "chance, pragmatism, and instinct"[1] are now all susceptible to scrutiny. Nothing can escape technical judgment, and so every aspect of human life becomes technical.

Efficiency and Reason

This phenomenon is what leads man to the standard of efficiency by which he judges everything. Efficiency is based in rationality, and reason achieves an unprecedented role in the technological society. Reason and efficiency are not interchangeable terms, but the two are

[1]Jacques Ellul, The Technological Society, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964), 21.

closely related. Reason is the force that guides technique, because technique results from science (which is solely based on the rational)[2] and the ability to find the one best means. This is technical efficiency. This one best means is that which allows for the smoothest progression of the technical world. This progression will always appeal to rationality, and so technical efficiency is "an instrument of human reason in our society."[3] Before the emergence of the technical world, man was able to be creative in his work, and he valued the presence of nature in all things. This cannot be the case in the technical world of reason. Machiavelli, writing on the brink of transition to the technical age, contributed to this discussion with his dialectic between *virtù* and *fortuna.* According to him, rational, calculated will-power (*virtù*) is the key to mastering *fortuna* or chance or nature. In the end, however, Machiavelli confessed that *fortuna* cannot be fully controlled, and she is always a threat to any calculated, reasonable action or progress. This dialectic, however, becomes a dichotomy in the technical world. Rather than having a fearful respect for nature, technique aims to fully master it to a point Machiavelli did not dare consider. Reason and efficiency aim to fully conquer nature, imagination, or any form of irrationality in the technical society.

Ellul describes nature as "essentially irrational, made up of accidents, of incomprehensible renewals, of the unexpected"[4] and says that because of this humans have traditionally used myth to explain and live alongside nature. This cannot be the case in modern society, though. Technique must rid its world of any similarity to nature, or it will not be able to develop, grow, and improve. So, technique must prove that in its world nothing can be accidental. In Machiavellian terms, *virtù* must fully conquer *fortuna*. This does not mean just a

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[2]Jacques Ellul, The Technological Bluff, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990).
[3]Ibid., 160.
[4]Ibid., 161.

conquering of nature or environment, but an attempt to rid the world of all chance. The same failure to master *fortuna,* as Machiavelli describes, still exists in the technical world, but it must be hidden. Ellul uses the example of the automobile in explaining this point. He says that automobile crashes cannot be thought of as accidents. Sure, they will always be a sort of mistake, but the technical system must give a new perspective to society in order to hide the threat of the dangerous automobile. Ellul says the accident must become a "negligible fact" or that it "be rationalized by statistics and integrated into rational tables of prediction."[5] Instead of respecting the role of *fortuna* in human life, and limiting technology out of fear of *fortuna*, technique hides her and gives a false image of mastering her.

The attempt to master is a key part of the technological society. Ellul explains that today we do not seek to conquer an abstract idea of nature or religion but instead to "project human power on the whole universe."[6] This is related to Hegel's master-slave dialectic. Donald Phillip Verene notes that through the servant, a master fulfills his desire over another object.[7] Technique provides the means to do this and, by taking over servitude, frees man and makes him real. When these techniques become guided by technical consciousness and are constantly improved, their autonomy creates an artificial self that secretly attaches to the human self. The desire for mastery in the technological society is an anomaly. Man uses technique to assure himself of reality and freedom, but he unknowingly creates an independent, mechanical, autonomous self of machines. This new self, with reason, becomes master of the human.

Autonomy and Automatism

When man enters into technical consciousness, he is leaving behind a world of mere

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[5]Ibid., 160.
[6]Ibid., 162.
[7]Donald Phillip Verene, "Technological Desire," Research in Philosophy & Technology, Volume 7 (1984): 99-112.

usefulness or functionality and elevating the standard of efficiency. Because efficiency involves constant reassessment and improvement, committing to efficiency really means committing to a process, both present and future. This process continually builds onto itself, and so technique is autonomous and improves upon "previous technical procedures."[8] Before the technical age, techniques were diverse and guided by matters of taste, imagination, creativity, or personal preference. These modes of production do not match up with today's numerical calculations of efficiency.

Technical work is formulaic and universal. Creativity and imagination must be uniform to create the "best means in the absolute sense."[9] There can be no variability. So, when all technique is subject to this law of the best way, it continually puts forth the "best." In other words, technique is exclusive of anything other than the best, and there can only be one "best" at a given time. Improvements in technology can change this notion of "best" by improving upon it, and so technique automatically reevaluates and improves upon itself. The exclusive nature of what is "best" is the driving force of the automatism, because it leaves room for only one way of doing things.

The consequences of technique's automatism are far reaching. Its autonomy claims dominion over "the choice among methods, mechanism, organizations, and formula."[10] Again, these are all driven by efficiency, but this efficiency comes from technique, not man. This is a key point, because technique gives man the image that he is in control, but technique is actually responsible for society's "progress." Technique is a system of formula and calculation, and when these qualities are paired with the standard of efficiency it has all it needs to progress on its own. Man cannot criticize or attempt to change the system, especially if he only focuses his

[8]Ellul, Society, 14.
[9]Ibid., 21
[10]Ibid., 82.

attacks on a branch of the system. As long as the search for the one best means is at the heart of technical consciousness, man cannot intervene. In fact, he lacks choice altogether.

This lack of choice or freedom is crucial to the rest of Ellul's thoughts on the technical society. The fact that man believes in an illusion of freedom is key to understanding why technique gains dominance over every realm of life and why man fails to constructively criticize it. Man's every action is susceptible to the standards of the technical society, but because he believes these standards are his, he thinks he is free. In reality, however, his decisions are technical. Ellul gives an example of the religious aspect of this when he posits the technical law, "You are at liberty to seek your salvation as you understand it provided you do nothing to change the social order."[11] Leaving the religious aspect of this law aside, it is clear that choice must be filtered through the technical standard (preserving the standard of the one best means). If man's choice does not meet the regulations of the technical world, he is not free to make it. He cannot make a decision that disrupts the status quo. If his decision is welcomed, it must have been a technical decision. Ellul says those who dare to make decisions against the status quo are outcasts in society. He says man may "himself be the victor, but only by submitting irreparably to technical slavery" or "he remains what he was, in which case he becomes more and more unadapted, neurotic, and inefficient, loses his possibilities of subsistence, and is at last tossed on the social rubbish heap."[12] Clearly, the conditions of the latter option force man to accept the former, and he is left with no freedom.

Present-Minded Necessity

Technical autonomy relies on the necessity of immediate technical advancement. This

[11]Ibid., 420
[12]Ibid., 334.

requires technique to be present-minded and to stifle any institutions that could interfere with speed of implementation. Ellul describes this when he speaks of a lack of foresight regarding technique. The reason we cannot have clear foresight of technique's effects is because they are unpredictable. Ellul says, "We never know what we are starting. We cannot even imagine it."[13] We do not consider all the possible outcomes, but we hope for the best. We are always prepared to reap the benefits of technical advancement, but rarely are we prepared for technical failure. An example of this is the BP oil spill of 2010. While oil companies have been doing this type of drilling for quite some time, there had never been a need to handle such a spill. The result was a confirmation of Ellul's statement, "cures always lag behind evils."[14]

Ellul calls this lack of forward thought present-mindedness. Regarding this, he says, "Everything which is technique is necessarily used as soon as it is available, without distinction of good or evil."[15] Ellul continues and calls this "the principal law of our age."[16] The first part of this law refers back to the technical operation and phenomenon. Obviously, technique in a modern society functions as a result of calculation and the search for efficiency. Naturally, efficiency is based on speed, and the need to implement new technique immediately is just a reinforcement of the efficiency of technical development.

The more complex aspect of this "principal law" is the way in which speed helps bypass moral judgment. This condition is a device with which technique can stave off its opposition. There is no real transition period between techniques where man can really contemplate and determine its potential dangers. Instead, man is looking for the next way to improve it. Too, it is a condition which, Ellul argues, many thinkers who criticize technology do not understand. Take

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[13]Ellul, Bluff, 71.
[14]Ibid., 72.
[15]Ellul, Society, 99.
[16]Ibid.

for instance the atomic bomb. Many who opposed this end result of atomic research argue that science and technique could have explored the realm of atomic research without actually creating a bomb. It is as if they expect scientists to be able and willing to impose a limit on their work. While this might be a possibility for some researchers, it is certainly not true for all of them, and to limit research in this way would stand in direct opposition to the technical operation and phenomenon. This is also the case on a more widespread level. Today, many thinkers criticize one or two aspects of the technical society, such as cell phones or communication over the internet. In this type of criticism, however, they overlook the fact that the prevalence of these "problems" is directly tied to the entire technical system. Because of the comprehensive nature of technique, even when a *part* of it is limited, there is no limitation on the whole. So, just as the atomic researcher cannot force himself to stop researching right before he discovers the bomb, neither can we successfully impose moral judgments onto branches of the technical system. Ellul is quite clear on this point when, quoting Jacques Soustelle, he says, "Since it was possible, it was necessary."[17] As long as we abide by the core values of the technological society, anything in accordance with them can happen, and in due time will happen.

Lack of Awareness and Moral Judgment

As technique advances by its own autonomy, it becomes more complex. With this complexity comes more complex and dangerous consequences. Ellul introduces this idea when he says, "The faster the machine, the more serious the accident. The more subtle the machine, the less forgiving the error."[18] One of Ellul's most detailed examples of this principle is his discussion of the automobile. Using this example, Ellul demonstrates a general "lack of

[17]Ibid.
[18]Ellul, Bluff, 56.

awareness"[19] of technical consequences. He notes that people have a "love affair"[20] with the automobile despite its ability to kill. (He also notes the high amount of deaths from accidents.) There are two characteristics to this phenomenon which are central to Ellul's thoughts about the entire technical system. The first of these is that the advantages of technical progress are "widespread," but the disadvantages are only felt by a "small fraction."[21] Inhabitants of the technical world are willing to risk their lives or well-being based on the probability that they will not fall into this small percentage of people killed or hurt by technical means. Aside from risk, many people fail to even make the connection between the technique and its results. A driving accident is more easily attributable to a faulty driver, the weather, or any explanation other than the foundation—technique itself. Secondly, the advantages of driving a vehicle (saving time, traveling farther, etc.) are only present in the technical world, so they appear to be signs of progress. Because these advantages are widespread, they are thought of as concrete. The disadvantages of technical progress are not only less common, but they are "abstract."[22] Because of this fascination with the advantages combined with the speed in which new techniques are introduced (before adequate evaluation), "the public can have no awareness of the negative effects of technique."[23] Continuing to function by its own will, technique can create irreversible effects.

This goes along with the idea that we cannot separate the positive and negative effects of technique—this would be a moral judgment. Moral judgments have no place in the technical society. In fact, even if technicians underwent a "moral conversion," they would only "cease to

[19]Ibid., 73.
[20]Ibid.
[21]Ibid., 74.
[22]Ibid., 75.
[23]Ibid.

be good technicians."[24] Technicians, consciously or not, will recognize the insignificance of moral judgment in this respect, and this is part of how the technological society will break down structures like religion and family—institutions that promote moral judgments. This is discussed in Ellul's writings on human techniques, which will be discussed later. For now, it is important to pair the lack of moral judgment with the inability to separate technique and abuse of technique. Again, using the atomic bomb as an example, the effects of the atomic bomb are often viewed as an abuse of science, research, and technical power, but Ellul is clear that this is just the necessary path of technique. Ellul thinks we should criticize technical research at the very beginning before the atomic bomb is near discovery. In other words, if research or technical development begins, it will end only when it runs out of possibilities. This could mean a failed experiment or a bomb that will kill millions, but for Ellul these results are the same.

Avoiding Criticism

An important characteristic of technique is the way in which it avoids criticism. This is partially explained by human techniques and propaganda, but its foundation lies within general technique. The key is that once technique is introduced to man, it must go on unquestioned so that it can develop and man will not hinder it. Technique does this primarily by emphasizing its benefits to humanity and downplaying and hiding its harmful effects. The degree to which technique does this is so great that any criticism mounted against is easily refutable.

How does technique avoid constructive criticism and reshape society to a seemingly incurable state? Ellul says that it gives the impression of ameliorating some "problems" of traditional society. This process requires people to believe that these issues are, in fact, "problems" and that technique is responsible for their solutions. Ellul seems to think that the

[24]Ellul, Society, 97.

origin of this idea lies in the "optimistic atmosphere"[25] of the Eighteenth Century. This marks a time when people anticipated a more pleasurable life with simpler labor and that "progress could only be achieved by the exploitation of natural resources and the application of scientific discoveries."[26] These trends have continued into today's society where Ellul notes that our goals are to find comfort while avoiding effort. He contrasts this with a medieval sense of comfort, for example, but says that idea is unimaginable today. Today technique has convinced us that it increases our sense of pleasure and decreases our pain or need for effort. As a result, it is able to avoid any threat to its existence.

While technique is able to improve upon discomforts of the traditional world, it is not without its own problems. In fact, everyone in the technical world sees that technique does create problems. What most fail to see is that not only do individual techniques malfunction or yield negative results, but that these problems are a result of the technical system. When a technique is criticized individually, the role of another is immediately elevated. This new technique then becomes the solution to the problem caused by the first. In Ellul's own words: "[Every problem] must be analyzed in such a way that it becomes a technical problem. Technique is then a perfectly adequate means to solve it."[27] For example, a company may dump dangerous wastes into a river. This, when discovered, will likely bring criticism to the company and an increased awareness to pollution and the need to solve it. To clean up the pollution that is already in the river, however, requires a technique of pollution removal. In the end, this new technique is the savior, and everyone forgets that the original problem was a technical one. Everyone remembers technique's ability to solve the problem but forgets that technique started it. By avoiding criticism and convincing us of its power, techniques build a false optimism in

[25]Ibid., 47
[26]Ibid.
[27]Ellul, Bluff, 48.

society.

Propaganda and Human Techniques

The technical society, with the aforementioned qualities, cannot function properly and have total control over mankind without anticipating his reactions. Ellul calls these reactions human tension and summarizes them as a general dissatisfaction with the disappearance of traditional society. In order to combat this, the technological system relies on a particular branch of techniques directed at influencing man's thought. Ellul describes the purpose of these techniques as "morale building," and they intend to reinforce man's belief in the technical society. These particular techniques are in some ways difficult to distinguish from technique in general, and this is because they are intertwined with a broader understanding of technique. For example, the fact that man never questioned atomic research before the development of the bomb is an indicator that not only was there a technique of atomic research but also reinforcement that this was a good thing. Ellul describes human technique in a variety of forms, but here the focus will be the discussion of propaganda, amusement, and education.

Propaganda

Ellul says propaganda is divided into two main mediums. The first are forms of media like radio, movies, and so on, and the second are psychological techniques. The conjunction of these two provides conditioned reflexes that lead men to a certain action. Ellul also makes a fundamental division between political and sociological propaganda. The former is the stereotypical type of propaganda. The latter, however, looks very much like culture. He defines this as the process by which "society seeks to integrate the maximum number of individuals into

itself, to unify its members' behavior according to a pattern, to spread its style of life abroad, and thus to impose itself on other groups."[28] Political propaganda can work within this framework, but Ellul is directing us to the idea that propaganda can be horizontal. A society can direct its own propaganda regime. This direction is spontaneous and results from the trends taking place within the society.

The next chapter will cover the complications of propaganda, including its effects on the perceived and the real. Here, propaganda's relationship to technique is important. Based on the definition of sociological propaganda and the requirements of technique, Ellul says propaganda must make man unaware of its presence. He says "the projected image will almost infallibly produce the desired reflex,"[29] so all institutions of propaganda act with virtual certainty about the outcomes of their strategies. Propaganda must convince man he is escaping the world of technique, reinforcing his sense of control and freedom. Man will not think anything unusual is going on, but in reality technique is progressing. All of this is caused by "reflex and myth."[30] When man is unaware of propaganda's presence, he is unaware of its effects on him. In its oblivious state, propaganda suppresses his creative faculties, provides an artificial "social conscience,"[31] and breaks down family and religion. For these strategies to be successful, man must live in mass society so propaganda is able to "adapt the individual to his everyday life, to reshape his thoughts and behavior in terms of the permanent social setting."[32] Whether this is initiated by culture or the conscious attempt of a leader, the results are the same. By being forced to conform to a mass society, every individual has no choice but to give in. Propaganda

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[28]Jacques Ellul, Propaganda: the Formation of Men's Attitudes, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Knopf Inc, 1965), 62.
[29]Ellul, Society, 366.
[30]Ibid., 364.
[31]Ibid., 369.
[32]Ellul, Propaganda, 75.

therefore reinforces man's inability to escape the demands of technique.

Amusement

Ellul's description of sociological propaganda is similar to amusement. In discussing both, he mentions forms of media such as motion pictures, television, and so on. It seems as though the difference between the two lies with their use of force. Propaganda, both sociological and political, contains an element of force. While this is truer for the political propaganda, even the horizontal, sociological type relies on the inability to escape its influence. For amusement, however, this is not the case. Ellul says that amusement is "exerted with less pressure,"[33] but also that it seeks to distract. He says that the key difference is spontaneity. Rather than being handed down or implemented via executive order, amusement is created horizontally and without the structure of other human techniques. Because of this, it is tempting to view amusement as acting contrarily to the goal of the technical society. It may seem as though spontaneity and lack of structure stand in opposition the rational, efficient means of technique. By engaging in leisure activities, man may be sacrificing time or resources that he could be using to be more productive. In fact, amusement and distraction sound like activities that direct away from efficiency on an individual and mass basis. This is not the case, because amusement's role is to boost the morale of man, his faith in the technological society.

For Ellul, amusement is a way for man to avoid the phantom he finds during reflective thought. This phantom reminds man not only of his lack of meaning in the technical world, but also of the imminence of his death. Avoiding this encounter seems to be the goal of all human techniques, because the phantom represents an idea that could threaten the entire technical system. So although the distraction leads man to the movie theater or into leisure activities

[33]Ellul, Society, 375.

where he is not as productive, this is necessary to maintain all other productivity. This is what Ellul observes when he says, "[the technical society] provides the antidote as it distills the poison."[34] While amusement bears the image of an antidote, it hides problems rather than cure them. So, in reality amusement reinforces other principles of the technical system. The strongest indicator of this is man's sense of choice. Amusement reinforces man's false view of freedom.

Another key characteristic of amusement is that not only does it provide a form of distraction but it distracts to the point of escape. It is not enough for man to hide from his phantom, but he must be able to forget about it completely. To escape, man searches for and finds the artificial. This includes media such as television, motion pictures, and radio where the viewer is permitted to "live as he might have willed."[35] He has repressed a potential call to action in his own life and now experiences it artificially. He "becomes a hero,"[36] and this hero is really the man he could become if he would only listen to his reflections. This is not possible for the average man, however, as challenging the system is too bold of an action. Like every other quality of the technical society, these artificial paradises replace a part of traditional man. Here, they replace "dreams and hope."[37] Rather than relying on a "flight into one's own self"[38] as a means of escape, man enters into a fake world that his not his own. As a result, he embraces the fortunes or tragedies of the characters involved in the artificial world. From this, man has found the "perfect" balance between important problems and those which are not really important because they are not really real.

Because amusement is a complement (and in some ways an extension) of propaganda, it

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[34]Ibid., 378.
[35]Ibid., 377.
[36]Ibid.
[37]Ibid.
[38]Ibid.

has an important effect on the family. Propaganda must work to break up groups that could threaten its success, and the family is the strongest and most traditional of these groups. Ellul argues that man has always had something to talk about, namely "vexations."[39] In the technical world, however, where all these problems have been solved, man is left with little content for discussion. Ellul believes that amusement fills this void, and he calls certain media "silence fillers."[40] Because man, who once had something to talk about, is now listening or watching—the family dynamic is changed. Ellul imagines the common scene of a family gathered around the television. While they are still together and interacting in a basic way, there is never silence or room for meaningful discussion. The television or radio does all the talking, and where communication would have brought healthy, functional relationships, the lack it creates the opposite.

Education

Education in the technical world must prepare individuals to conform to its ideology. This means that education must aim to show children the importance of reason while minimizing creative faculties. A child who escapes this goal will either be of no use to the technical society or a threat to it, so the role of education is crucial to the preservation of technique. Not only will children be denied the wide use of creativity or imagination, but as a result intellectuals will become a dying breed. Those who seek knowledge for its intrinsic value have no place in the technical world, and lessons that teach the value of knowledge will disappear. Ellul says the one goal of technical education is to "create technicians."[41]

Education achieves this goal through the transformation of knowledge into pure

[39]Ibid., 378.
[40]Ibid.
[41]Ibid., 348.

information. Rather than ideas, Socratic dialogue, or discussions of the good life, technical education relies simply on information. Machines, especially computers, run on information and when humans begin to value data in the same way, it represents the human brain's efforts "to conform to the much more advanced brain of the machine."[42] Like the information of machines, this information does not involve any form of moral judgment. Again, when this is the basis of education, there is no place for creativity, imagination, or discussion because the question of the goodness of information is inane. Information just *is*.

In the technical world information integrates people into society—it is a means of achieving conformity. When we are all exposed to the same data, regardless of our interpretation of it or its relevance to us, we are "united" by some sense of common ground. Information, in effect, is like propaganda (in fact information is crucial to the success of propaganda) in the way it forces itself upon a group of people. This invasion creates a "mental paranorma"[43] in which everyone lives. There is no consideration for the limit of the human brain or the dangers of this overwhelming amount of information. No one in the technical world dares to consider either the sheer quantity of information or its lack of moral judgment. As a result, any sort of truth is completely lost.

Conclusion

The emergence of the technical consciousness reshaped man's standard of judgment. Traditionally, he judged his work by functionality and creativity, but in the modern world he must judge by the standard of the one best means. His work, like everything in the technical world, must become like a machine. Man loses his ability to judge his world in any moral way,

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[42]Ellul, Bluff, 328.
[43]Ellul, Society, 329.

and technology steals his choice and freedom. Because of the nature of technique, man cannot see far enough ahead to anticipate its dangers. As a result, technique always appears to be good. Human techniques further this belief. They tell man that he is free and that it is good to be conformed into a mass society. In all of these characteristics there is the real and the perceived. Technique inhibits the ability to see and interpret the real and creates a fake world. This world becomes the new “real” human world, because technique's grip is tight to the point that man cannot escape and see what is real.

Propaganda and Hyperreality:

Imitating and Erasing the Memory of "The Human"

"The pleasure of imitation, as the ancients knew, is one of the most innate in the human spirit; but here we not only enjoy a perfect imitation, we also enjoy the conviction that imitation has reached its apex and afterwards reality will always be inferior to it." (Umberto Eco,1967)

"Nothing human is exempt from the influence of technique." (Jacques Ellul, 1954)

In the technical society, man lives in a state of constant tension and loneliness. In rare moments of thought he realizes this, but he realizes simultaneously that the problem is beyond repair. His laziness or lack of true freedom prevents him from taking action against his current state. Instead, he "chooses" to escape it for brief periods in order that he may endure its conditions. To escape, he creates a fake world characterized as hyperreality. In the end, his very humanity becomes hyperreal. This technical form of life is absolutely fake and appears better than the actual. Jacques Ellul discusses this in terms of religion and myth, sex, and interpersonal relations in a mass society. All of these remain important, but in a world on the frontier of cyber-social relationships, online communication is now an important part of this discussion. In what follows, each of these elements will be discussed with the aim of showing that the creation of a hyperreal humanity is the main goal of sociological propaganda, a manner of thought that suppresses freedom for the sake of technical advancement. The key to this process is imitation, and by imitating human experience propaganda is able to promote a new form that appears to the masses as better than reality. Propaganda must convince the group to buy into this understanding

while technique actually destroys all things human. In this act, basic human institutions such as myth and religion, communication, and the family are all manipulated and then forgotten.

The Societal Requirements for Propaganda

Jacques Ellul says that propaganda is "experienced by practically every citizen of the technological age."[44] This is due to the needs of both the state and the people as a result of technique. For the people, propaganda creates the impression that their will is taken into account, and this image allows the state to advance with technique in hand. The people care that their opinions and thoughts actually make a difference in the minds of politicians and toward progress of society in general. This desire to participate is created by a void left by technique. Ellul says that by obliging to a technical world, man "has never initiated a change."[45] Propaganda is thus the means to prevent man from discovering this fact. It hides it from him. Man can believe he is making a change and the state requires this belief. At the heart of this dilemma is the difference (or confusion) between private and public. The average citizen in the technological society wants his opinion to make a difference, but he is also operating under the assumption that his opinion is of his creation. For the state, this cannot be true. Propaganda must cause an increase in public opinion. This public opinion is filtered through technique and similarly makes no real moral claims. Rather than making his own opinion, then, man merely accepts public opinion for himself. This opinion is artificial and without the judgment that may have accompanied personal opinion in a traditional sense.

The society in which technique and propaganda thrive, as described by Ellul, closely

[44]Jacques Ellul, Propaganda: the Formation of Men's Attitudes, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Knopf Inc, 1965), 121.
[45]Jacques Ellul, The Technological Society, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964), 376.

resembles David Riesman's description of other-directed society. Riesman's explanation of character types is based on population levels, while Ellul's description of the technical world is based more on the standard of judging work (the one best means). Regardless, propaganda is a way to unite the two theorists. In fact, Jacques Ellul's innovative definition of propaganda as sociological is harmonious with Riesman's observations of other-direction. Riesman believes that conformity is central to any society, but the way in which it is achieved varies based upon changes in population over time. In other-directed society, he argues that conformity is guaranteed by the "tendency to be sensitized to the expectations and preferences of others."[46] Accompanying this search for approval is the propagation of technical ideas and ideals. As a result, accepting these technical world views becomes imperative to winning approval of others. Other-directed society has a built up level of "technological skill" and a web of mass communications through which the "relations with the outer world and with oneself are mediated."[47]

Many features of the other-directed society are extensions of conditions of inner-directed society. In the latter, people began to imagine themselves as individuals with career goals and a range of emotions that were contained in the preceding tradition-directed society. In other-directed society this individualism becomes a key point of strategy for the media (like in Ellul's discussion of opinion). Also found in the other-directed society is the breakdown of magical and religious explanations, the role of the family, and moral education. While Riesman attributes all of this to a change in population and character, Ellul believes technique is the main driving force. Riesman's thoughts in *The Lonely Crowd* demonstrate an understanding of the beginnings of sociological propaganda, and although he does not attribute this to technique, one can see the

[46]David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, (Yale University Press, 1950), 9.
[47]Ibid., 21.

connection with Ellul's thought. Riesman struggles less with the idea of what it means to be human, and instead observes changes relative to time or population. His thinking can then only go so far with Ellul, because in Ellul we can hope to find some idea of what it means to be genuinely human, and how technique corrupts or replaces this humanness.

Propaganda

Jacques Ellul is clear that propaganda is a need of the modern man. Basic human qualities including trust, friendship, and acceptance are rare in the technical society as hostility and competition pervade. Needing these human values, man is forced to accept them from other means and in other forms. Ellul explains that propaganda has two main goals: to give explanations and values and to give a view of the world. This propaganda has two forms. One of Ellul's most important and perhaps groundbreaking distinctions is between political and sociological propaganda. Propaganda is traditionally thought of as being consciously and strategically used by government regimes. Of this propaganda, Ellul says the "choice of methods is deliberate and calculated"[48] and that this generally is characterized as vertical, meaning passed from the top down. This form of propaganda usually comes in waves as needed according to circumstances and requires constant renewal to maintain long term effectiveness. Too, this usually relies on passivity of the people who are willing to become objects of the state.

When Ellul writes *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* in 1965, he believes he is witnessing the unfolding of a new sort of propaganda. His idea of sociological propaganda is something similar to culture and the spreading of ideas. It lacks the leadership and calculation of political propaganda, although it may be influenced by politics. He defines this form of

[48]Ellul, Propaganda, 62.

propaganda as "the penetration of an ideology by means of its sociological context."[49] Rather than calculating a message to filter through communication or political structures, this propaganda is simply allowed to spread. Central to the success of this propaganda is integration, a goal of propaganda that Ellul claims did not exist before the twentieth century. Integration fulfills the technical need that society advance toward uniformity. This form of propaganda promotes customs and habits which soon become involuntary. Ellul argues that an ethic slowly penetrates and takes over the judgment of individuals. In this discussion he also says that propaganda provides myths and a way of living. Like religion, this gives the individual a world view: "The individual in the clutches of such sociological propaganda believes that those who live this way are on the side of the angels, and those who don't are bad."[50] It is easy to see then how this parallels the issue of freedom as discussed in the previous chapter. Again, man has a choice of either being an "angel" fooled by propaganda or a "devil" outcast by his peers. The false image is also key here, because angels are devils in reality, and vice versa. Lastly, sociological propaganda must regulate groups and prevent their strength from becoming a threat to its success. Not only must propaganda break or limit these groups, but it must find a way to fill the need left behind by their destruction.

Whereas political propaganda upholds the technological society in an explicit, forceful way, sociological propaganda upholds it by dealing with its effects. Technique leaves man in a state of loneliness and stress, and certain forms of propaganda help him escape it. Ellul's distinction between "amusement" and sociological propaganda on this point may be problematic. While he views the two as complementary, amusement may, in fact, be part of sociological propaganda. Ellul uses an American film maker as an example of accidental propaganda. He

[49]Ibid., 63.
[50]Ibid., 65.

says that while the filmmaker does not intend to make propaganda, the propaganda exists due to the fact that what the film expresses is determined by a propagandistic environment. If Ellul really believes this, then it seems unlikely that any form of media in the technological society could avoid being propagandistic unless, of course, it operated in a philosophical pursuit of truth. Ellul also says that the hero and the movies are not enough to accomplish these ends, but they work with propaganda. Yet if heroes, film and other media are used to create an ideology for the mass, then they must be propaganda. What complicates this distinction is the idea of escape. Ellul seems to view the hero and cinema as means of escape more so than other media. In a sense he seems to believe that escape is something different than the creation of an ideology. It seems, though, that escape plays such a central role in the creation of ideology that it is indistinguishable from propaganda. Regardless, the desire to escape is a sure sign of propaganda and helps secure the technological society. These technical forms of escape ensure that man can never actually escape. Too, they are brief and fleeting and aim only to ease his intentions to the point that he can function regularly in the technical world at all other times.

A central aspect to propaganda is the notion of replacement or substitution. When propaganda is used to promote an idea or an ethic, it involves discarding what came before it. In doing so, it also takes on the function of what came before it. In many ways this is similar to technique. Ellul mentions that man used to create his own tools, but now tools must be created according to the one best means. This new technical form replaces the old but still provides functional tools. The previous way, however, is forgotten. We see this happen with propaganda, especially with those institutions which threaten it. Religion is a key example. If religion is a threat to propaganda, it must be replaced with something else. To do this, propaganda elevates technique to the role of "the sacred," and original religion is forgotten. This is true with anything

propaganda replaces. The problem of propaganda is then a problem of memory.

Escape

The conditions of work, the immanence of competition and war, city life, and other such characteristics of modernity represent the unprecedented demands placed on man in the technological age. As a result, he feels his life is meaningless and he tries to escape. Escape is thus related to propaganda, because propaganda uses escape to protect itself from rebellion. Rebellion would be the ultimate form of escape, because rebellion can lead to taking over the oppressor. Ironically, propaganda uses escape to prevent rebellion. If there were no outlets of escape (movies, the hero, drugs, sex, and so forth) man would more ably realize the need for rebellion. Escape can then be viewed as a medicine which keeps the propagandistic system healthy. It requires just the right dosage in order to quench the desire to rebel while maintaining the willingness to participate in the technical system. In the following passage, Ellul observes the loneliness, lack of meaning and free will, and need to escape that characterize the life of the average technical citizen:

> Consider the average man as he comes home from his job. Very likely he has spent the day in a completely hygienic environment, and everything has been done to balance his environment and lessen his fatigue. However, he has had to work without stopping and under constant pressure; nervous fatigue has replaced muscular fatigue. When he leaves his job, his joy in finishing his stint is mixed with dissatisfaction with a work as fruitless as it is incomprehensible and as far from really productive work. At home he 'finds himself' again. But what does he find? He finds a phantom. If he ever thinks, his thoughts terrify him. Personal destiny is fulfilled only by death; but reflection tells him that for him there has not been anything between his adolescent adventures and his death, no point at which he himself ever made a decision or initiated a change.[51]

The purpose of escape is not only to hide from the conditions of technique but also to

[51]Ellul, Society, 376.

hide from one's own thought. Escape techniques do not just distract the technical citizen from considering rebellion, but they require that even his thought be escaped. Propaganda must not let the phantom convince man of the need for rebellion, and instead flashes this phantom at rare moments, making these thoughts seem foreign and strange. By escaping this phantom, man is not escaping the technical world but his interiority, his memory, his one path to freedom.

Many people in the technological society respond to their conditions by trying to rebel against technique. In reality, however, their actions represent conformity to it. For example, Ellul claims that propaganda limits the potential for new ideas because they are a threat to it. As a result, someone fooled by propaganda will think all new ideas are propaganda. A rebellion of this sort is then not against propaganda; instead it strengthens it. Propaganda seems like the cure but is really a covering up of the problem. Not only does propaganda as a whole seem like a cure, but Ellul says people will cling to individual branches of propaganda depending upon which tensions or problems they are experiencing. This branch of propaganda then liberates the individual from that trouble and becomes a god. Sex provides the perfect example of a pseudo rebellion against the technical world and the deification of a liberator. Ellul believes that wild sex lives are a result of an attempt to rebel against the technical society. This, of course, is an illusion and represents adherence to a "sociological current."[52] Similarly, sex is a common "branch" of propaganda which, when clung to, becomes a god. This could be said of other forms of propaganda, but sex clearly shows the human essence of the problem. In a theological critique, Ellul claims that sex cannot just be treated by the church on a moral plane. In fact, the real problem with sex in the technical world is that it violates the true sense of "being human." If this is true, propaganda must promote sex as a means to a better human existence.

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[52]Jacques Ellul, The Ethics of Freedom, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 457.

One of the most widely discussed forms of escape is that of the hero. Ellul claims that the technical form of the hero emerges as a result of the individual's inability to establish himself apart from the mass of society. Since he cannot, he admires the hero who is capable of this feat. Whether in athletics or cinema, the hero becomes godlike. Everything the average citizen cannot be or accomplish becomes the task of the hero. Individuals can then live vicariously through the hero and indirectly "accomplish" something. Ellul says the hero becomes "the mythical realization of all that the individual cannot be."[53] Daniel Boorstin adds to this discussion the observation that before technique, heroes arose from "folk culture."[54] These heroes were always of man's own creation. In mass culture, however the celebrity represents greatness and is fueled by economic demand of modern society. Also unlike folk culture is the vividness of the modern hero or celebrity. Boorstin argues that heroes should become bores but that celebrities become vivid and individual. In fact the celebrity must be cast in this particular mold if he or she is able to remain relevant. Boorstin is particularly interested in the way in which the pseudo culture of modern society is created by individuals. He argues it is the individuals of modern society who create the market demand for the fake. Without a doubt, propaganda is the key force that joins the individuals in this demand. Because of this demand and the fact that Ellul and Boorstin both agree that modern heroes are "receptacles into which we pour our own purposelessness,"[55] society is both the creator of celebrity and the celebrity itself. In other words, celebrities are made by us, and we imitate them in what is really an imitation of ourselves. Once a figure reaches celebrity status, there is no room for moral judgment. "Celebrity" does not involve any idea of right or wrong. In fact, it does less so than "hero." Celebrities with publicized alcoholism, for example, are on the same level as celebrities who are known for their

[53]Ellul, Propaganda, 172.
[54]Daniel J. Boorstin, The Image: A Guide to Pseudo Events in America, (Antheneum, 1957), 47.
[55]Ibid., 61.

philanthropy.

Marshall McLuhan notes these tendencies in other media. He notes that literature in the modern world is not only commercialized and lacking meaningful messages but that this technique progresses by the demands of readers. He finds similar problems in moral judgment, one example being an advertisement for the promiscuous novel *"Vixens,"* conveniently placed next to an advertisement for a children's Bible.[56] Aside from these advertisement discrepancies, he finds moral judgment declining in literature altogether. He says, "There is obviously no longer any question of mental appraisal in fiction. Such stories are not a means of holding up human actions for the critical evaluation which strengthens the powers of reasonable living. They are things to be felt in the viscera."[57]

Ellul believes that the desire to escape is created by the tensions of the technical world. Specifically, he believes that we realize we are living in a world of false images, but we feel powerless to change our surroundings. Rather than fixing it, we escape. Boorstin seems to agree. Aside from escape into tales of technical hero or into alcoholism, drugs, and so forth, Boorstin acknowledges that some institutions exist out of the need for spontaneity. This represents a different form of escape. Boorstin argues that sport and crime specifically provide us with spontaneous action that cannot be found in the everyday world of technical images. McLuhan calls sport "a magical institution"[58] which imitates rituals and impulses that are key to the social group. He argues that most seek out sports because of the drama they provide. For some sports this drama is granted by just watching an event, perhaps an event that takes place once a year. For others, the drama is about continually following statistics and standings. And

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[56]Marshall McLuhan, The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man, (New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1951), 23.
[57]Ibid., 25-26.
[58]Ibid., 135.

then of course the individual participants of the sport are heroes, and in some cases referees are the figures of evil. Of the heroism of players, he says, "To identify oneself with notable individual players while secure in the anonymity of the mass—that is part of the show."[59] McLuhan interestingly parallels the sport world with other technical structures. For instance, he says that those who find wrestling unappealing instead follow the stock market. Football spectators, too, are usually spectators of the "business world." This description clearly shows the way in which techniques reinforce each other, and it also shows the need for drama, excitement, and spontaneity in the lives of technical individuals. Ellul's commentary on sport shows that it is another deceptive escape tool. While sport seems to be a deviation from the principles of the technical world, he says it contains the same spirit, criteria, morality, actions, and objectives" as the technical society.[60]

Crime in the technical age provides similar drama and spontaneity. Again McLuhan provides commentary showing the dangers of sociological propaganda. He notes that any discussion of crime using modern communication media risks promoting the criminal as a hero. Of course this is easily identifiable in today's society where criminal television shows (both of the "drama" and "reality TV" varieties) portray detectives' pursuit of not only catching the criminal but understanding his or her reasoning and personal experience. In the end, in some cases, the criminal becomes justified based upon his or her own unfortunate circumstances. McLuhan observes that seemingly harmless advertisements using the slogan "Crime Does Not Pay,"[61] are not simple announcements of a warning. Instead they portray the criminal as facing insurmountable odds and crime as a means to rebel against authority or government (a desire that many in the technical world likely have). McLuhan notes that this type of portrayal clouds moral

[59]Ibid., 137.
[60]Ellul, Society, 384.
[61]McLuhan, Bride, 29.

judgment and crowds out a discussion of vice and virtue. In yet another discrepancy between the technical image and reality, McLuhan notes, "it is obvious that, as our powers of crime detection have advanced, the power to define vice or virtue has declined," and if crime could pay, he says, "the dividing line between virtue and vice would disappear."[62]

Hyperreality

The work of the previous chapter showed that the characteristics of the technological society function in such a way that appearances are different than reality. This condition is the result of propaganda. Now it must be shown that for propaganda to elevate the image above reality and for people to accept this elevation, the image must appear *better* than reality. This is the basis of Umberto Eco's idea: hyperreality. Eco observes an American fascination with substitutes for reality as a fascination with "something even more real."[63] These substitutes are hyperreal and are not limited to America but are found in all technical society. When these substitutions become better than reality, they create a problem of authenticity: what looks real *is* real. An instance of this is found at the Ripley's museums. The chain museum company hosts copies of particular artifacts in its museums nationwide while sometimes owning no original copy at all. In this case Eco explains, what is important is "not the authenticity of a piece, but the amazing information it conveys."[64] The same is true for wax versions of the *Last Supper*. Eco observes that the use of color by these recreations is not at all like the original painting. Also, next to the copies of the *Last Supper* are reference images that serve the function of showing the original painting. Ironically, Eco notes, even these reference images are not pictures of the actual paintings. Why not? Because the superiority of the recreation must remain intact

[62]Ibid, 31.
[63]Umberto Eco, Travels in Hyperreality, trans. William Weaver (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc., 1986), 8.
[64]Ibid., 15.

and visitors must be convinced of it. The point of this is to remove any need of the original and likewise any memory of it. In fact, this is the exact method of propaganda. Propaganda must aim to provide images that appear genuine or even better than the genuine or original, and thus propaganda must also aim to corrupt memory.

Another important characteristic of hyperreality is the way in which the images remove the ability to exercise moral judgment. Eco says that in wax museums this is accomplished by democratization. At one museum he notes "Marie Antoinette's boudoir is recreated with fastidious attention to detail, but Alice's encounter with the Mad Hatter is done just as carefully."[65] In these museums it seems as though all moral context is lost. The historical significance of a symbol of Antoinette does not matter. What matters is condensed to a standard of re-creation. The symbols' ability to remind of the original is celebrated, but there can be no celebration of the original. The significance of the original, whether it be historical or moral, is useless.

In a trip to Disneyland, Eco observes a different type of hyperreality, because Disneyland is not a singular reproduction. Comparing Disneyland to wax museums, Eco comments, "the latter still tries to make us believe that what we are seeing reproduces reality absolutely, whereas Disneyland makes it clear that within its magic enclosure it is fantasy that is absolutely reproduced."[66] Rather than celebrating a work of art as something close to and even perhaps better than reality, visitors of Disneyland celebrate the fact that everything is fake. When this type of ideology succeeds, reality is inferior to the fake. Eco explains that Disneyland hosts a zoo in which visitors can see "fake nature," including alligators. "Disneyland tells us," he

[65]Ibid., 14.
[66]Ibid., 43

explains, “that faked nature corresponds much more to our daydream demands.”[67] Eco traveled from the fake New Orleans of Disneyland to the real New Orleans, where he rode a boat in hopes of seeing alligators. He observes that when this ambition does not result in the spotting of an alligator, “you risk feeling homesick for Disneyland.”[68] In perhaps one of the most provocative lines of his essay, Eco tells us it is Disneyland's job to convince us that “technology can give us more reality than nature can.”[69]

Eco observes at Disneyland and in analyzing the hit movie, *Jaws,* an equal treatment of good and evil. What matters is not moral association but the spectacular nature of presentation. He also seems to believe that this need for both good and evil represents an inability to limit hyperreality. He claims that reproduction could be a way to provide reassurance and perhaps to celebrate an important symbol (and most technical citizens believe this to be the function of reproductions). But the process of hyperreal creation is such that it must surpass these limits, and it must thrill in any way possible, bypassing any real judgment.

The key to hyperreality is imitation. In fact, Eco calls hyperreality the “apex”[70] of imitation. The reason it is an apex, is because now imitation can be better than reality. Wax museums portray art as better than the original just as Disneyland's form of nature is better than actual nature. Not only do wax museums and tourist attractions like Disneyland represent specific forms of sociological propaganda, but they demonstrate, with Eco's commentary, the nature and goals of the new propaganda Ellul is describing. An example of this is technical education. Propaganda needs to replace true education with an education that can convey information without moral judgment. This seems related to Eco's point in his museum

[67]Ibid., 45.
[68]Ibid., 44.
[69]Ibid.
[70]Ibid., 46.

observations—there is only information, no contextual knowledge. In a more general sense, propaganda must downplay the importance of nature (as at Disneyland), because nature is a threat to technique and must be overcome by it.

Propaganda as Hyperreality

When propaganda promotes the technical lifestyle it must imitate a previous lifestyle. Through this imitation it constructs a hyperreal image, and this of course removes the need for the original. So just as New Orleans boat riders long for the Disneyland form of nature, citizens of the pre-technical society, once exposed to the technical image, begin to long for it. As this occurs throughout a society, members are forced to conform to the new way of life. There is really no choice in this matter, because the consequences of not conforming lead to being an outcast, and few are willing to choose this.

We must now address what propaganda imitates and what its hyperreal image looks like. Propaganda, giving explanations and values, is a modern myth giver. This requires imitating previous forms and traditions of myth. Traditionally the myth giver is a poet, and for this thesis to be correct propaganda must then be a corrupt form of poetry. For Plato, "The poet wants to mold the souls of his public in the name of a community which seeks to assure, through persuasion, the obedience of its members to a system of values. To attain this goal, the poet employs imitation which relies on sentiment, pleasure, and especially fear. Consequently, whoever is persuaded by myth surrenders his liberty, for he is led, without being fully aware of the fact, to modify his behavior according to a system of inherited values, which, by definition, is foreign to him."[71] When this system of values aligns with what is wise or virtuous, poetry is

[71]Luc Brisson, Plato the Myth Maker, (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 8.

permissible. Plato, though, fears that most poetry does not meet this requirement. His concerns with poetry are similar to concerns with sociological propaganda. If this propaganda is a form of bad poetry, it promotes some sort of dangerous, corrupt myth.

Escape and propaganda, which try to hide the problems of modernity, become man's liberators. As liberators, they are sacred, and represent a progression of the sacred in humankind from nature, to the church, and then to technology.[72] Ellul says that to make the conditions of the technical world acceptable, "one must transcend it."[73] The religious connotation of "transcend" is no coincidence, and Ellul believes technique, through propaganda, becomes sacred. Darrell Fasching explains that technology, like religion, holds promises for the future, looms over mankind because of its potential to harm, and also maintains constant fascination[74]. Because of technique's ability to gain the title of sacred, mythology must also change. Ellul in this regard makes a key point about substitution. Although mythology and the "sacred" may change through time, their function does not. Ellul's point is that although technical religion does not share content with the religion of, for example, the Middle Ages, its purpose in daily life is the same. Similarly, propaganda must imitate the function of the original, because it is incapable of really imitating the content. Ellul thinks media is a key to myth today and that "history and science" are the main myths of modernity (promoting happiness, progress, and youth).[75]

Technical myth, in imitating original myth, is imitating part of what it means to be human. Defining "humanity" is a task too large for this project, but it will suffice to focus on technique's handling of myth, freedom, communication, and death. I have already discussed myth, but the discussion of each of these aims to prove that it is the goal of propaganda (and the

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[72]Darrell J. Fasching, The Thought of Jacques Ellul, (New York: Edwin Mellon Press Lewiston, 1981), 35.
[73]Ellul, Society, 303.
[74]Fasching, Ellul, 35-36.
[75]Ibid., 40.

end of technique) to create a hyperreal humanity. Citizens of the technical age must buy into this humanity, and it must replace the original, genuine humanity. The issue of freedom was discussed as a central part of the last chapter, and freedom is a problem involved with every aspect of technique. This is because once the "one best means" is adopted, there is no room for any will to deviate. Fasching explains that for Ellul this problem is so great that the "technological ethic" will eventually destroy morality.[76] Technique establishes a new form of the good, which of course relates to its own "sacred" status, and all technical citizens must obey this good. By removing freedom, the technical "evil" can never be committed. Again, keep in mind that technical evil is in reality good. The problem, Fasching explains, is that for Ellul freedom and morality are part of being human. In Fasching's words, "this ethic of efficiency puts an end not only to morality but to the human itself." Again, "[It] marks the imminent disappearance of human beings amid the collective institutional structures and the chromium gleam of the technological city."[77] There is no discussion of imitation throughout Ellul's work or Fasching's commentary. It is apparent, though, that if propaganda is to destroy the essence of the human, it must convince him to believe its motives are opposite. If the technical image is always deceptive (as shown in the first chapter) and must replace the original (through hyperreality), then it must do so by imitating the original. This is because man recognizes the original as something familiar and can believe in the myth that its hyperreal form is an improvement.

This theme is also found in communication, and this is one of the latest developments in sociological propaganda. The tradition of letter writing goes back for centuries, and gave the ability to maintain correspondence with those who were far away. Letters were still able to retain the formalities of conversation, using a salutation, a body, and a closing. This structure

[76]Fasching, 109.
[77]Ibid.

parallels that of a face-to-face conversation. When the email gained popularity, it seemed as though the formalities may remain but with greater speed of exchange. While this is true in some cases, the email has become just a way to share information quickly. Like the loss of moral judgment in other areas of technique, conversation on the internet loses its need to be formal or proper. While this is a topic that has been covered by many thinkers, a new form of online communication, social networking, should be looked at through the lens of Ellul and Eco. Sites like Facebook allow not only instant communication, but they allow instant updates about someone's life. This includes relationships, plans and schedules, and so on. There is also an element of democratization, because not only can anyone have a Facebook, but a Facebook user can keep up with the online actions of a multitude of other users. Facebook inevitably becomes a forum to promote one's own opinions, and authority is lost. Every opinion on the internet is viewed equally, and there can be no figure who is able to provide the truth. Facebook, and sites like it, are thus propagandistic because they further the destruction of authority as well as genuine human communication. Social networking sites represent Ellul's claim that whatever is possible, must happen. Social networking, like the internet, is new to mankind, yet has already achieved such a level of use and popularity that no technical citizen can imagine or remember life without it.

There is one element of humanity which technique cannot control as well as the others. This is death. To be sure, technique works to distance humans from the feelings and experiences of death, both physically and emotionally. Too, with technique scientific procedures are now possible which not only prolong life but make the promise of immortality (cryonics). It is also likely that in the technical age traditions of death and burial give way to more rational, less personal practices. Regardless of these victories, technique cannot overcome the threat death

presents. Ellul says, "Technical civilization has made a great error in not suppressing death, the only human reality still intact."[78]

Conclusion

Propaganda must project images to the technical citizens, and these must be imitative. They should copy as closely as possible what it means to be human. This imitation provides a familiar image. In the minds of technical citizens, all that has changed is that society has progressed, and this is certainly the result of human freedom. This imitation is precise to the point that it sustains technique and a widespread bluff of humanity. It fools man into believing in its superiority over truth and reality. Only with philosophy can one hope to see these imitations as fake and restore memory of the original.

[78]Ellul, Society, 376.

A Solution of Proportionality: Hoping for the Impossible

"It destroys, eliminates, or subordinates the natural world, and does not allow this world to restore itself or even to enter into a symbiotic relationship with it."
-Jacques Ellul (1954)

"In other words, those who accuse me of pessimism are in fact saying to me: You prevent people from being able to sleep peacefully."
-Jacques Ellul (1992)

The technological society is a machine that advances without hesitation, and with propaganda it silences all opposition. Technicians fail to recognize any of this and are quick to claim their control in these matters. Philosophers, on the other hand, are capable of seeing the totality of the technological problem, and the only viable solution must have this philosophical foundation. This must include a comprehensive, Ellulian understanding of the facts of technique. This involves the understanding that there is no human freedom in the technological society as such and that to break from this society requires the restoration of what is human. There are three such solutions to discuss: that of Siegfried Giedion, Ernst Cassirer, and a Socratic solution based in Ellul's work. The solutions of Giedion and Cassirer presume that technology has not yet reached the point Ellul observes. Because of this, their solutions are helpful insofar as they serve as benchmarks for memory. In other words, because the thinkers do not fully comprehend the system of technique and its relationship with propaganda, they cannot fully address the problems of today. At the same time, the solutions they envision bear the same principles of contemplation and memory that are found in Ellul's thought. I wish to claim that the only viable current solution is a Socratic solution. The keys to this are based in Ellul; following this path is the only way to return to the possibilities posed by Cassirer and Giedion.

Cassirer: Form and Technology

Ernst Cassirer, writing in 1930, notes that technology in its modern form deviates from traditional production due to its foresight and abandonment of natural models. The observation of technology's replacement of natural means is not a new idea, but Cassirer's warnings of the consequences may be stronger than those of his predecessors. It seems as though Cassirer realizes in 1930 the severity of the problems of technology and its proximity to a point of no return. He gives multiple ominous warnings about technological advancement, envisioning a time when "the human has cast himself forever from the paradise of pure organic existence and life."[79] Furthermore, "once the bond that binds him to nature is cut, it can never again be tied in the old way," and "unbiased happiness that organic existence and pure organic activity had given him fades away forever."[80] Unlike Ellul, Cassirer does not think technology has reached this irreversible point. Instead, witnessing an earlier stage of technological development, he imagines a sort of balanced, stable role for technology.

Cassirer uses language as a model to parallel the development of the tool. He argues that language and the tool are both creations of the human spirit. This spirit is an ambitious drive that works as a counter to the soul. The division between technology and nature or the organic realm parallels the division of spirit and soul. The spirit creates technology and its goal is to overcome the soul via achieving dominion over nature. Language and the tool, when first introduced to humanity, are accompanied with mythical understandings of their place in human existence. At this point, they appear not as the creation of the human spirit, but as a necessary part of human development with an accompanying mythical, imaginative purpose. Both are seen as being introduced to humanity by a higher power and are thus treated as divine. Cassirer calls this

[79]Ernst Cassirer, *Form and Technology*, trans. Antonio Calcagno, Wilson Dunlaey, John M. Krois, and Steve Lofts (in manuscript), 35.
[80]Ibid., 37.

period "mythical darkness"[81] and explains it as a time in which language or tools are not understood and their function has not yet been realized. This changes as man begins to see the uses of each in his existence, outside of just a mythical role.

Once man overcomes the mythical darkness, he achieves "Titanic pride" and a Promethean spirit.[82] He takes as his own what he once believed to be a gift from the gods. With this belief, human beings are sure of their freedom in the dominion of language and tool. At this stage, reality becomes a "modifiable, malleable material."[83] Man is able to use the once god-given gift to create his own way, his own world. There is no "final stop or resting point"[84] and man can anticipate, for the first time, a world of continual progress. In this new conception of the world, man's spirit is brought to the forefront. It is in this world that Cassirer is able to realize and claim, "All technology is a creation of spirit."[85] As the opponent of the soul, this spirit and its technological creations must aim to restrict the freedom of the soul and "deny and destroy it."[86]

This occurs with the abandonment of natural models. Whereas early tools are modeled after the hands or other body parts, advanced technology breaks free from the organic. While Cassirer does not say this explicitly, the abandonment of natural models seems to be paired with an abandonment of imagination or work that was allowed to be creative and founded solely on functionality. Cassirer may be suggesting the beginning of the technical consciousness and the standard of the one best means. He argues that technicians will be forced to choose "the most perfect, among those possibilities that exist in themselves and are objectively present."[87] Once

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[81]Ibid., 28.
[82]Ibid., 28.
[83]Ibid., 29.
[84]Ibid.
[85]Ibid., 30.
[86]Ibid.
[87]Ibid., 44.

natural means are abandoned, Cassirer observes the erection of "a new order."[88] In this order, the tool "obeys its own law[89]" thus achieving the autonomy which Ellul observes. Its laws exist in the realm of the spirit, and therefore the judgments of the natural realm become obsolete. In a sense, Cassirer is envisioning the idea that moral judgments will have no place in a technical world. As technique achieves autonomy via the one best means and weeds out morality, Cassirer claims, "Here, it is about neither pleasure nor displeasure, neither happiness nor sorrow. Rather, it is about freedom and bondage. If the growth of technological ability and wares necessarily and essentially secures in itself an even stronger measure of servitude, such that it increasingly enslaves and constrains humanity rather than being a vehicle for its self-liberation, then we no longer control technology."[90] These observations are significant because they anticipate Ellul's thoughts on technology, particularly by making freedom (and thus humanity) the central issue. At the same time, they anticipate what is to come if technology is not philosophically addressed.

Cassirer writes as if he stands between the breakdown of mythical darkness and technology's realization of its "highest mission."[91] Since this mission has not yet been accomplished, Cassirer's writing can be seen as bringing awareness to an unfolding problem. He speaks with a great sense of urgency in regard to the dangers of technology and is clear about what is at issue. If technology continues to progress and fully removes man from the "guardianship of nature,"[92] Cassirer seems to think the results will be irreversible. To prevent reaching the point of no return, man must keep technology in the role of servant rather than leader. In this effort, man can keep his own freedom and can make conscious decisions about the role of technique. If technology is a servant of man, it seems as though many of Ellul's concerns

[88]Ibid., 35.
[89]Ibid., 38.
[90]Ibid., 39.
[91]Ibid., 51.
[92]Ibid., 36.

would be solved. If man maintains freedom over technology, this must involve the ability to foresee its effects before it is introduced and to interject moral judgment into technological advancement. At this stage, the tool will still be respected as something foreign and divine but with the confidence that it can improve human life. When this stage is passed, and man's freedom is overcome by technical will, Cassirer sees no hope for a true reversal. This new stage meets the description of Ellul's technological society, where man is convinced of his freedom while technique actually dominates its will. While Cassirer does not explicitly give a solution for this situation, by suggesting the need for balance and the role of technology as servant he provides a benchmark to which memory may return if technology ever does exceed what is acceptable for human existence.

Giedion and Equipoise

Siegfried Giedion believes technology has exceeded what is acceptable for human existence and calls for a balance or "equipoise."[93] This equipoise is described as a balance between inner and outer realities but is not really suited to Giedion's main point. This sort of balance does not involve a hierarchy, because each side of the balance is equally valuable. A better term may be "proportionality" which incorporates technology into man's life with the understanding that it should play a lesser role. Giedion notes the ways in which mechanization has strained the relationship between man's inner being and his environment. This is due to mechanization's invasion of spheres that are not suited for it. While it has taken some time, mechanization has, according to Giedion, entered nearly every sphere of human life. Healthy proportionality is then a state in which technology is returned to its right place, to a level where its functions impede less on man's humanity. This is similar to Cassirer's notion of technology as

[93]Siegfried Giedion, Mechanization Takes Command, (Oxford University Press, 1948), 714.

servant. Giedion also hints at a solution to Ellul's problem: the cures lag behind the evils. He suggests that new techniques or machines be fully evaluated, accounting for their "social implications"[94] before they are used on a widespread scale.

Giedion's solution of equipoise is another solution of memory. He is advocating a return to the human standard of judgment. He argues that equipoise (proportionality) will need to create a new man, a man who achieves the balance current man does not have. But this is no new man, just a reappearance of previous form. Giedion says, "The man in equipoise we must achieve is new only in contrast to a distorted period. He revives age-old demands which must be fulfilled in our own way if our civilization is not to collapse."[95] These demands and this balance involve *being human.* This would not eliminate technology but would be a matter or priority and content. If technology is evaluated by a philosophical understanding of the human, then decisions can be made to assure technology's conformity to the standard of the human.

Ellul's Christian but Socratic Solution

It is difficult to say whether Jacques Ellul would believe in the possibility of either of these solutions. Often labeled a "pessimist," Ellul is thought to lack any real solution. Because of the comprehensive nature of technology, it seems unthinkable that he would advocate a balance where technology was used but man was also free. This is because for Ellul, the loss of man's freedom is necessarily tied to the emergence of the technical consciousness that developed with the growing use of machines during industrialization. For Ellul, then, there may be no balance as long as this technical consciousness exists. This does not mean, however, that there can be no meaningful life in the technological world. On a collective level, technical

[94]Ibid., 721.
[95]Ibid., 723.

consciousness must be broken down if there is to be meaningful life. This does not mean that machines would not operate, but that there would be room for moral judgment and human intervention. To do this would require a large-scale understanding of the problem of technique. In fact, realizing the true problem in an Ellulian sense is the first step to recovering from the technological society. This involves understanding that the standard of the "one best means" is at the heart of the technical world, and that no moral advancement can occur without the breakdown of this standard. Ellul's frustration with his fellow scholars and philosophers of technology lies in their failure to realize this. A solution based on wise proportionality cannot be achieved without this realization. Inherent in the "one best means" are all the techniques necessary to prevent any balance. Once the problems of technology are correctly understood and the technical consciousness challenged, a balance can occur. Technology could then be used in a stage between mythical darkness and complete freedom, in dialectic with nature.

Unlike Cassirer and Giedion, Ellul realizes this scenario, though possible, is unrealistic. With the strength of technique and propaganda having increased even in just the twenty years between Cassirer's work and his own, Ellul understands that a collective solution is not possible without beginning on an individual level. He advocates an individualized solution, one that has its roots in Socratic self-knowledge. This solution is based in Ellul's Christianity and depends upon an existential "leap of faith" against the system in power. Christianity for Ellul is like humanity. It has been corrupted by technique and its true sense must be recovered. For Ellul, this recovery means acting out against its oppressor in a true rebellion. This nonviolent rebellion involves challenging all branches of the technical world. In doing so, man will find the most extreme opposition and persecution; he will become a devil in a world of angels. Despite this, he is to value his interiority and take confidence in his thought. By revolting against the devices

that limit his freedom, man is asserting his autonomy. In order to replace these devices, man must change his form of thought. He must abandon the technical consciousness for the alternative—contemplation.[96] Only with this form of thinking, can technique be desacralized and replaced with natural forms.

The problem here is that if technique is the sacred and promotes promises of a better future, man must find an even greater hope in his vision of post-revolution society. Ellul envisions this revolt being led by believers of the Christian or Jewish faith. The principles of his solution, however, apply to anyone willing to engage in contemplation, or the pursuit of self-knowledge. This philosophical pursuit, in the modern age, must lead to the realization that humanity has become manipulated and hyperreal. The true philosopher will realize that the only solution is to return to the real human. Whether this contemplation is religious or philosophical, it is the only means with which to see through the technical images. Only with this approach can man formulate the problem correctly and see the comprehensive nature of technique. This epiphany would include insight into the bluff technique plays on man, and would aim to undo this. This takes place on an individual level. This stage of revolution is expressed through the words of Jesus: "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."[97]

While Ellul wants Christians to overcome the world spiritually through Jesus, the next step is more active. For this to expand to the collective level, the individuals must work to form the types of institutions which technique seeks to destroy. This could be the church or other groups that aim to restore a previous form of humanity. This collective solution would also include the family and the promotion of morals. In this act of memory and restoration, man

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[96]Darrell J. Fasching, The Thought of Jacques Ellul, (New York: Edwin Mellon Press Lewiston, 1981), 61-62.
[97]John 16:33.

would be breaking down technical consciousness. A society based upon community and morality would not be operating by the one best means. Instead, it would represent natural existence.

This stage of Ellul's solution is a collective revolution based on hope.[98] The contemplative form of life is what allows the individuals to realize the need for revolution. After this occurs, social religious hope helps man march forward. When the technological society is desacralized, man must have a new "sacred" form in place. This is what his hope provides. In Ellul's "best case scenario" this hope will be apocalyptic in awaiting the return of Jesus Christ as God's mysterious plans take shape and all of humanity is reconciled to Him. For the purposes of this discussion, it may suffice to say that in order to successfully recover from the elevation of technique, one must limit all functions of technique on both an individual and social level until humanity is restored. Man's world view, hopes for the future, source of morals, and so on must all be removed from the grips of technique, and for Ellul they should be placed in the hands of God. For Ellul this is a "passion for the impossible"[99] in which every technical realm is hoped to become undone. Again the words of scripture provide another perspective to his solution. Like Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, technical citizens should seek to restore a new, higher order: "If they had been thinking of the land they left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one."[100] Plato, too, captures the need for hope and contemplation along with the possibility that the ideal city is impossible: "But whether such exists, or ever will exist in fact is no matter, for he will live after the manner of that city, having nothing to do with any other."[101]

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[98]Fasching, Ellul, 62-63.
[99]Fasching, Ellul, 81.
[100]Hebrews 11:15-16.
[101]Plato, The Republic, Book IX.

Conclusion

Technique constantly presents man with images. In doing this, it fools man into thinking its qualities are strictly positive and that it moves society toward progress. After convincing man of this, technique steals his freedom but convinces him he is in control. Technique does this through hyperreal propaganda, which imitates the essence of being human. Man sees these imitations, but does not recognize the consequences of the abandonment of the original. In the technical world, he loses what it means to be a true human. The only chance to return to the human is to establish proportionality, but this can only be done with philosophical insight. Man must first use contemplation to understand technique as a system which destroys his freedom. Only after this stage can he individually achieve proportionality in his life. Then, if man can act to re-establish those institutions destroyed by propaganda, he can hope for the impossible on a social level. This hope can then replace the entire technical order, it can destroy the technical consciousness, and the impossible may become real. Technology and technique as a whole will then be returned to the status of "servant." Only then will mankind be human again, and only then can it turn technical impossibilities into human realities.