

30. For a discussion of obligation and the German character, see David C. McClelland, *The Roots of Consciousness* (Princeton: Von Nostrand, 1964), pp. 72-81.
31. FTZ, 7/8 November 1936.
32. FTZ, 9 November 1936.
33. *Die neue Gemeinschaft*, 8, September 1942, 495.
34. *Hamburger Anzeiger*, 9 November 1939.
35. *Rheinische Zeitung*, 10 November 1941.
36. Arendt, p. 361.
37. *Revolutionary Immortality: Mao Tse-Tung and the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1969), pp. 7-8.
38. FTZ, 9 November 1936.
39. *Die neue Gemeinschaft*, 10, August 1944, 346.
40. VB, South German Edition, 11 November 1935.
41. FTZ, 9 November 1936.
42. Carl Schütte, *Schulfeiern im Geiste der neuen Zeit* (Langensalza, Verlag von Julius Beltz, 1937), p. 137.
43. VB, Munich Edition, 10 November 1936.
44. *Die neue Gemeinschaft*, 8, September 1942, 495.
45. *Die neue Gemeinschaft*, 9, September 1943, 468.
46. *Bremer Zeitung*, 9 November 1942.
47. VB, Munich Edition, 7 November 1936.
48. *New York Times*, November 10, 1934, p. 5.
49. VB, South German Edition, 10 November 1935.
50. Domarus, p. 655.
51. FTZ, 11 November 1936.
52. *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen & Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 10.

AN ASPECT OF THE ROLE OF PERSUASION IN A TECHNICAL SOCIETY

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PERSUASION, PROPAGANDA (POLITICAL), advertising (commercial), and news, in the context of a technical society, present us with different images of a "reality" that is both imaginary and fictitious. And yet for all their differences, these images are very similar. Political or economic information of the most substantive nature, when transmitted by the mass media, will ultimately have the same effect as the fictitious constructions of advertising and propaganda. It is not just that the media have peculiar powers, but that information transmitted in large masses and to large masses becomes as different from empirical reality as the epic images of propaganda or advertising. It seems to me that this role, this function, always comes back to adherence to technique, to the technical society, to integration into the system, and to adaptation. This is the only point of view I intend to hold to in this essay (apart from the idea that media create a fictitious universe, which I examined in *The Political Illusion*).

Technique cannot function, obviously, without man. It is man, of course, that strives to accomplish, to work, to be effectual, and to dominate nature. Technical means exist only to the extent that man makes use of them. This seems axiomatic and yet it leads us to a classical error, usually stated in this way: "Because man created technology and because technology works only to the extent that man makes it work (the computer, for example, has to be programmed, etc.), then man must be the master of technology—he can employ it as

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he wishes and can orient it in the sense he wishes." If this were the case, we would still be left with the following question: "In every province we observe an accumulation of disorder and of the negative effect of technology. Where does it come from?" For some, this disorder is the result of a series of errors. But how can we believe both in man's exceeding cleverness in creating and inventing techniques and in his perpetual error in using them? For others, it is the "politico-economic structure" that is responsible for our errors. But we must keep in mind that this structure is itself a technology and we can identify exactly the same errors, dysfunctions, and negative effects in both the capitalist and the socialist countries. For others, our errors would derive from a defect in man's adaptation to technology—man lags behind from the moral, ideological, and intellectual standpoint in relation to the technology he employs. The negative effects of technology would derive then from this disharmony. But this presupposes that technology in itself is good and legitimate, whereas morality and religion are in error.

Now while in my view it is quite right to say that it is the disharmony between technology and man that leads to disorder and dysfunction, it is nonetheless a mistake to posit on the one hand a technology "in itself" and, on the other, a "man" in himself. We are parts of the technical system and must at the same time adapt to it in ourselves and conform in ourselves to its necessity. And it is here that a multiplicity of persuasions comes into play. If technology is what it is, it is because of man's complicity. Yet this complicity is not natural and spontaneous—it is acquired, it has been created by technology itself. In other words, we must invert the classical proposition, "Man created technology and is therefore its master," to "Technology makes man, who is indispensable to it, and the process evolves through the 'connaturality' of both." The agent of this acquired connaturality is the process of persuasion. There can be no "technostructure," for example, without activities by the mass media and by persuasion. And this works by necessity because the mass media themselves are technologies that belong to the technical world, because information must be technologically manipulated before it can be successfully transmitted, because persuasion acts by applying techniques, particularly psychological ones.

The whole thing, then, can have no other object than to facilitate the technical system, than to enforce harmony between man and technology, than to ensure man's complicity. But persuasion, propaganda, and advertising work by circumspection. They rarely direct our attention to their techniques, and never to the question of our adaptation to the technical society. In fact, all of our political problems, economic disputes, theatrical productions, etc., are suffused

with the propaganda of our technical society. The assumptions of technique are latent in every judgment and choice that we are called upon to make (about effective government, for instance, or options as to arms, or the growth of the GNP and standard of living, etc.) and, at the same time, these assumptions constitute the warp of the news we receive. It is on this warp that the political or cultural or social spectacle represented by the mass media is woven. Adherence is thus not explicitly demanded. Evidently the question, "Are you for or against the development and growth of technology?" is never asked outright (even by the ecology movements) and cannot be asked in its full implications—it would mean nothing. But the mass media game leads to implicit adherence, for just as everything was formerly ordered and explained in relation to the world of the divine (the sacred), so it is today in relation to the technical system. And just as the sacred could work only through adherence and through an acquired adherence, so too technique can work only through an acquired adherence. As for the world of the divine, it was effected through participation in myth. As for technique, it is effected through participation in the mass media. I would like to illustrate this by two examples: the substitution of symbols and the closure of discourse.

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The work of symbolization, and we are increasingly aware of this, is essential to man. It is thanks to his symbolization of the real world that man has both affirmed that he is different from the world and capable of mastering it. Now this work has been completely transformed and sterilized by the development of technology and by technology's becoming a total environment in which man lives. Indeed symbolization is always effected in relation to the environment in which man lives, and as a function of the environment. Throughout the history of mankind, until the Eighteenth Century, man lived partly in the "natural" environment and partly in the social environment. The natural environment was dominant during the "prehistoric" period; the social environment gradually gained the ascendancy in the Tenth or the Seventh Century B.C., depending on the area. Symbolization worked first with respect to the natural realities of nature (giving birth to the religions of nature, to magic, etc.), and then with respect to social realities (the symbolization of political power, law, etc.). At the present time, environmental change makes everything relating to nature largely obsolete, discarded. Mankind no longer needs to symbolize nature because we no longer really depend on nature. And it is no longer she who is both his foster-mother and a threat, even though he still "likes" to sail, surf, ride, etc. Similarly, all social symbolism is

merely a vestige—it is no longer the social group with its political rites, its structures, its conflicts of opinion, etc., that is the determining factor for man as it was during the “historical” period. Mankind lives, of course, within a symbolic system that derives from political options, national conflicts, faith in the government, etc., but we recognize more and more that our social symbolism is out of touch with actual reality.

Now what is really new about the technical environment is that it does not lend itself to symbolization. And this is the case for two reasons: first, for there to be symbolization at all, the symbol-creator must be outside what he is symbolizing; there must be some distance between the symbolizer and the symbolized. As G.K. Chesterton observed in his famous formula for distinguishing man from beast: “Man set out once to draw an ape, but the ape never had the idea of drawing itself.” In symbolization, the subject affirms that it is he who is the subject and projects the object outwards by establishing a relation that the subject himself determines. Now this used to be possible because neither nature nor society were willfully created by man. It is not he who “makes” them. On the other hand, the essential difference with technique is that it is produced by man, made wholly by him. Technology has no kind of existence and no potential for being outside of a conscious activity completed by man, since it is not created spontaneously. Man is therefore totally implicated in the existence of the technological environment. Apparently it is only man who knows what “objects” are, although in one way he knows too much, meaning that he thinks he has no need to symbolize them, to measure their distances, to assert himself as different. He lives under the conviction that he is their master, a disastrous delusion. And in another way, man is at the same time deeply integrated into this technological creation, precisely because it is his own and because he has in fact thrown himself wholly into it.

But there is much more to all of this, for technology actually symbolizes itself. And this is the second reason why technology does not lend itself to human symbolization. It does not even help us to make an effort to wrench ourselves free from a symbolic environment because in a technical society the symbolization was performed in advance and delivered to us by ourselves. We are increasingly aware that a technological object is above all a symbolic object for man. I refer you here to the remarkable studies of Simondon and Baudrillard on this subject. From their work—Simondon’s *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (1956) and Baudrillard’s *The System of Objects* (1972)—we can see that when man purchases a technological object he is at the same time buying a symbol. But it is not a symbol of his own making. The technical system persuades him through its mass

media—advertising, propaganda, etc.—that these purely material objects have transcendent meanings. Their symbolization is a refracted symbolization. There is nothing natural about the process. In fact, the symbolism produced by technicians symbolizes nothing (in the solid, classical sense). In the final analysis, the images of a technical society only seem to be symbolizing by *reflecting* a reality that is itself only a reflection. This process is not by any means similar in function to the traditional purposes of symbolization—that is, to allow man domination through distance and differentiation. Quite the contrary—its purpose is a more complete integration of man into the technical system (as far as production, consumption, etc., go). What exists then is self-symbolization by technique. And this has an effect quite the opposite of that always attributed to classical symbolism. Rather than distancing and differentiating man from the objects he symbolizes, technique’s self-symbolization has the effect of integrating, adapting, and assimilating man to technique.

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Placing myself in a completely different perspective now, I would like to call attention to a second aspect of the transformation effected by the means of persuasion in a technical society, something that might be called the “closure of discourse.” This is very similar to what I described in *The Political Illusion*, although slightly more advanced. In that book, I tried to show that the multiplication of propaganda entails a loss of the sense of reality, whether lived or historical. Certainly we are not in the situation described by Orwell, a permanent “rewriting” of history, but we are already in a state of forgetfulness and indifference to the subject. Politics is all a part of a world of images, and the reality lived by the individual or by a group is not considered true unless represented and broadcast. The truth of a fact is exactly equated with its diffusion in the form of image. The credibility ascribed to it is the result of the belief of the mass of listeners or viewers. It is the weight of the number of believers in an image that verifies the fact it represents. The general impression is that redundancy in information is a sign of poor communication, something to be eliminated in that redundancy creates noise and fading. In our present situation, this belief is absolutely inaccurate. It is redundancy alone that confirms truth, and it can even be said that it is *itself* truth. We have outstripped the phenomenon of the repetition of propaganda. Against mere repetition we can protect ourselves, for example, by disclosing the repetition. But we are now succumbing to a redundancy that is much more insidious because it does not rely on the reiteration of vocabulary but on pieces of evidence alleged to be ac-

quired. The result is that nonexistent data show up as evidence of reality, while memory is erased at the same time. We are always a part of a tissue of evidence that eventually acquires existence because people believe it exists.

I might cite thousands of examples. One that is especially significant for the present is the existence of "the Palestinian People." There never was any "Palestinian People" as an historical, cultural, linguistic, or any other entity. There were Arabs living (usually not for very long) in Palestine. How did they become a "people"? Through the continuous assertion that terrorist activities are expressions of a "Palestinian People." The "people" now exists because the warp of news about it has made it appear. And conversely, memories both collective (historical facts are absolutely useless) and individual (we hear the most astonishing palinodes from politicians, writers, and philosophers who *forget* in a few months their original positions to adopt others diametrically opposed without bothering to mention that they had been wrong, etc.) get erased. These are some but not all of the data that constitute what I have called "the closure of discourse," meaning that discourse has changed in its nature. Human language is always aleatory and makes of information a "game" of sorts. In other words, discourse implies both innovation and uncertainty—it challenges the listener to take a position and incites the speaker to exaggeration. But with the dominance of technique, and with the multiplication of communications, discourse has lost these characteristics and finds itself in confusion over reality and truth. Reality and truth are now functions of what is broadcast. Experience, which used to be directly transmissible and constitutive of cultural development within the group, is no longer so. Experience can only pass through the mass media, which makes it lose its faculty of integration into a culture. The mass media also deprive experience of its character of personalized urgency. (The immense majority of news items provoke only an indifferent interest, and the character of emergency is attributed to what is most often presented as such.) Closed discourse, a feature of the technical world, will then reflect the disappearance of the speaking subject, which explains the frequently employed formula, "They say . . .," or "The story is . . .," instead of "I say"—a formula which expresses precisely the work of integration performed by the mass media in the objectivized technical system.

INFORMATION/ PROPAGANDA:

Analects from

PETER L. HARATONIK • *a Technological Society*

1. I.B.M. (it is no longer "International Business Machines") is not in the machine business. I.B.M. is in the *information* business. In a post-industrial society (see Daniel Bell),
"The business of business is information."
2. Information, according to Shannon/Weaver, is not to be confused with meaning or knowledge. Information is just the "stuff"; a measure of uncertainty or choice. (Note "choice" of language by Shannon/Weaver et. al., circa 1948.)
3. Jacques Ellul. *Propaganda*. "Propaganda becomes possible only when people develop a consciousness of general problems and specific responses to them. The formation of such responses is precisely what the promulgation of information creates . . . information prepares the group for propaganda."
4. Information is clearly not a question of getting "it," rather of what to do with "it." A former N.A.S.A. programmer once told me that large quantities of computer readout from satellite monitoring stations are simply shredded since no one could ever find the time to analyze it. Question: Does the very nature of information (meaning) have to change in the face of information (quantity of uncertainty)?

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