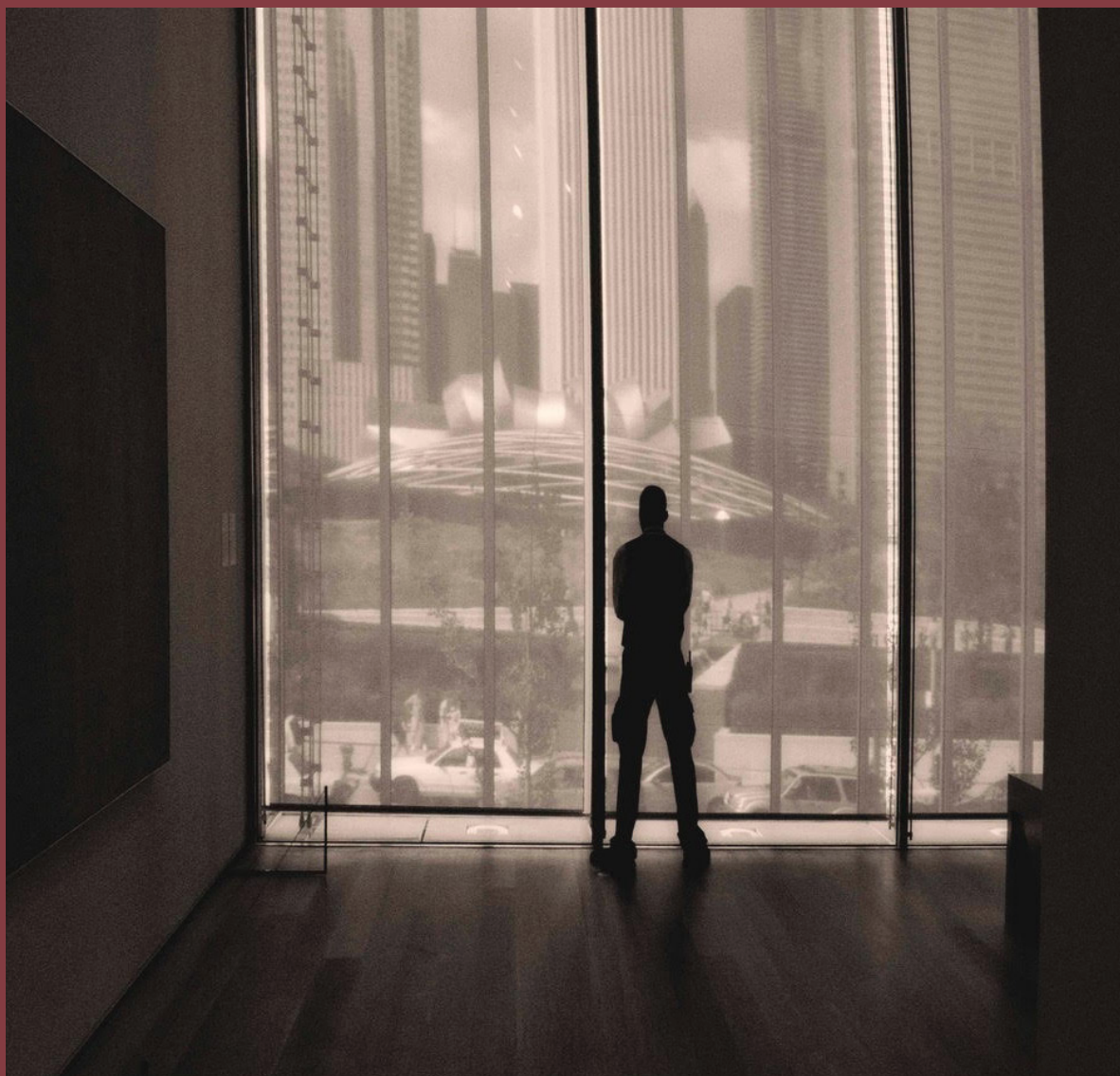
The Ellul Forum

Number 70 Fall 2022



The Ellul Forum

Welcome to the *Ellul Forum*

As the *Ellul Forum* now transitions from one chapter of editorship to the next, it currently operates with an interim editorial team comprised of aspiring scholars in the field of Ellulian studies:

- Emily Hill, Soliciting and Managing Editor
- Amy Erickson, Copy Editor
- Anne Dimond, Copy Editor
- Jason Hudson, Book Review Editor
- Greg Wagenfuhr, Layout and Design
- Ted Lewis, Team Convener and Print Coordinator

This group is already laying tracks for forthcoming issues in the next two years (see below). By the Spring of 2023, decisions will be made to have a longer-term, sustainable plan for the editorial work of the journal. Also in early 2023 we will be selecting an **Ellul Forum Review Board** that will serve to provide pre-publication supports and approvals. This group will be announced in our Spring issue.

Please know that we invite queries and submissions year-round. While every issue is theme-driven, we can also add stand-alone articles from time to time. Book reviews are welcome year-round.

One new invitation is for readers to write response letters to previous articles, not exceeding 500 words. These letters will help to fulfill an original vision for the *Ellul Forum*, namely to promote dialogue among IJES members.

Please feel free to share the journal with others in view of encouraging them

to subscribe by becoming an IJES member at $40 per year. This amount was adjusted to ensure that we can cover the costs of printing and mailing, along now with some stipends for the editorial team.

All communications can be directed to: *ellulforum@gmail.com*

Finally, our gratitude goes out to Lisa Richmond who provided the editorial oversight to the *Ellul Forum* over the past five years, assuring high quality in both form and content.

Contribute to future issues of the *Ellul Forum*.

If you would like to propose a paper for the Spring or Fall 2023 issues, please email a 200-300 word abstract to *ellulforum@gmail.com* along with a brief bio. You can find our submission guidelines for papers on the IJES Ellul Society website under *Ellul Forum*, or request it via email.

Spring 2023 Topics Related to Our Pandemic Times

Over the past three years, the Covid-19 pandemic has been at center stage for defining a new era in the modern world. Whether one supports a standard perspective as promoted by mainstream and progressive sources of news or finds themselves with a more questioning stance regarding official narratives, it can be agreed that most countries worldwide have experienced unprecedented levels of social control on both vertical and horizontal levels. In this edition of the *Ellul Forum*, primary articles will cover any topic related to our pandemic times, including the management of information, changing views of science, connections between government and medical institutions, and general impacts on the masses.

Fall 2023 Surveillance and Information Management

According to sociologist David Lyon, we live in a culture of surveillance. Today's surveillance is no longer like what George Orwell described in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* but rather like the documentary *The Social Dilemma* or Joanna Kavenna's *Zed*. Today's surveillance occurs in the overlapping sphere of governance, marketing, and security and includes our own participation in surveillance--from watching others on social media to our own self-

reporting of data via our tools and devices. In this edition of the *Ellul Forum* we'll focus on practices of surveillance in different locations utilizing insights from Ellul and other thinkers in order to consider implications in our life and society.

Spring 2024 Revisiting The Technological Society

As our 2024 summer IJES conference, now secured for downtown Chicago at Roosevelt University, will be themed around the publication of Ellul's magnum opus, *The Technological Society*, it is fitting to dedicate an *Ellul Forum* issue to this book with respect to its ongoing relevance as well as to ongoing critiques. Articles will engage the content of this book in relation to Ellul's other writings, current issues that strengthen or weaken his overall thesis, and other secondary writings that engage the same topics and theories that Ellul presented in his original work.

Stand-alone articles:

Please know that not all articles accepted for an issue have to fit into a primary theme. We welcome submissions of all kinds, provided they engage the writings of Ellul and the themes which he studied.

Responses requested for this current issue: "Arts, Culture, and Environment in a Technological Society."

Did articles in this issue generate a new idea, a question, an encouragement, or a counterpoint perspective for you? Please email a short response letter to *ellulforum@gmail.com* (no longer than 500 words), and the editorial team will publish a selection of letters in the Spring 2023 issue.

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Montreal 2022 Conference Description

In July 2022, the biennial conference of the International Jacques Ellul Society was held at McGill University in Montreal under the theme "The Arts, Culture, and Environment in a Technological Society." Among Ellul's oeuvre are two significant reflections on the arts: The Empire of Non-Sense: Art in the Technological Society *(1980, English trans. 2014) and* The Humiliation of the Word *(1981). This conference afforded the opportunity to consider the continuing relevance of Ellul's critique of technology specifically as it relates to arts and culture. Presentations covered a wide range of topics, including visual art, literature, music, and architecture, and engaged with Ellul's concern that the arts may be incapable of confronting the hegemony of Technique. Given the importance of Ellul's ecological concerns, presenters were also encouraged to address the question of sustainability in relation to artistic practices and industries.*

1. **David Lovekin,** "Re-Imagining the Image Re-Focusing the Word." Lovekin examines Ellul's proposition that symbols are no longer possible in a technological society. The relationship between the image and the word provides the key to the symbol's viability. Ernst Cassirer's notion of a symbolic form in the light of "symbolic pregnance" rounds out the discussion. Ellul claimed the word was humiliated, to which Lovekin adds: so was the image.

2. **Samir Younés,** "The Two Orders and the Appearance of the World." Younés traces the relation between historicism and modernism, focusing on the control technology accrues when it is presented as a necessity for artistic choice. Of particular importance is the reduction of imitation to copying,

and the co-option of the body in artistic work by technological phenomenon. If the image had been humiliated, so had the hand.

3. **Justine McIntyre,** "Does the End of Art Signify the End of Man? Beyond the Technical System: the Place of Lyricism in Our Conception of Water." McIntyre examines technology's denuding of the nature of water to the dimensions of the practical and the technological. The poetic dimension taken up by artists such as Gaston Bachelard has been lost, and the meaning of the human is ultimately at stake in the loss of water's symbolic dimension.

4. **Mark Honegger,** "Where is the Fiction? Art's Audience in a World of Technique." Honegger argues that art does not exist in the absence of an audience that appreciates an artifact as art with aesthetic values beyond those of commerce, politics (the technological sort), and entertainment. This kind of audience is disappearing. As Ellul argues, today's art often trumpets the values of technology that leave an audience befuddled and alienated and placed in the authoritarian hands of the critic. This situation is rhetorically unsound and self-contradictory.

Re-Imagining the Image, Re-Focusing the Word

David Lovekin

In Jacques Ellul's many studies—his Biblical critiques, his historical works, and his sociological analyses—a common theme recurs. The human world is essentially bifurcated: the human breaks with God, struggles with nature (both external and internal), and seeks freedom from the necessities the human has created. The subjective stands against the objective in whatever form or fashion it appears—some aspect of otherness (what the subject is not)—and produces the symbol as a bridge, a path, a commonality, another world. Ellul wrote:

> Man cannot have a relationship with another save by the intermediary of symbolization. Without mediating symbols, he would invariably be destroyed by raw physical contact alone. The 'other' is always the enemy, the menace. The 'other' represents an invasion of the personal world, unless, or until the relationship is normalized through symbolization. Very concretely, to speak the same language is to recognize the 'other' has entered into the common interpretive universe […][1]

In *The Empire of Non-Sense: Art in the Technological Society,* Ellul claimed that symbols were no longer possible. This claim is counter-intuitive. The technological society is inundated with images of all kinds, with movies and literature in endless variety, but the claim hangs on understanding that images are not symbols. Technical mentality does not tolerate bifurcations and diversity. He wrote:

> Technique cannot be symbolized for three principal reasons. First it has become the universal mediator, and because it is itself a means

"Re-Imagining the Image, Re-Focusing the Word." *Ellul Forum* 70 (Fall 2022): 5–21.

> […] it is not the object of symbolization, but rather it is also […] outside of all other systems of mediation or symbolization. It is, in the second place, a producer of a communal sense. The communal act today no longer relies on the support of the symbolic but rather on a technical support (the play of media for example). Simply technique establishes a non-mediated—and immediate—relation with man, who, in the past, felt a strong need to distance himself from nature but technique seems not to require such distance. It seems to be the direct extension of the body. Who has not heard it said that the tool is merely an extension of the hand? Thus, we pass from an organic world, where symbolism was an adequate and coherent function in relation to the milieu, to a technical system where the creation of symbols has neither time nor place nor sense. What symbols are necessary are produced out of technique itself.[2]

The "other" becomes technique, which is no longer mediated or understood as an object or as a means, but has become the end itself. The subject as subject is not defined in relation to what it is not, as it is in symbolic relations. The "others" of the natural world and of the social world, of the laws and regulations that established a *sensus communis,* and of the religions and cultural traditions suffer similar fates. Otherness is obviated, reified, and turned into conceptual machinations, as technical phenomena, by the logic of technique. For example, human time with its messy flow of heterogenous moments and otherness has been replaced by analog and digital time, which makes going to meetings and obeying the absolute of being on time possible. When we look to the device to decide where and when we should be, we become the device with nowhere left to go. The medium is not simply the message but is the message and the messenger and the means of communication combined. The image is the ideal of communication with no dangling contradictions or paradoxes, with no reaches for the unseen with obscure and metaphorical language, but the image is not without its problems. It needs to be re-imagined with words that re-focus.

Ellul examined the profundity of the symbol theologically and epistemologically. The human breaks with God and forms his own city out of his own language; meaning and object, word and image never coincide.[3] The human is not God and is left to Babel without God's word. The truth of God's word can only be revealed symbolically, with what the Bible provides.

The Bible is not a machine, Ellul insists. Epistemologically the symbol is necessary as well. The human is separated from the natural world spatially and temporally in fields of finitude, and finds a home by virtue of the symbol:

> The interpretation of this world is already, by itself, the act of a subject who separates himself and who deposits everything else into another universe of objects upon which he can, and is prepared to, act. This creation of an "other world" furnishes him with a justification. And, finally, in the measure to which he is able to imagine a dimension other than that or the immediately sensible—a universe of which he is the constituent and where he continues to reinterpret and to institute new things—he becomes the master of the real world.[4]

The real world for Ellul is the world of technique, which is not the true world of absolute knowledge. The absolute is dressed in symbolic finitude and is redeemed only if known to be finite. As I will show, technique produces technical phenomena that masquerade as symbols but are manifestations of what Hegel called a "bad infinity," a *Schlecht-Unendliche*.[5] Only the true is the whole, as Hegel had proclaimed.[6] The technical phenomenon, as image, is a partial truth claiming to be the complete truth. The image as mere sensuous presence is the finite repeated endlessly. Perception and conception are mechanized in the demise of the symbol and its expressions.

I read Ellul philosophically and understand him to be worthy of wonder in the Socratic sense. The job of philosophy is not to solve problems but to examine truth claims and to pursue self-knowledge as the self comes to know what it does not know and then to know more as a result. In technique's denial of absolutes, it becomes one. Hegel is my guide here. Ellul provides us with the logic of technique but Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms gives us the logic of the symbol. The symbol is the attempt to recover meaning as meaning. This is first divulged in what Cassirer called symbolic pregnance. The primary symbolic form of language reveals the two gestural directions meaning takes: outward toward the object and inward toward the subject in its attempt to know. Art attempts to recover the primary unity of subject and object in symbolic pregnance. Cassirer's insight aids the Ellullian project to understand the importance of art in sustaining symbolic ac-

tivity wherein the seen and the not seen combine precariously in a balance of image and word, meaning and meant.

I will discuss Ellul's view of technique as a mentality that stands before objects or tasks at hand—from building jet engines to orchestrating a gas attack or providing wedding plans— with the application of a mathematics-like methodology in the pursuit of efficiency and the one best way. The technical phenomenon is the result, with the objectivity of the object canceled.[7] The distinction between the made and the not-made collapses. The phenomenon and its images become reality as the body or mind is no longer extended but is disembodied in the reification of concepts. Technique, in short, becomes a form of consciousness unknown to itself, a migrant identity without means of support or conveyance, a metaphysical homelessness on the edge of "whatever."

Technique constructs a world of images—visual presences—that preempt the domain of the word that surrounds and gives meaning to the visible. The video-worlds of the news, the internet, and social media provide the propaganda that keeps a technological society flourishing in a present-mindedness, separate from a past and future, made possible by the word and the powers of memory. The invisible disappears into the visible. The symbol requires the dimension of the word that is thereby humiliated in its reductions. I would push further to say that the image is humiliated and that the unseen is the other side of the visible. The purpose of the symbol is to reveal the unseen that makes the seen visible—the underside of the image—the word in flight for form and expression.

Images and Words

We are surrounded by images, many not of our own making. We are continually looking at pictures which invite representation. Pictures of food, animals, other people, trees, landscapes, and water. Pictures of pictures, advertisements, places to visit, and other desirables. However, I have made a leap from images to pictures, from sensations to representations. An image, a doctor might say, according to theory, is a neural excitation, although theory and perception are worlds apart.

A picture is a re-presenting of sensations. Memory, conscious or not, is involved. A child psychologist might say that objects have to be learned and interpreted from sensations, a process that we adults do not remember until we are before something we have never experienced and named, like a certain mixture of blue and green. Sensations are given shapes that can be named and then re-presented. I can refer to the aforementioned mixture as "bleen," with apologies to Nelson Goodman. Words reach for images as puffs of wind, moments of physicality, but they are mere scratches without a meaning beyond the scratch, beyond the swoosh and echo. Leaps for beyonds are needed for meaning to take place. And, leaps are needed for images to become pictures, again with the aid of memory. Memory and meaning abide together.

That initial experience may have been in a very remote past or in an anticipated future, which, when recognized, becomes past. The sensation or sensations are carried forward and form a something and a not-something-else, and words enable such a transport. "This is a table and not a chair," for example, provides a sense that keeps me from eating on chairs and sitting on tables. The word "image" from middle English refers to a figure, an icon, or a mental impression of something experienced. Thus, *image* invites the notion of a copy or of an impression or that to which the copy may relate. I have introduced sensation as a root phenomenon that may be inseparable from any sense of copy. From the Latin *imāgin* and *imāgō* we derive representation, reflection, apparition, copy, visible form. The word groans in ambiguity. The word refers to something visible, to an appearance; but an appearance of what and of what kind and to whom and in what situation, in what time and place? The ambiguities of appearance call for the word at the service of memory and vice versa.

Word comes from Middle and Old English, like the German *wort,* and is related to the Latin *verbum* and the Greek *eirein* to say to speak, and, via the Hittite *werya,* to call and to name. Calling and naming will lead to writing and to a conjoining of image and word, granting the intimate connectivity mentioned above. Thus, the notion of word suggests a prior connection to, and then separation from, impressions.

The Technical Phenomenon and the Demise of the Symbol

Jacques Ellul posited a culture in crises related to problems of language that revealed humanity's inability to symbolize, to struggle with otherness, to form and sustain communities, and to find a sense of place. Agreeing with the studies of R. J. Lifton, Erik Erikson, Kenneth Boulding, and Ernst Cassirer, Ellul stated:

> There is no longer a continuity of the person, which supposes a stable and intact relation between man, his symbols, and his institutions: this stability no longer exists. There is nothing but endless searches to find oneself. In this search we are all plunged into the same uncertainty, constituting a "universal mode of the becoming self," a function of the structures of modern society.[8]

The mentality of *la technique* stands opposed to a dialectical language that seeks, embraces, and then creates with opposition, metaphor, and paradox, the very business of the symbol. Technique cannot be symbolized by virtue of its opposition to opposition that is grounded, ironically, in the tentative certainty of images of the now and not yet. At risk is the symbol's capacity to unify and to find purpose and meaning in expressions of cultural difference with a creative embrace of otherness and of the value of "ends." Technique provides means with no end. The cliché is an aspect of this certainty, the machine in its new suit.[9] Originally a cliché was a printer's dab, making a sound and an image as it pounded out meaning. That sense of metaphor in history and culture is lost. The cliché is more than a tired expression; it tirelessly produces the landscape for *la technique* that is the quotidian co-efficient of limbo—the basis of the media and its always "breaking" news.

The natural world, the social world, and the values and perspectives that make those worlds meaningful, are taken up in conceptual terms by technique with a denial of their "otherness." Ellul describes the arrival of this mentality historically.[10] In the primitive world material and spiritual techniques reflected their particular cultures. The tools of material techniques were handed down in a culture's history. Spiritual techniques such as magic presumed an infinite connection between things and world and typically did not progress. If a technique did not work, it was the will of the gods

or was not performed correctly. The educated Greeks privileged rationality and had little respect for the spiritual or material technologies. They were able to separate science from technology—with Plato and Archimedes as exemplars—and science (or natural philosophy) was the more valued. The Romans valued law and worked to achieve a sensus communis thereby. Balance and order were the social and spiritual goals. Christianity and its institutionalizations in the Medieval world placed God's word and the church above any technical process except in education, which was part of dogma and doctrine.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought profound but scattered developments with gun powder, the nautical compass, the printing press, and, most importantly, a pride powered by reason. Descartes was a hero of that age. In the eighteenth century the appeal of a Cartesian mentality came to dominate: methodology and mathematics supported the interests of building state power and its supporting economies. By 1750, Ellul concluded, the principles of Descartes were everywhere applied. The truth was a matter of clarity and distinctness structured by method that disallowed contradiction and paradox.11 Clarity, knowledge, and progress, however, were dogged by Descartes' mind/body problem that still gnaws at us today.

Consider this on an existential level. All cultures had techniques performed using a technical operation that typically involved using tools. The tool was an extension of the body or the mind—a shovel or an abacus, for example. An object or a problem was faced. The ground or the sum were forms of "otherness," and the tool made this work possible with body or mental alignments. The technical operation is an "embodied" condition. The tool and the language supporting it complied and the operation bore the marks of the object or the abilities of the operator. Copying nature or tradition will not produce technical progress. Flapping arms or praying does not achieve flight. But something like the Bernoulli principle that measured the velocity of air over a curved surface made flight possible.

Reason and consciousness intervene to produce what Ellul calls the *technical phenomenon*.[12] "It is no longer the best relative means which counts, as compared to other means also in use. The choice is less and less a matter

of one among several means which are potentially applicable. It is really a question of finding the best means in the absolute sense, on the basis of numerical calculation."[13] The bulldozer and the computer are technique's version of the operation put through the conceptual wringer to advance technical desire but at great cost. The shovel and the abacus will not decimate forests or cloud the internet with false information. In my brief description of Ellul's historical examination of technology, consider the various forms of otherness that stood in technique's way but have been co-opted or put in technique's filing cabinet.

The key point is noting the change in an awareness during the process of becoming aware of this awareness. I offer an Hegelian interlude. While writing on my computer at this moment, I am aware of the keys and of the words appearing on the screen. The words do not flow from my pen or pencil, and I have no contact with the surface on which the words appear except to clean the screen. In my process of writing, typically, I go back to pen and paper and then to typing. As most writers know: writing is rewriting. I also know there is no one best way to write. Writing is a symbolic process in which I struggle with my thoughts, with their appearance on the page—I did not know that is what I wanted to say; it isn't, but it is better than what I wanted. And usually I have to get up and do some Tai Chi Chuan before I get back to my desk. As my thoughts-as-images become words, my thoughts and my words evolve and devolve, and then become something else for the moment. Aware of the power of technique to co-opt the moment, I choose to disallow it. I do not sit at the computer and type as dictated by the order of the day.

Ellul's description of the technical phenomenon offers seven characteristics, beginning with (1) rationality:

> this rationality, best exemplified in norms, and the like, involves two distinct phases: first, the use of "discourse" in every operation [under the two aspects this term can take: on the one hand, the intervention of intentional reflection, and, on the other hand, the intervention of means from one term to the other]; this excludes spontaneity and personal creativity. Second, there is the reduction of method to its logical dimension alone. Every intervention of technique is, in effect,

> a reduction of facts, forces, phenomena, means and instruments to the schema of logic.[14]

In translation, I have an idea and then describe it, only to wonder: could this idea be put better; am I mistaken? Wonder is the enemy of technique. What is the essence of what I thought? If the goal is to produce essences, and if essence and truth are understood as logical identities, then I fail. That is, if A is A, and if A cannot be both A and not A, does the real A, the essential A, ever appear? To me, never. If I write them one A is always to one side of the other. They are never identical. Or, if I say them, one A comes before the other and are still not identical. So, my knowledge of something keeps changing and shifting with the environment and with my attempts to know. As Ellul would argue, I know one thing for sure: only God knows the A in all of its aspects. As it stands, technical rationality plays God or plays with being God-like, and that is Ellul's point. Technique wears the shroud of an Absolute that is woven with six other threads.

The technical phenomenon is always (1) *artificial,* by definition. The trick, then, is to claim that it is better than the original, bringing memories of the Six Million Dollar man. This is made possible if what it is not, what made it possible, is forgotten. Driving a car is better than walking if the goal is to get somewhere fast but, typically, to get to the car one has to walk. Technical choice becomes (2) *automatic* if the faster, the larger, the quicker is better. A good way to kill an enemy would be with poison gas if the kill is the goal. But this way precludes getting to know that enemy and choosing another path. Technical choice is (3) *geometrically* altering, because one can never wholly predict the outcome. Who would have guessed that railway travel would have led to murder mysteries, impressionist painting, and the paperback book? Technical choice becomes (4) *monistic* with the golden rule: that which can be done will be done, on earth as it is in a Super 8 lobby. Technique then (5) spreads *universally* as all these proclivities add up, and we have (6) the new *sacred.* The Absolute appears, but only for the moment, however. The absolutes of technique are like the news. The true has to wait for the next iteration. The new is the notion behind each technical phenomenon, showing that, as an absolute, it is utterly false. The eternal and the new do not add up. Technique becomes what Hegel called a bad

infinity.[15] And for this reason it is not symbolic in Ellul's sense.

Ellul considered the importance of the symbol in these terms: the real world for Ellul is not the true world; the real world is the world of technique and its images that propagate without symbolizing but simply repeat the very system that creates them—and endless series of "nows" and "whatevers." The person who lives in the news is without matter and memory.

Ernst Cassirer's notion of the symbol, mentioned above, provides further insights. Cassirer (1874-1945) coined the term "symbolic form" by which he meant the power of the spirit to inhabit the material world and to give it shape.[16] Cassirer philosophically was a neo-Kantian and an Hegelian in a qualified sense. He adopted Kant's transcendental method of the schema, of understanding that all symbolic forms expressed specific "tonalities" of space, time, number, and cause and effect as applied to spirit sensually placed. Space and time were not grasped as abstract concepts but understood as aspects the forms take. And he was a Hegelian in his use of a dialectic that examines how awareness is changed (taken up) with an awareness of that awareness. The *en sich* (in-itself) is transformed by the *fur sich* (for-itself) in a relation of unresolved confrontation in which a new position appears that embodies the confrontation but is transcended, moved beyond.

In his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* Cassirer emphasizes three forms, conceding that the list was open-ended: myth, language, and science. These reveal the three functions of consciousness: the expressive (*ausdruksfunktion*), the representative (*darstellungsfunktion*), and the conceptual (*bedeutungsfunktion*). Each of these show three stages: the mimetic, the analogic, and the symbolic. Thus, myth has an expressive side, a representational side and a conceptual side that are exhibited in the above three stages. In myth as a symbolic form we have the expressions of myth and magic, the establishment of totems and boundaries together with the use of tools, and a nascent form of science, say chemistry, in the practice of alchemy. Thus, each form is similar to and different from the rest, with each in potential competition.

A viable culture kept the forms separate and productive in their own ways. The form of language was of particular importance, embodying a mimet-

ic and an indicative type of gesture: there is movement out toward the object and back toward the subject, a motion between image and word. This embodied movement exhibits the Hegelian dialectic: awareness and self- awareness combine to bring a new change, a new stage. Consciousness moves outward as an object and calls to be named with a quality of "symbolic pregnance."

> By symbolic pregnance we mean the way in which a perception as a sensory experience contains at the same time a certain nonintuitive meaning which it immediately and concretely represents. Here we are not dealing with bare perceptive data, on which some sort of aperceptive acts are later grafted, through which they are interpreted, judged, transformed. Rather, it is the perception itself which by virtue of its own immanent organization, takes on a kind of spiritual articulation—which, being ordered in itself, also belongs to a determinate order of meaning. In its full actuality, its living totality, it is at the same time a life "in" meaning.[17]

The object speaks as the sensuous and the non-sensuous combine. The now is alive in a present weighted by a past anticipating a future. Cassirer adds: "The symbolic process is like a single stream of life and thought which flows through consciousness, and which by this flowing movement produces the diversity and cohesion, the richness, the continuity, and constancy, of consciousness."[18] The form is like a human organ and not a collection of parts and qualities. The notion of mere perception would abstract the flow of moments united by memory and the imagination.[19]

Dimitry Gawronsky reported that Cassirer once told him that the whole idea for the philosophy of symbolic forms came to him while on a Berlin streetcar in 1917.[20] This led him to the symbolic pregnance that was the entire Warburg Library. This unique collection enabled him to flesh out the symbolic forms of religion, art, history, and technology and to develop the stages of the symbol: they all begin from mythic depths, proceed through analogical development, and bring forth conceptual elements. The form of art begins in myth and ritual, and imitation, then leads to its own objectifications and interpretations, and finally opens to invention, the creation of something new. Art, at best, does not simply copy nature, repeat intuitions, and provide uncontrolled self-expression, but intensifies sensory experience

and reveals dimensions beyond the senses. It also avoids conceptualization and repetition.[21] Cassirer wrote: "If language is to grow into a vehicle of thought, an expression of concepts and judgments, this evolution can be achieved only at the price of forgoing the wealth and fullness of immediate experience. […] Here (art) recovers the fullness of life; but it is no longer a life mythically bound and fettered, but an aesthetically liberated life."[22] Word and image as oppositions are recognized as forms of spirit's self-revelation in art.

Technology, as with all the forms, begins with myths and rituals, extends to tools and operations, and culminates in airplanes and skyscrapers—concepts embodied. Possibility opened for extended self-expression,23 but Cassirer harbored reservations: the tool had laws of its own;24 individuals could suffer an alienation from the natural world and from each other.25 Where the objectification of technical objects leads is open to question. He understood that worrisome changes in language had taken place:

> If we study our modern political myths and the use that has been made of them we find in them, to our great surprise, not only a transvaluation of all our ethical values but also a transformation of human speech. The magic word takes precedence of the semantic word. […] New words have been coined, and even the old ones are used in a new sense; they have undergone a deep change of meaning. […] those words which formerly were used in a descriptive, logical, or semantic sense, are now used as magic words that are destined to produce certain effects and to stir up certain emotions.[26]

The imitative and indicative directions of language have altered with no clear separation between them.[27] The indicative becomes the expressive but expressive of what? Not of tradition; not of nature.

In The Myth of the State, Cassirer wrote:

> The new political myths do not grow up freely; they are not the wild fruits of an exuberant imagination. They are artificial things fabricated by very skillful and cunning artisans. It has been reserved for the twentieth century, our own great technical age, to develop a new technique of myth. Henceforth myths can be manufactured in the same sense and according to the same methods as any other modern

weapons—as machine guns or airplanes.[28]

Words and images were used for the techniques of myth, to control and unite, but not to inform or to understand. What diminishes the powers expression and gesture, the bases of language and of symbol formation? Was technology anything more than applied or misapplied science for Cassirer? He did not have Ellul's portrait of technique as a life-world where time and space were no longer symbolized by the factory and the watch, becoming time and space itself. Technique is an incessant causal movement ending in apotheosis beyond any moral or aesthetic judgment. Cassirer adds, however, the epistemological importance of symbolic pregnance and the two aspects of gesture required by the necessary cultural forms of myth, language, and science in balance.

How Symbols Work

For Ellul, as for Cassirer, the symbol required an unresolved struggle with otherness that no longer abides. We are stuck with images and words that have lost tension and reference. By image, recall, Ellul means a sensuous presence that provides a sense of certainty, logical and existential.[29] We cannot see that white is both white and not white. But words can say that white is gray or blue, depending on mood or poetic inclination. The word, especially the one heard, is from the dimension that surrounds, from the relation between the seen and the not-seen. Ellul means both the literal word and the figurative word, especially the biblical word. The image divorced from the word is the vehicle of technique that is mere repetition instead of a profound imitation. It becomes the cliché mentioned above, the meaning that simply means itself; the image humiliated along with the word. But now I ask: how do the dimensions of the image and word appear at all? What precedes their appearances, their opposition? Is this important for assessing their collapse and for the humiliation of the symbol and the word?

A word that I utter or write comes at the cost of time, knowledge, privilege, and an audience who will hear or read it. I mean all that I have written in this essay. I include what I have just written at this moment. The rationality

of technique reduces words to images, identities, as noted above, to an unceasing march of "nows." Words prove a dimension that surrounds, loaded with paradox and metaphor. Words sustain; images without words exhaust. Ellul wrote in "How I Discovered Hope" that Romans 8 provided him with continual inspiration.[30] I found these words from Romans 8:18 to inform my reading of Ellul: "Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." God gives us language that conditions our freedom, in which we are free to do wrong, to make mistakes, and then to know and to learn from these mistakes, which I suppose are also God-given, or at least allowed.

For Ellul, on my reading, God is the whole, the totality of what could be known and what is not known; the seen and the unseen, what words and images struggle for and against. Ellul's critique of technology took shape along with his symbolic reading of the Bible that made sense out of what had become non-sense: attempts at symbol-making that wallpaper the real but abjure the true. And that, I think, is the true. The true is the whole, the business of trying to make meaning in the first and last place. The Bible is not a machine, he continually claimed, and he hoped that God's creation—what the human did not make—was not, or should not, be a machine. Ellul had a religious epiphany while translating Goethe's *Faust*. After that overwhelming moment he got on his bicycle and pedaled and pedaled.[31] And in his lifetime he authored over sixty books and a thousand articles.

In 1933 Cassirer and his wife Toni left Nazi Germany, traveled and taught abroad—carrying the complete works of Goethe. He settled in the United States, leaving the decadence of the Weimar culture but retaining the notion of the fragility of culture embodied in the tension between Heraclitus' bow and lyre, a harmony in contrariety.32 If human meaning is produced in the forms that express culture, is there nothing beyond culture? Is there a metaphysics behind the symbolic forms, a place from which to read the tragedies that cultures are heir to? Donald Philip Verene states that Cassirer had read Goethe's maxims and produced a sketch of what a metaphysics of symbols would be like. First, we have an I. Not just a Cartesian I in a room reasoning and waiting for visits from the evil genius. But an I in search. And then, an action against some non-I. An objectivity.

So far, nothing new. Cassirer's Hegel would have agreed. But the final moment was in a "work," werk. And here, Verene notes, we have new ground. He writes:

> Cassirer's synthesis of these two methods of philosophy allows him to conceive the *Werk* of philosophy as contemplation. He says that Socrates is the discoverer of the sphere of the work as contemplation. "In the history of philosophy it is Socrates who discovers this sphere, who puts it forth and establishes it as a central object for philosophical investigation and 'marvel' [*Verwunderung*] (PSF4:184)." Contemplation is the reaction to Wonder and the means by which it can be sustained. [….] Wonder is the phenomenon that is embodied in the work.[33]

Wonder is what sustained me when I discovered Ellul after reading Hegel and Cassirer. I found a voice speaking and writing from a Christian perspective of the sort I had never read or heard, and that echoes still in the institutions of culture that remain, in the hope of a presence in absence and of the symbols that allow the visible invisible.

Notes

1 Jacques Ellul, "Symbolic Function, Technology and Society," *Journal of Social and Biological Systems* 1, no. 3 (1978): 210.
2 Jacques Ellul, *The Empire of Non-Sense: Art in the Technological Age,* trans. Michael Johnson and David Lovekin (Berkshire, UK: Papadakis Press, 2014), 30–31.
3 Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970).
4 Jacques Ellul, "Symbolic Function, Technology and Society," 209.
5 G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London and New York: Humanities Press, 1969), 149.
6 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Michael Inwood (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 2018), 11.
7 Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society,* trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964), xxv.
8 Jacques Ellul, *Metamorphose du bourgeois* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1967), 235–236. Lovekin translation.
9 See David Lovekin, *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1991), 201–207.
10 Ellul, *Technological Society,* 23–60.
11 Ellul, 43.

12 Ellul, 21.
13 Ellul, 21.
14 Ellul, 79. I have modified Wilkinson's otherwise fine translation with additions in brackets. Ellul discusses the characteristics in *Technological Society*, 77–147. For a more complete account of the seven characteristics see Lovekin, *Technique*, 52–187.
15 Lovekin, 98–105.
16 Donald Phillip Verene, *The Origins of the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: Kant, Hegel, and Cassirer* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 13.
17 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms,* trans. Ralph Manheim, vol. 3 (London and New Haven; Yale university Press, 1963), 202.
18 Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms,* 202.
19 Cassirer, 162–190.
20 Dimitry Gawronsky, "Ernst Cassirer: His Life and Work," in *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer,* ed. Paul Arthur Schlipp (Evanston, IL: Tudor, 1949), 21.
21 Ernst Cassirer, "Language and Art II," in *Symbol, Myth, and Culture, Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer,* ed. Donald Phillip Verene (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 186–187.
22 Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth,* trans. Susanne K. Langer (New York: Dover, 1946), 98.
23 Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms,* trans. John Michael Krois, vol. 4 (London and New Haven: Yale University Press1996), 41.
24 Ernst Cassirer, "Form and Technology," in *Ernst Cassirer on Form and Technology: Contemporary Readings,* eds. Aud Sissel Hoel and Ingvild Folkvord (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 40.
25 Cassirer, "Form and Technology,"48–49.
26 Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1946), 283.
27 Cassirer, *Myth*, 282.
28 Cassirer, 282.
29 Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word,* trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 9–11. See also, Lovekin, *Technique,* 207–214.
30 Jacques Ellul, "How I Discovered Hope," trans. Alfred Krass and Martine Wessel in *The Ellul Forum* 65 (Spring 2020), 5–8.
31 Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1994), 52.
32 Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1944), 222–223, 228.
33 Verene, *Origins,* 85–86.

The Two Orders and the Appearance of the World

Samir Younés

For the past two centuries, thinking about the visual arts has been overshadowed by two grand cultural narratives locked in ferocious opposition: the Classical and the Historicist. Both narratives derived from perceived orders in the world, and from projected orders onto the world. The Classical addressed the idea of order in Nature as a paradigm for order in society, while Historicism addressed order in relation to the immanent values of a given society. This narrative, in its reformulation in the early 20th century, became one of the philosophical justifications for artistic Modernism.

Historicism now dominates public discourse, but not completely. In many traditions around the world the practice of the Classical remains, though in a diminished way. In the 1970s and 80s the cultural phenomenon called Postmodernism was one of the revolts against the strictures of Modernism as the only acceptable form of Modernity. Although Postmodernism never amounted to a system of artistic thought, it allowed artists to learn from the experience of previous traditions. Whereas Modernism was monistic, Postmodernism was pluralistic; it was open to various artistic positions. It was in this context that Ellul's *L'empire du non sens* was launched.[1] Ellul went directly to the point: most of what passes for Modernist art theory was completely determined by technique. Furthermore, it was one of the ways in which art was used to induct the mind into the technological system. Although L'Empire was largely ignored by artists and architects, it remains an important contribution to thinking about Modernist art. This essay will discuss the many effects of these narratives, on the making of art, on understanding art, on the images of the world, and on the uses of the

"The Two Orders and the Appearance of the World." *Ellul Forum* 70 (Fall 2022): 21–34.

hand, with reference to Ellul's illuminating insights.

The Classical Narrative

The Classical narrative took Nature as the superlative source for cultural paradigms. It saw a causal relation between Nature understood in her laws (*natura naturans*) and nature understood in her products (*natura naturata*). Products of nature were understood as embodiments of the laws of Nature. By extension the human-made imitated the nature-made as a set of paradigms, as a set of exemplars. One of the most enduring concepts in the visual arts is this sense that artistic principles evolved from dual origins: on the one hand, from observation of Nature and nature, and on the other, from the artistic conventions that imitated natural laws. The latter, for example, include proportions, which may encompass the relations between the parts of a whole, the hierarchy of forms, the propriety of form to purpose, or the adequacy of the artistic form in fulfilling the purpose. The Classical narrative saw a unity of principles animating the nature-made and the human-made. Painting, sculpture, and architecture are human-made forms that could have been made by Nature had Nature herself been the painter, the sculptor, the architect.

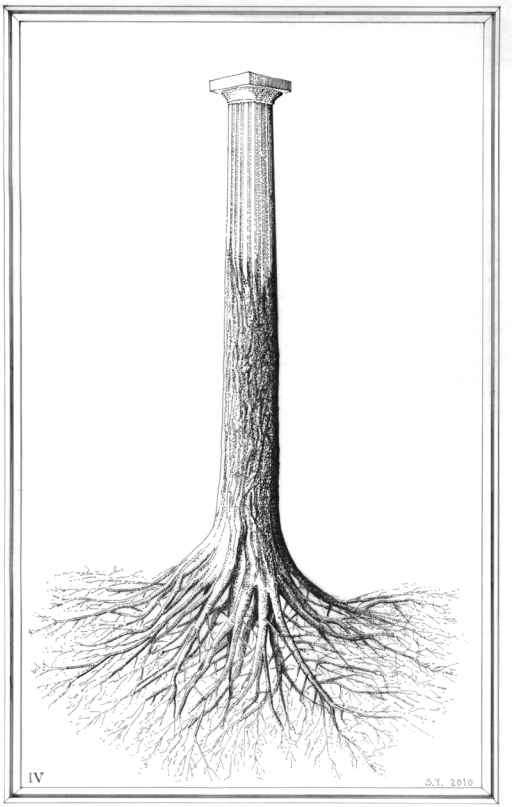

Fig.1 *Samir Younés, Colonnatura IV. An allegory of Nature and Architecture, 2010*

The history of art and architecture, and history in general, were written in order to demonstrate how cultural values and forms derived from Nature, from natural law. For Classicism, nature-made objects—and by imitation human-made objects—have an essence that endures beyond everyday con-

tingencies and modifications. Forms change, but in a much slower fashion than demanded by Modernism, and when change occurs, these forms still retain identifiable and enduring qualities. Classicism developed a set of enduring ideas around historical experience. It gave authority to these enduring ideas, but that authority was the authority of reason: collective reason as embodied in conventions and traditions. In this view, individual works of art, as particular historical phenomena, are contingent expressions informed by enduring and formative ideas that gave meaning and provided the measure to empirical daily experience. Architects, for example, good architects, speak of the solid, the useful, the commodious, the beautiful, along with symmetry, eurythmy, and propriety.

To achieve their contemporary work, visual artists looked to the enduring aspects of their respective traditions from two standpoints. The first advocated the maintaining of tradition based on the authority of great historical exemplars. The second operated on the assumption that the continuation of a tradition is justified only by collectively reasoned agreement about what has proven successful in that tradition; otherwise, the practice would be discontinued. In other words, the ongoing use of tradition was accepted after being rationally proven by experience. This, in brief, was the position of the Classical narrative which had been in operation across cultures for centuries until it came to be eclipsed by the second grand narrative: Historicism.

The Historicist Narrative

Historicism assailed the Classical, considering it as a fixed and absolutist outlook that uniformly applied the same theory to the study and the evolution of the nature-made and the human-made. Historicism separated the natural and the human realms, seeing no common principles that animated both. The nature-made, it contended, is categorically separable from the human-made. It rejected the belief in universal ideas which are abstracted from development and from temporality. It also opposed certain assumptions inherited from Enlightenment rationalism, such as the supposedly unchanging laws of Nature and supposedly unchanging human nature, and replaced them with a view of nature and society in constant change. The

radical aspect of the Historicist interpretation of reality was its affirmation of the primacy of historicity, of temporality, of contingency, of the non-enduring, its emphasis of the particular over the universal, and its assertion that all phenomena and their cognition are always in a state of becoming—forms arise, change, transform into newer shapes, or dissolve. As all human productions, the visual arts can only be studied and understood according to the social context in which they emerged, and the principal task of the artist or historian was to understand that very social context from within (as in J.G. Herder's *einfühling*, feeling into) while refraining from projecting onto it an external content that may alter the understanding of its past reality. The visual arts were a unique expression of their culture and time, and they were progressing according to laws of growth and change deriving from the unique historical experience of that social context. Society and artistic styles were linked causally, while style was considered the bearer of societal meanings. These were some of the concerns of Historicism in its early developments, as seen in the work of Leopold von Ranke and later Friedrich Meinecke.

Historical change followed some determining patterns which the Historicist explanation sought to prove through an extensive accumulation of facts arranged in a chronological order. But these determining patterns did not reside within the paradigms of a transcendent Nature as embodied in the traditions of Classicism; rather, they were located within the immanent cultural values of a continuously changing culture. Ideals no longer resided in a glorious past as an *apriori* given. Rather, ideals were to emerge from the clashing events of daily empirical experience.

Central to understanding historical reality itself was the notion that cultural forms were ever in a state of becoming or in gradual change—a notion pivotal to the very essence of Modernity. To Historicist change Hegelian and Marxian thought added a progressive character in which becoming meant a transition from 'lower' to 'higher' forms. Thus was the notion of a universally valid and *past* ideal replaced by that of a universally valid *future* ideal. When Historicism assailed the certainties of Classicism, it did not erase the notion of certainty itself. It simply replaced one set of certainties with another. More precisely, Historicism accepted a variety of certainties,

some weaker, others more forceful.

One of the most forceful Historicist certainties was the concept of historical determinism. With the considerable authority exerted by Hegelian teleology, determinism reached an overarching historical scope where cultural productions were inescapably led by a spirit of the age (zeitgeist, the spirit of a given time frame) influencing nations and individuals. This spirit was evolutionary in the sense that it was considered as the moving force behind changes in form, e.g. governing the passage from the Romanesque to the Gothic, Gothic to Renaissance, Renaissance to Baroque, and so forth. An era's cultural products were not only expressions or conformations to the assumed zeitgeist, but the products themselves were justified based on this very assumption. For this overarching reason Hegelian historians tried to associate artistic composition(s)—which they called style—with the determinations of the zeitgeist. In fact, they blended several things: (1) artistic composition, (2) ways of slicing time, (3) the zeitgeist, (4) and a teleological view of the world in which progress was assured by technology. Some philosophers and historians, but especially artists and architects, seemed particularly adept at identifying the spirit of eras in general, and especially the spirit of the modern era, at the same time as it was manifesting. Nevertheless, Modernist architects and artists—the true Historicists—believed they knew with certainty what this impending spirit was and how to imminently embody it in their daily work. As promethean artists, they knew how to sculpt the real and render it pliable to their will, which was the will of their age. Many artists and architects also believed that they were called upon to fulfill a historic mission to manifest the zeitgeist and be its most faithful and enthusiastic apologists.

The more forceful exponents of Historicism claimed to have discovered the laws that underlie history and saw historical events as purportedly evolving in a certain direction that was determined by *their* overarching narratives (e.g. the notion of the arrow of time, the direction of history).[2] One problem associated with this conception is that it applied the same understanding of progress to the sciences and the arts alike. Whereas the sciences and the arts evolve, they do not do so in the same way and not necessarily according to the same patterns. Accordingly, artistic forms were said to be

evolving following determining historical forces, and these forces were in turn evolving in a particular direction—again, a direction that Modernist artists and architects were particularly adept at manifesting. Other concepts, such as that of a zeitgeist and of a *weltanschauung* (a world-view, a world-image), and of teleology and progressivity, merged with Historicism, thus making it a dominant cultural force. The zeitgeist required its own images, the *weltanschauungen*, and these were the images that are suitable for a specific time frame. These were the images of presentness. Note that the Classical speaks of images suitable for a place while Modernism speaks of images that fit the time. Place, in Modernism, is less of a concern, and sometimes not a concern at all.

Fig. 2. Beaubourg, *or* Centre Pompidou, Paris. *By Richard Rogers, Sue Rogers, Renzo Piano, and Gianfranco Franchini. Completed in 1977 and rebuilt in 2000.*

Art historians of a Historicist bent applied these general conceptions developed in the philosophy of history and in social science to artistic knowledge. They wrote narratives using stylistic classifications where each period is qualified by its own unique style and each style was distinguished by an

inexorable rupture from previous styles. Such a construct became a vessel for Historicist claims in the visual arts in which stylistic ruptures were assured by determinist forces operating in history. Once teleological thinking came to permeate this construct, historical styles came to be seen as steps leading to the apotheosis of Modernism—as if by necessity. Other views regarding the development of art were rejected with a decisive sleight of hand.

That the Modernist architect and artist considered themselves the embodiment of autonomy and freedom from any conformism did not prevent them from holding this position simultaneously with the providentialist belief that the artistic forms of the modern age obediently reflected the dominant zeitgeist. The zeitgeist was unassailable. For decades, apologists of Modernism did not acknowledge the glaring contradiction between calling for the autonomy of every art—indeed the autonomy of every artist—on the one hand, and on the other, accepting historical determinism, and later, technological determinism. To achieve their work in faithfulness to this spirit, artists had to sever their connections with previous traditions by the continual search for new forms, and these forms/images were expressed by the latest technology which, in turn, represented the new society—the technological society. The world was apprehended within a new kind of image: a technological image, which Modernists heralded as *the one image* valid for their preferred cultural resonances. It is worthy of note that in contrast to the German romantics' use of the term *weltanschauung*, in the sense of a view of the world, recent Postmodernist uses of the term have tended to employ it in the plural sense of "images of the world". Hence Martin Heidegger's observation that the peculiarity of the modern era was to see the world as *bild*, as an image.

The Image and the Hand

Both orders, the Classical and the Historicist, were and are accompanied by their own sets of images. There are two sets of images because there are two cultures—the one humanist, the other technological—and visual artists have been haplessly oscillating between both. This parallels, although

not exactly, C.P. Snow's intent in his book *The Two Cultures* to overcome the divide between humanist culture and scientific culture. Now, however, the most acute divide occurs between humanist culture and the world of technique, which is not necessarily the world of the sciences.

Visual artists and their critics apprehend the world and make the world imagistically. Ellul, by contrast, is a man of the word whose sensibilities are more inclined toward symbolic content, to the meaning that should underlie artistic form and justify it. Much of his understanding of the world is mediated by the word, and less so by the image. In fact, Ellul was quite alarmed by the invasive proliferation of images in the technological society. His strong Protestant aesthetics played a significant role in this distress which he expressed as a religious conflict between the visual realm and the verbal realm, between the image and the word. But Ellul was not an enemy of visual culture. He was most concerned about a particular kind of image, a triumphalist image whose empire humiliated the word, namely: the technological image that frames the minds of citizens. Citizens of the technological society were consumers of images that were justified by an ideology that glorified presentness as the leading edge of Modernity. Ellul averred that,

> With the ideology of instantaneity in art, with immediacy, with spontaneous creativity (the happening, etc..), we are in the presence of a pure assimilation into the technological processes, and a total negation of all that has been considered art since the beginning.[3]

Ellul rightly lamented the humiliation of the word by the image. But he worried mostly about the mindset that sees only one valid image for a world whose appearance is supposed to be technologically determined. Yet this was not the only humiliation; the tool with which the image is fashioned has been humiliated as well. But the hand—humanity's first tool for crafting the image—was humiliated first. The tool has been humiliated because the hand had been humiliated before. In fact, one of the victims of the technological image has been the distancing, and sometimes rupture, between the mind-eye-hand-tool-art connection. This, by the way, is an extraordinarily efficient connection.

With your indulgence, let us consider the hand briefly. Let us consider the hand poetically, or rather poietically (from the Greek verb *poein*, to make). Is the hand an animated being? We think so when we say that the hand solicits a direction from the mind. But the hand also has its own physiognomy; in fact, it has many physiognomies. Have you looked at your finger for example and endowed it with a physiognomy that recalls a face? Do you deduce the full body's physiognomy, or rather its proportions, from looking at the hand?

When we admire a painting, say in the presence of the painter, we invariably look at the hand and then we look at the face. We feel the need to find a certain alignment between the work of art, the hand that produced it, and the face that enveloped the mind that directed the hand. We would like to see the face to which the hand belongs. The painting returns meaning to the consciousness that imagined it, and the hand and the brush mediate this relationship. Some people assume that a philosopher, a pianist, a harpist, a painter, an architect, a surgeon, an accountant, or a baker have varying lengths and proportions of fingers that correspond to their vocations. Among artists, the hand is alive, and the hand implies livelihood. It implies action. It makes. Have you ever looked at the reach of Arthur Rubinstein's fingers?

To paraphrase Henri Focillon: *L'art se fait avec la main* (art is made by hand). The hand serves the mind and the eye, but it is a proud servant that demands much respect, and care. We should listen to the hand, especially when it asks the mind for direction. The hand also shows the diversity of emotional states: a hurried drawing betrays a frantic hand and behind them an agitated set of emotions.

Blind people use the hand in a seeing way, because the touch perceives, reinforces, and corroborates what the hand has identified. But sight alone is insufficient; seeing people, too, need the hand to see. That is why we caress the delicate carving of stones in archaeological sites. The hand also literally speaks as in the case of mute individuals. Considered poietically, the hand not only makes, it also speaks. Note also the camaraderie, or rather the *compagnonnage*, the guilds of artists and artisans who use the hand.

The hand can imply elegance as in the entwined hands of the Three Graces in Boticelli's *Primavera*, or the hand movements of the ballerina in *Swan Lake*, or Rodin's *La main de Dieu*. And who could forget Jacques Louis David's Socrates raising his finger prior to taking the hemlock, or Gaetano Cellini's *L'umanità contro il male* (humanity against evil). The mind directs the hand and shapes its movements; but the hand, too, shapes the mind's approaches to art. Because the maker's intentions and skills are refined by the made, the made—in turn—shapes the maker. The hand of the sculptor, the painter, the architect in action illuminates the void of space and the solidity of objects within that space. This, of course, is apprehended by sight, but in the process of drawing, the hand allows the solids and voids to be experienced in a nearly tactile way.

The hand and the tool are accomplices in producing works of art. The hand that makes the tool does so in direct relation to the demands of the mind and the body. But let us not forget that the hand and the tool mutually transform each other—calluses are a proof of skills in development. The hand needs to develop and learn the movements necessary for the tool to complete the task properly, and in the process the tool is "rounded" as it accrues the patina of age and use. As a result of the complicity between the hand and the tool, all tools are rounded by use. Even cities are rounded by centuries of use as in the formerly sharp edges of the hills of Rome.

Manual Drawing and Computer Graphics

The images of the technological age, the *weltanschauungen* that have been justified by Historicism/Modernism and technology, have had a deleterious effect on what we just described regarding the hand. To the computer was given the task of proliferating these technological images on every continent. Given the stupendous works of art produced throughout history one is astounded by the remarkably short time it took for computer graphics to displace and then eclipse manual drawing. It is therefore useful to differentiate between manual drawing and computer graphics. A significant number of visual artists today express grave doubts about whether drawing will survive for one more generation in academia and in practice. In my dis-

cipline, architectural schools presently award diplomas to students who no longer draw manually. It sounds like a contradiction in terms, does it not? An architect who does not draw.

Both manual drawing and computer graphics have been placed at the intersection between ideation and realization, but they have widely divergent effects regarding the images with which the world is built. Computer enthusiasts usually deride the critics of computer graphics by telling them that the pencil and the computer are both tools, that it is only a matter of time before one is accustomed to this new tool, and that resistance to computer graphics is equivalent to being intentionally behind the times. Explaining away the significant differences between manual drawing and computer graphics by considering them as "just tools" in an equal sense presupposes that the tools for drawing are neutral instruments that have no effect on the designer's intentionality. In their zeal, computer enthusiasts insisted that the artistic mind was unchanged by the tools at its disposition. Herein lies a grave error in understanding the symbolic nature of a tool, and why it is difficult for a technical phenomenon, such as the computer, to be symbolic in any comparable way.

Mind-eye-hand are ontologically interdependent, and the tool, such as the pencil, allows them to reach out to the world: *seeing* its images and meanings as they are, and *seeing into* its images and meanings as they could be, and perhaps as they should be.[4] The drawn object returns meaning to the consciousness that imagined it, and the tool mediates this relationship. These are some of the reasons that make symbolic thought possible through the mediation of the tool, and these are also some of the reasons why manual drawing and the tool are positioned at the intersection between the ideation and realization of architectural and artistic form.

With the replacement of the tool by the technical phenomenon, that is, with the replacement of the pencil by AutoCAD, the mediation of the body and the extension of the tool into the world have been replaced. We can say that 'the pen is mightier than the sword', but how strange it is to say that 'Revit BIM software is mightier than the sword'. If the manifestation of artistic form previously depended on a symbolic thought that instantiat-

ed expression and representation through manual skill, this manifestation has now been replaced by technical processes and operations and the near elimination of what has hitherto been known as symbolism, whether it is art imitating Nature, or symbolizing religious themes, or social mores.

It is important to note that the *augmentation* of technical phenomena and means has been accompanied with a *diminution* in symbolic form and meaning as well as humanity's mediation using tools. Ellul showed that by replicating themselves, technical phenomena 'symbolize' themselves. Extending this thought a bit further, one can affirm that a symbol that symbolizes itself is a condition of no sense—of non-sense. And once this phenomenon explodes in society, it becomes an empire of non-sense.

The massive production of technical phenomena, all made with the utmost rationality and efficiency possible, means that these phenomena not only occupy the real, but they have become the 'only real', the 'absolutely real'. They have acquired an unassailable aura of necessity. When technical phenomena in great number entwine with the belief that their necessity must remain unquestionable, the result is that technology appears to be infinite, an infinity that acquires its own metaphysic simply because it is omnipresent. In their proliferation, technological images induce "ideo-motor" actions, to use William James' expression. Relentless repetition of technological images tends to form and conform the mind by inducing other technological images, and these images become the first stages of physical acts that transform the world accordingly. Many "inventive" forms produced by architects today have less to do with their creativity and more to do with the software that they use.

Do computer graphics not compel the mind to work in a particular direction, and is the role of the architect or artist in this case not that of an editor? But the technological mind considers the multiplication or proliferation of means as a necessary condition for artistic freedom—the dubious belief that the increase in means necessarily entails an increase in the freedom of expression. Only this proliferation of means, Ellul insisted, makes for a freedom from which the artist cannot escape. With this triumph of means, with the triumphalism of technological images, any combination

of forms becomes possible. Artistic genres, or traditional modes of artistic composition, are considered obstacles in comparison to the emancipatory and seductive technological means. Yet, contrary to prevalent belief, technological means, or succeeding software programs, do not necessarily facilitate the expansion of artistic freedom, nor the quality of the art, nor graphic precision.

Computer graphics acquire an aura of inevitability and necessity because they are part and parcel of a technical system that has become the aggregate of all means and all ends; forming an infinite continuum without closure, without limit. Computer graphics coordinate well and they attune the mind to the technological society's relentless pursuit of utmost rationality and efficiency. Yet, for all their versatility, computer graphics do not allow for the subtlety and nuanced expressions of manual drawings, while hand-made drawings always appear different because they express directly the personalities of their makers. Computer graphics almost always exhibit sameness requiring much effort to personalize them. Still, one does not have to use computer graphics in order to produce drawings that are totally integrated into the technical system.

In their motion pictures, directors Francis F. Coppola, Stephen Spielberg, and Christopher Nolan insist on using film (mostly) rather than digital technology; and they do so not because of an attachment to an older and obsolete technology, but because film allows them to achieve a certain aesthetic that, despite its considerable flexibility, digital technology still does not provide. The same applies to some artists and architects who are adept at both hand drawing and painting as well as computer graphics. Their preference for manual drawing has less to do with backward technophobic sentiments and more to do with an artistic sensibility that is attained by the mind-eye-hand dialectic, even if the refinement or perfection of manual drawing may take longer to achieve. The most accomplished artists today who use computer graphics have begun their careers as perspectivists and painters formed on the foundations of great art. But their numbers are diminishing considerably, and the new generation of architectural renderers have largely been exposed to the world of computer graphics, cinematographic simulation, and the imagery of advertising empires. For the

near future, the most accomplished artists have recommended temporary 'hybrid' drawing methods based on knowledge of great art as well as the more expedient aspects of computer graphics.

Since the early 1990s many artists and architects have joined forces forming various private ateliers as well as schools within established academies and universities where manual drawing is of paramount importance.[5] Many of these artists are quite familiar with computer graphics, but they choose to draw with the hand and the tool continuing the long-enduring tradition of great art. They are thoroughly anchored to modern society in their outlook and seek to imbue it with their humanism. They have seen how the attempts at reforming Modernism and its technologically-determined products by infusing it with humanist values have nearly all failed. But these artists are also keenly aware that their work is not a way to preserve or rescue lost artistic knowledge and methods. They do not act as conservationists of art, for that is the task of the museum. Rather, they practice their art as a living tradition, one that is taught and practiced by free minds working together on common artistic goals. All is not lost.

Notes

1 See Jacques Ellul, *The Empire of Non-Sense: Art in the Technological Society*, trans. Michael Johnston, with introductory essays by Samir Younés and David Lovekin (Winterbourne, UK: Papadakis, 2014).

2 Karl Popper's comprehensive critique of Historicism pertained more to the scientific explanation.

3 Jacques Ellul, *La parole humiliée* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 249–250. Author's translation.

4 On Ludwig Wittgenstein's aesthetic reactions see Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief, ed. Cyril Barrett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966).

5 Most prominent among these institutions is the School of Architecture at the University of Notre Dame and the Florence Academy of Art.

Does the End of Art Signify the End of Man? Beyond the Technical System: the Place of Lyricism in Our Conception of Water

Justine McIntyre

I have chosen a question as the title for this paper. It is very likely that, on reading the question, you have already begun to mentally formulate a response; for the question—as all questions do—begs an answer. Many signs around us appear to point to an affirmative response and so we may feel ourselves drawn to concur with the sombre forecast implied. After all, has not Art as we knew it, the High Art worthy of capitalization, been dead and buried for some time? Have we not lost our eye and ear for harmony in both sound and figure, as well as in social and political relations? Perhaps there remains some lyricism yet dormant in our collective unconscious, although brutalised by the constant barrage of distractions mainlined via an increasing panoply of technical devices.

Before coming round to our question, we should first examine how we have arrived here—here being at the brink of climate disaster and mass extinction, witnesses to an increasingly reckless and unyielding techno-capitalist system of deepening inequalities.

Jacques Ellul (1977) offers a clear and compelling response: it is our enthrallment with all things technical, our constant pursuit of the amelioration of our human condition, which has led us to the creation of a technical system that we no longer control and—quite to the contrary—that we now serve. All our creative efforts are now smoothly redirected, pointed towards the overarching imperatives of technicity, speed and efficiency.[1] Art is none of these things. Art is slow and contemplative. Art forces the artist first to disengage from social-economic imperatives so as to be able to observe, then to think, then to synthesise, and finally to communicate through the

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creation of a work of art that embodies this process. In creating Art, technique remains at the service of expression and not vice-versa.

To illustrate, I draw on a composer often cited as a reference with respect to his technical mastery—J.S. Bach. There is no question that Bach was an absolute master of contrapuntal technique, as is illustrated by the two volumes of "The Well-Tempered Clavier" featuring one Prelude and Fugue set for each tone of the chromatic scale, major and minor, a feat that Bach accomplished with bravado—and then repeated over again, his musical invention seeming to know no limits. While the preludes are composed in various forms (one might say "freestyle"), the fugues follow a strict set of technical rules: a short musical theme (the "subject") is stated, then taken up by the other "voices"—up to five!—against which the first voice continues its musical trajectory by means of the countersubject, all the threads weaving together to form a technically coherent whole.

However, technical coherency was for Bach only a means to an end. Although he was a bit of a showoff at times, managing to weave in half-time, backward, and even inverted subject variants, all of this technical flair was aimed at a greater purpose, namely to delight and to please people in order to inspire them towards God. For the devout Lutheran Bach, what more perfect proof of the Creator's presence than this auditory ecstasy, the indescribable pleasure of experiencing through sound, spun out note by note, the perfection and complexity of mathematical principles fitting together harmoniously, transitory musical tensions resolving in glorious cadences? Busy with composing music and keeping his affairs in order, Bach had little time for documenting his creative process; however, marginalia found in his personal copy of Calov's Lutheran Bible reads: "*NB Bey einer andächtigen Musiq ist allezeit Gott mit seiner Gnaden Gegenwart*" (NB In a music of worship God is always present with his grace).[2]

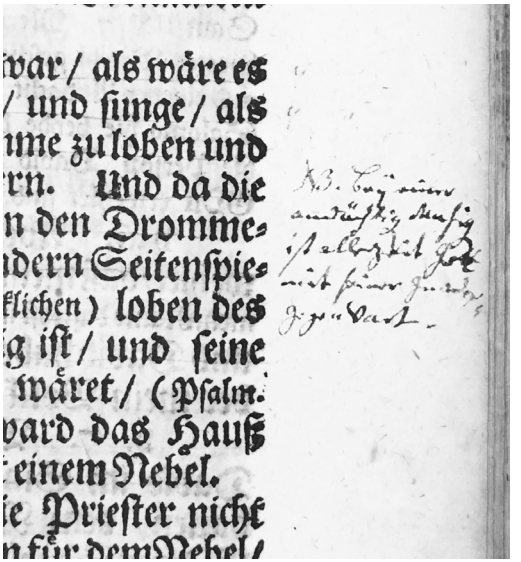

Fig. 1. *J.S. Bach, marginalia, Calov Bible, 1733.*

Compare with this the dry serialism of the contemporary composers such as Arnold Schoenberg, whose 12-tone technique was a highly theorised and codified methodical manipulation of tones without regard for notions of melody, and in which both rhythm and harmony were reduced to mathematical operations—an art form from which regard for beauty is conspicuously absent. Here it may be helpful to propose a framework for defining beauty as having both inherent qualities (relating to consonance and to proportion for example, as phenomena existing in nature and reflected in Art) as well as those deriving from shared cultural notions of what constitutes beauty—a good example of this is the quarter-tone, expressing poignancy in many of the Eastern music traditions, a subtlety to which the Western ear is insensitive, perceiving instead a note that wavers between two known "solid" half-tones. While Schoenberg and his followers may have hoped, over time, to cultivate in their audience an appreciation for atonality as a modern form of beauty (an acquired taste indeed, one which perhaps only a very few highly rarefied music theorists may relish, and even then they are likely pretending) he certainly could not hope to achieve beauty through any *inherent* quality of his work. Indeed, quite to the contrary: not only are atonal composers' works lacking in beauty, they are deliberately voided[3] of it. In his *Theory of Harmony* (1911), Schoenberg considers atonal music a "liberation" from tonality, arguing that beauty is a quality pertaining only to the individual, and cannot be collectively defined.[4] This is in keeping with the atomisation aspect of Technique.

In deliberately avoiding evocations of beauty that appeal to either inherent or cultivated notions, modern art exposes its first fundamental rupture with every art form that precedes. Once its main objective, the fundamental gesture towards establishing a sympathetic connection, via a common aesthetic reference, with the viewer / audience is no longer an objective at all. Henceforth, the modern art forms critiqued by Ellul in *L'Empire du non-sens* (1980) fall into one of two categories: militant art—art with a unidirectional message (which, to be precise, is not art, rather ideological propaganda), and anti-art—which specifically distances itself from meaning in order to focus only on form (a sound, a colour, the frame, or even simply the gesture itself forming both the starting point and the "point" of the work). "*C'est tout!*" Peripheral to these two forms of modern art are *decoration* (as in

a purely frivolous "bourgeois" aestheticism, making paintings into "wall art" and music into "soothing sounds") and *entertainment*, which Ellul classifies as escapism, a necessary counterpart to the dehumanising constraints of the technical society, which—in alleviating our anxiety—enables the system's perpetuation.

The second major revolution of modern Art is that it does not seek its point of reference in the natural world. From well before Bach, and up until the serialists, Art had always been anchored in the natural world, from which artists sought inspiration, and from which they drew a commonality of meaning that could be understood and, perhaps more importantly, *deeply felt by their audience.*

> Man was bathed in the natural world, he had no intercourse except with the air and the water, the rain and the trees […] even when he lived in the city. In his strangest inventions, in his most unbridled aesthetic creation, he always took these elementary realities as his starting point.[5]

Once modern artists (acting in actual fact as *technicists*) had effectively decoupled artistic creation from the natural world, and were no longer concerned with communicating meaning through a commonly defined concept of beauty, modern art lost its ability to move us deeply. We, as citizens of a technical society, have become estranged from artistic meaning, so that a Brahms symphony, to modern ears, is a succession of quaint but otherwise meaningless sounds. And at the same time, humanity has lost a powerful and important aspect of our essential Being: an ability to express, through Art, our deep connection with Nature.

Water Music

As the technical world supplants the natural world, it simultaneously eradicates the lyrical world in which we once evolved—a world imbued with cultural-territorial significance, passed down by our predecessors through the songs, stories, fables, and allegories that served as artistic inspiration while also providing important information about our environment and ourselves. Ellul writes: "there are no other relationships between man and nature, the entire set of complex and fragile links that man had patient-

ly woven: poetic, magical, mythical, symbolic disappears; there is only the technical mediation which imposes itself and becomes total."[6]

Technology (more broadly, "*Technique*" for Ellul) replaces complex and meaningful interactions, so that modern daily rituals become primarily mechanical. Drawing water from the well, for example, is supplanted by turning the tap and behind it, an entire invisible technical network of re-direction, capture, filtration, pumping and piping such that the old stories, myths and legends relating to the drawing of water are emptied of their significance and exist only as relics of a former civilization. Compared to the river or the well, there is nothing particularly lyrical about a tap. As increasingly sophisticated technical devices are interposed between people and the natural world, the language to express our attachment to the world falters, until finally the bond is lost, and our sensibility to nature, numbed. Hence, despite urgent and compelling messages warning that we must change our behaviour or suffer grave consequences for the planet and for human societies, we do not; nature's pleas leave us indifferent. Besides, we believe the system will work out its own solutions: this is the false promise of "green growth".

Looking specifically at water as the primordial condition for life and on which, despite our many and varied technical achievements, life still depends, we can observe that in post-colonial, techno-capitalist North-American societies:[7] water has ceased to exist in our collective consciousness beyond the operation or service it provides us. Once the stuff of dreams, poetry, and mythology, but now detached from its life-significance, water is voided of its meaning, drained of its historical and cultural contexts, and reduced to a utility defined by the operations we perform on it and by the technical services it renders to us.

To understand how this came about, we must first accept that water, in addition to its physical manifestation as a thing-in-itself, is also a social construct. Water-as-being and water-as-service can be distinguished as, respectively, "water" and "H20", much in the same way as "land" and "property" are two forms of physical and social constructs relating to firm ground. This theme has been explored by Jamie Linton in his book entitled "What is Water?" (2010), a dialectical exploration of water as an historical subject.[8]

As our cognitive frames shape our experience of things, in doing so, they contribute to shaping the things themselves to "fit" our experience of them: a self-reinforcing system of collective ideas and their physical manifestations. Since contemporary cognitive frames around water focus primarily on functions and services, this manifests physically as water systems, from large works of engineering such as dams and canalisation to, more recently, electronic measurement systems and apps meant to inform us about water quality, flood risk, etc. If water is absent from our creative works of Art, it is because it is absent as a Being-in-itself from our cognitive frames.

Some groups have become aware of this regression and have made attempts to re-establish a creative and symbolic connection to water, in order to reintegrate water-as-a-Being into our lyrical conception of the world. More often than not, these attempts tend to prove Ellul's thesis that the world itself has transformed and we along with it, so that the technical system is the overarching reality that is—often quite inadvertently—expressed through modern art forms.

At a recent conference in Berlin on the theme of "artistic strategies to support endangered waters,"[9] interdisciplinary artist Matthias Kranebitter describes as "humanising the river" his work of music, entitled "*Wassermusik*" (clearly a hat-tip to Handel's magnificent Water music) wherein a brass band performs music through long tubes connected to the instruments and trailing deep into the river, producing unintelligible blurps of underwater sound and bubbles on the river's surface. For whom is this music intended, since a river cannot "hear" as people do? How exactly does this spectacle "humanise" the river? Is it not, on the contrary, a demonstration of our incapacity to feel a human connection to the river, and to seek out technical devices to help simulate a connection?

Fig. 2 *Performance of Wassermusik by Matthias Kranebitter, Berlin 2022*

The richness and complexity of meaning that comes from the *consciousness of our being intertwined with the elements of the natural world* is lost. Historically, it is this very lyrical connection that was expressed in countless works of art that reference water as a powerful being, imbued with meaning and symbolism. Narcissus looked not into a mirror, but a pool of water; Ophelia did not overdose on opioids, but deliberately drowned in a river. From Beethoven's dramatic musical depiction of a thunderstorm in his *Pastoral Symphony*, to Schubert's delightful *Trout Quintet*, to Ravel's sparkling and playful *Jeux d'eau*, water is both the central figure and the source of artistic inspiration. The evocation of water is not merely accessory to these compositions, it is essential; it is what makes them resonate with us and gives them their universal appeal. For Gaston Bachelard, water more than any other element, is a "complete poetic reality".[10]

The Question

As the technical system drains our natural world of significance, its symbolic nature becomes lost, and the lyrical integration of the natural world into our formal and informal expressions—Art, myth, the world of dreams—evaporates. With its disappearance, our ability to perceive the world and our sensitivity to our being-in-the-world cloud over. For this reason, the end of Art could very well signify the end of man, as signs of nature's distress go unheeded. It's not that we've consciously stopped listening. It's that we have ourselves, imperceptibly, grown deaf. If there is to be any hope of achieving what should be our primary human objective—that is, *preserving the living conditions for human and for all living creatures, for future generations to enjoy and thrive*—it is through re-establishing our lyrical connection to the natural world that we may hope to regain our ability to feel with and to be moved by nature—and so be moved to defend her.

Artistic output that expresses or upholds the technical system serves to further erode our lyrical connection to nature, keeping us on an ecologically destructive trajectory. Reconnection can be encouraged through interactions with water and other elements of the natural world, and through sharing songs, stories, and traditions around these interactions. Most promisingly,

humanity is hard-wired for these connections, as may be witnessed in the delight of infants and small children when they are in natural settings, and the spontaneous expressions of creativity that emerge from those experiences.

Consciously striving for a lyrical reconnection with nature is, in a technical society, an act of defiance and will accordingly be marginalised. However, what is at stake is our collective future. Moreover, even should we fail in our lifetime to bring about change on a global scale, the personal journey is reward enough.

Notes

1 See: Jacques Ellul, *Le Système Technicien* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1977; reis. Le cherche midi, 2012)

2 Bach's Calov Bible is held in the collection of the Concordia Seminary Library in St-Louis, MO. Concordia Seminary, "Bach Bible". Accessed September 22, 2022. https://www.csl.edu/resources/library/bach-bible/

3 Ellul frequently uses the term "*récusé*" meaning "rejected" or "refused" to describe the active elimination of specific qualities or attributes such as beauty, sensitivity, connection, meaning, etc.

4 Arnold Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, trans. Roy E. Carter (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 10.

5 Jacques Ellul, *L'Empire du non-sens : L'art et la société technicienne* (1980; reis. Éditions L'échappée, 2021), 81. (Author's translation).

6 Jacques Ellul, *Le Système Technicien,* 46. (Author's translation)

7 I specifically exclude Indigenous cultures from this analysis, as their cultural narratives remain rooted in traditions that (broadly speaking) have served to keep them distinct from modern techno-capitalist societies.

8 Jamie Linton, *What is Water? The History of a Modern Abstraction* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010)

9 MUDDY, DIRTY, WET: International conference on artistic strategies to support endangered waters. Accessed September 22, 2022. http://mudconference.citizenartdays.de/

10 "Thus water will appear to us as a total being: it has a body, a soul, a voice. More than any other element perhaps, water is a complete poetic reality." Gaston Bachelard, *L'eau et les rêves, essai sur l'imagination de la matière* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1942), 24. (Author's translation)

Where is the Fiction? Art's Audience in a World of Technique

Mark Honegger

The goal of this paper is to examine the artistic audience rather than the artist and his artifacts. In contrast, Ellul's primary book on art, The Empire of Non-Sense (ENS), focuses on how technique has shaped artists and what they have produced. I believe Ellul's premise that technique has diminished our humanity can also be seen in our diminished ability to be an artistic audience.

Ellul interacts with Marshal McLuhan several times in *The Humiliation of the Word* and *The Empire of Non-Sense,* and the two scholars are easily paired together because of their complementary work on social media. However, a potentially more beneficial comparison could be made between Ellul and the literary scholar Walter Ong, McLuhan's student. Ong was aware of Ellul's work. (I am not aware of any Ellul citations to Ong.) Ong's 1967 classic, *The Presence of the Word,* sounds like a title Ellul himself could have penned. The two men shared similar concerns on communication, language, dialogue, and the relationship between vision and hearing. Both agreed on the need to restore community and dialogue to the public sphere. Both studied how modern media impinged on human consciousness. Both emphasized how truly listening to another's words was the key to a personalism that honored the humanity of others and ourselves simultaneously. Both were concerned with the relationship between vision and hearing and the way the two senses interacted with one another.

Honegger, Mark. "Where is the Fiction? Art's Audience in a World of Technique." *Ellul Forum* 69 (Fall 2022): 42–58.

As a literary scholar, Ong focused on different issues than Ellul did, but his foci have also deepened our understanding of the historical roots of technique and propaganda. His dissertation was on the intellectual impact of Peter Ramus, a French educational reformer of the 16th century (1958). Though little cited today, Ramus had an outsized influence on European thought, and Ong brought to light the long-lasting impact he had on intellectualization and communication. Ramus was fascinated by *method*, the quickest and most efficient way to attain a goal. In pursuing those goals, his method minimized the role of dialogue and discussion; instead, a person consulted their own internal sense of right and wrong. The Ramus revolution led to modern societies where public discourse was presumed to be value-free, values being relegated to the domain of one's own private life. The loss of public values discourse left no possibility of finding agreement on values apart from coercion or the manipulation of public opinion. Ramus' work was an earlier harbinger of technique and propaganda which Ellul traces from later centuries.

A good introduction to Ong's view of vision and hearing can be found in *Orality and Literacy* (1982). It carries the subtitle "The Technologizing of the Word," which again sounds like an Ellul title. This work focuses on the changes in language and communication that take place as cultures evolve from primarily oral societies to those influenced by writing both before and after the introduction of print. *Orality and Literacy* is a profitable work to pair with a reading of Ellul's *The Humiliation of the Word*. For example, in chapter three of Ong's work, "Some psychodynamics of orality," he discusses the interiority and temporality of sound and their implications for how language intrinsically affects human relationships, one of the many points of contact with chapter one of Ellul's work, "Seeing and Hearing: Prolegomena," where Ellul affirms that "speech is basically presence."[1] Ong describes how listening to another person is the greatest thing we can do to affirm their humanity, because we are connecting with their interiority. In contrast, if we simply look at another person, the gaze of Foucault, we objectify them because they are treated as a surface, as something less than human. It is not surprising that a person tends to feel threatened when stared at by another for too long a time.

However, in this paper I want to build on the insights of Ong's seminal article "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction" (1975). The fiction in question turns out to be two things. First is that the writer must fictionalize his audience; he casts them into a role and writes to unknown people according to that role. The second fiction is that the audience must fictionalize itself. The reader has to cast herself into that role chosen by the author, which is often different from her actual life. This process of fictionalization is even more pronounced in writing because of the physical and psychic distance between writer and reader, as compared to a face-to-face conversation, where a lesser fictionalization is present.

There is a lot of complexity involved in these dual fictionalizations. They are not written down anywhere but are left implicit, and literary analysis has shown how dramatically they have changed over the centuries. Ong cites as an example the opening lines of Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*,

> In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river to the plain and the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels.

Ong explains how Hemingway casts the unknown reader as if he were a close companion of the writer, signified by the use of "that" and "the" in these opening noun phrases, a person whom Hemingway can share his feelings with. Nothing quite like this is found in previous centuries of English writing. For example, there are hints of an assumed intimacy between writer and reader in the essays of Addison and Steele from the 1700s, where the reader is cast as a "coffeehouse habitue," but this doesn't rise to the level of sympathy and camaraderie that Hemingway was imagining for an audience of readers whom he did not know personally.

Ong's article helps us to understand why readers are unable to enter into many texts; for example, it is not surprising that modern readers often find it difficult to cast themselves into the roles required to read ancient and older works. However, I also think that Ong's observation about the fiction of the audience contains an insight into the nature of art in general as well as a clue to why art becomes problematic in a technique-dominated soci-

ety. When art is generally discussed, the focus is typically on the artifacts of art—the paintings, the sculptures, the symphonies, the poems, etc. and secondarily on the artist. However, I believe that art should be understood as the entire relationship between the artist, their artistic artifact and a person who appreciates that artifact. I symbolize this in the diagram below where the first arrow represents creation and the second arrow represents appreciation.

ART

[Artist → Artistic Artifact → Artistic Audience]

To illustrate, if the painting of the Mona Lisa existed in a world without humans, it would not be art; but likewise, if it existed in a world where people did not recognize what it was or did not value it as art, it would be something but not a work of art. There have been many studies on artistic artifacts but fewer studies on what is required for a person to be an artistic appreciator. This focus on understanding the audience is alluded to by Ellul in *Presence in the Modern World,* in a passage where he speaks about the need for intellectuals to understand their fellow man. He writes,

> If they want to understand what the cinema is, they should go to the cinema, not to see a work of art or anything like that—but in order to dwell there. In other words, to enter into communion with the crowd of spectators, to see them instead of the film, to share their perspective and feelings. (80)

Following Ellul, I am arguing that it is at the location of the audience that art has become imperiled. Even great art as identified in previous history is not immune to its audience. For example, Shakespeare does not exist as art to the majority of Americans. Now that is not to say that people have never heard of Shakespeare nor that they would fail to identify him as a "great writer," but their identification of him would simply tap into a shared cultural designation—"everyone thinks Shakespeare is a great English writer." In truth, Americans by and large are not artistic appreciators of Shakespeare because his language makes demands on modern readers. His worldview and cultural understanding differ sharply from modern readers, and

modern readers are unable to fictionalize themselves in the roles required to read Shakespeare as art.

Using the concept of the artistic audience can help us interrogate issues in art from a different vantage point. For example, it provides a category for distinguishing between high art and low art. High art makes greater demands on the audience; low art does not. Now in using these terms, I am not in this paper making claims about better or worse art. In fact, the logic of my position defangs debates about better or worse art and artists because I wish to center art at the place of the individual. One person may prefer one writer to another, or one song to another. But my premise asks this question—what exactly are people talking about when they raise the question of better or worse art in the abstract or at some global level? Typically, there is given a set of criteria that is believed by an art critic to define art, and so arguments can then be made as to which art or artists best exemplify those criteria. Those who accept that set of criteria will be able to enter the critic's arena of evaluation and may agree with her assessments. However, at a certain level the critical evaluations can displace the artistic artifacts themselves, because they don't address the more fundamental issue of who really appreciates the artistic artifacts as art. Yes, William Shakespeare has written plays that probe the human situation and give us insight and pleasure in contemplating it, but does John Smith appreciate *Hamlet* as art?

The issue of demands made upon an audience arises when people compare the complexity of classical music to pop music. Pop tends to repeat the same notes and melodic phrases and to use simple melodic lines. Chords are more predictable and repetitive. It is also played by a smaller group of musicians. Classical music is often played by a whole orchestra. It has more complicated melodies, longer melodic phrases, and more varied chords. Hence, it is not surprising that more modern listeners find it easier to appreciate pop music because it does not make a great intellectual challenge on the listener,[2] while classical music demands more of its audience and requires a greater concentration on and understanding of the music.

Alongside the difficulty and diminished capacity of the audience to enter the complexity of classical music, certain audience members will also want to embrace or avoid certain identities in relation to classical music. And

this can also encourage or discourage a person from appreciating an artistic artifact. Thus, there are people who want to be known for artistic sensibility who desire to enter classical music, just as there are others who identify classical music with discredited ruling groups in society and so eschew classical music to avoid certain identities. The old American sitcom Frasier played on these identity questions in its episodes. Wanting to embrace or avoid certain identities can also encourage or discourage a person from appreciating an artistic artifact.

The inability of an audience to enter the complexity of a piece of art leads to a loss of language, which is replaced by images. An artform like photography can be interrogated through the lens of the artistic audience. Ellul has written about the triumph of the image over language and the triumph of reality over truth in The Humiliation of the Word. Photography is preeminently an artform of both the image and reality, so one cannot discount the broader psychic pressures in society for accounting for its popularity. However, there is also the unique power of photography whereby the viewer of a photograph becomes the camera that has captured that image, so a beautiful photograph invites the viewer to fictionalize herself as someone who also recognized and even "captured" that still, solitary image amidst the hustle and bustle of an everchanging world. It makes a viewer feel artistic because it is reality, unvarnished and unconstructed, and simply registered by the eye.

Issues regarding the fictionalization of the audience can also give us a way to investigate transgressive art. In ENS, Ellul writes, "An art that does not embrace sacrilege would amount to nothing. What distinguishes above all the 'immoral tales' from run-of-the-mill pornography is the over-riding, sacrilegious, and hence, political intent."[3] Ellul calls transgression "a very significant and recurring phenomenon, quite characteristic […] of the old-fashioned nature of this art," though this is not necessarily well-known to a modern, ahistorical audience which often reacts to current fashions of transgressive art as if something completely new was occurring.

A specific example of transgressive art that I will bring up with some trepidation is rap music. When I presented this paper at the Ellul conference in

Montreal and discussed rap music, some members of the audience objected. They pointed out that not all rap music is transgressive, that its negative messages are not characteristic of African-Americans and African-American culture, and that there are positive and uplifting message expressed through rap, such as the subgenre of Christian hip hop. These statements are true and well-taken, and they also illustrate well the point I wished to make, which I will get to in just a moment.

Though rap music has expressed many kinds of messages, it has often been overtly and self-consciously transgressive. It has celebrated violence and sexual exploitation, drug and other addictions, and an escape from life through an early death. Notable in its lyrics are the portrayals of young men as pimps who denigrate women in their pursuit of riches and fame. Famous rap artists such as Ice-T and Snoop Dogg have gone on record about their life as a pimp. A further component has been the identification of the rappers' personal lives with their music, both strongly transgressive and consistent with each other.[4] These transgressive aspects have very much been part of the public conversation surrounding rap, as evidenced by the public denouncements made by both former Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton.[5]

Part of the popularity of rap has been its political messages aimed at the ruling classes, and the transgressive identity of rap has been treated and justified as political criticism. My concern though in this paper is to raise the issue of artistic appreciation for rap music. To esteem rap music as art (not respond to it only in political terms), people must fictionalize themselves as those who find artistic beauty in transgression, even in oppression and pain. (I will talk about what Ellul says about art and beauty later in this paper.)

Transgression has become a free-floating phenomenon in modern society; there are different motivations for why an artistic appreciator might find beauty in transgression. For young African-Americans, glorifying the transgression of the sexual exploitation of women could be making a political statement about America's callous history towards African-Americans, but for a crossover audience of young white people, the artistic beauty of transgression could be a response to a wide variety of things, from the pe-

rennial revolt of children against their parents to a protest against the powerlessness they feel in a society where technique eliminates human spontaneity and self-determination. That is, technique seems to stimulate a kind of sanctioned transgression so that the appeal of transgression for people in a technique-dominated society can be interpreted and applied in many ways. At the same time, it creates the illusion of a shared community where diverse peoples appear to have the same values, which they do on a surface level ("the transgression of rap music is justified because something in the world is very wrong"), but perhaps not deeper down ("we all don't agree on what that something wrong exactly is").

A discussion about rap music as art can also give us a way to consider the relationship between beauty and art. Ellul in *ENS* sharply criticized this supposed relationship when he wrote,

> For a very long time, it was believed that art had something to do with beauty and that that was the recurrent concern—what constituted beauty and met its criterion? That was a mistake. Art has nothing to do with beauty. Those who speak of beauty and art are retrograde. And, if one simply wants to understand modern art or to situate it, one must renounce this absolutely irrelevant criterion. Harmony, balance of forms, the strict adherence to a framework or usage, grace or plenitude, whatever the criteria, it is always a question of beauty, but that era is closed…To the degree that one is concerned with beauty, one disregards the real direction of modern art.[6]

Here I must enter into a little dialogue with Ellul. I agree with him that modern art has greatly abandoned any attempt to be beautiful, certainly with regard to the clearest expressions of beauty such as harmony or grace. But I disagree that art as art has nothing to do with beauty. Instead, I will venture to offer that art is a human attempt to construct beauty and express transcendence. What is going on today is that the relentless modern debunking of everything that has gone before us, truly one of the triumphs of technique, has extended to rejecting beauty based on earlier criteria. But modern artists *are* trying to express beauty in what would formerly be seen as non-beauty and to construct art from what would formerly have been seen non-art. Is this possible? Theoretically, it is. In fact, I believe there is a spiritual basis for this attempt, and it is found in Ecclesiastes 3:11, "[God]

has made everything beautiful in its time" (ESV). I don't think the verse is talking about art, but I do think it is teaching us about the nature of beauty, and it clues us into the consideration that beauty has a moral component to it, that beauty is ultimately moral beauty, or righteousness to use the biblical term. Physical terms like harmony and grace are material expressions of a spiritual reality. According to the Bible, God is an "artist" who can create spiritual beauty from everything that happens, truly a mind-boggling notion when one thinks of the Holocaust and a world of such evil. Many modern artists don't believe there is beauty in the world and don't believe there is transcendence in the universe, which problematizes the idea of art, but that doesn't keep them from trying to create beauty from non-beauty or art out of non-art. Otherwise, they would be pursuing some other end, such as creating propaganda.

Let me apply this train of reasoning to the prior discussion about rap music. How is it that an artform that celebrated pimps and the sexual exploitation of women was so widely received in the world today? Answer—rap artists were trying to create beauty out of ugliness. The beauty of pimping was that it was a statement about the oppression of African-Americans in western societies; pimping was beautiful as a criticism and moral condemnation of racial oppression.[7]

Were rap artists successful in creating art? Here we have to bring in the artistic audience. They would need to fictionalize themselves as people who could also find beauty in pimping. We can see that politics enters into this equation. Those who politically agreed with rap artists in advance were likely to appreciate and justify rap music. Those who disagreed with that brand of politics were likely to dislike and criticize rap music, and they had a ready-made criticism, which was the terribleness of sexually exploiting women. At this point, *neither* one of these groups is in an artistic relationship to rap music. For both groups, rap music is propaganda, either a propaganda they agree with or a propaganda they disagree with. What would be more significant would be for people on both sides of the political spectrum to enter an artistic relationship with rap music. For those on the left, this might take the form of abhorring the sexual exploitation celebrated in rap music while

at the same time savoring the juxtaposition between pimping and society's treatment of African-Americans. For those on the right, it would involve having the courage to consider why pimping is an artistic way of confronting the U.S.'s racial past while concurrently hating the sexual exploitation of women. Both approaches require the kind of dialectal thinking that Ellul so prized. Both approaches are not easy to do, especially in today's climate of technique and propaganda. I believe that for most people, they either esteem rap music as entertainment or esteem it as propaganda, or they hate it. And perhaps few people truly have an artistic relationship to it.

Let me return now to my earlier comments about how a previous audience responded to my use of rap music in this paper. I used the topic of rap music and its transgressiveness to raise the issue of rap as art. However, some people in the audience could not get past the larger issue for them which was rap in political terms, and their response was strong evidence for my claim that the ability of the audience to be artistic appreciators has been diminished nowadays, driven out by other values. In this case, political sensitivities didn't even allow the question of rap as art to be weighed and considered. Someone says to me, "But rap is more than those transgressive songs," and this makes me wonder, "Does your observation allow you to appreciate rap as art or is it primarily a political calculation?" The politics is not going away, but what is happening to art and its values? They are seeping away.

These examples are meant to get us thinking about how an audience fictionalizes itself in relation to art. Let me turn now to the issue of how technique and propaganda have shaped people in ways that diminish their ability to be an artistic audience.[8] There are four points I wish to make.

1. Technique imposes economic values on people, which are at odds with artistic values.

The economic priorities of modern life are almost too obvious to mention. The ultimate arbiter of worth today is money, and society likes to compare disparate things by comparing how much they cost. I am reminded of the articles one used to see about how much it would cost for a family to hire persons to do all the work that a stay-at-home wife and mother would do

in the normal course of a week. The articles were often intended to show how valuable such a wife and mother was, but they also revealed the unstated assumption that her work was not intrinsically valuable in itself but primarily was valuable for its economic exchange value.

Art (here I am referring to artistic artifacts) is received in terms of its economic value, and I would suggest that economic value has become a controlling priority for esteeming art. I can confess that I like to watch on PBS the series *Antiques Road Show*, a show where ordinary people bring to a group of antique specialists items from their houses and attics and garages to see what they are and what kind of value they have. In the American version of the show (the British version is slightly different), an expert will tell the owner something about the item they brought in, and there can often be surprises when the owner discovers they own something older or rarer than they had realized. Crucially though, the culmination of each story is the reveal at the end where the expert estimates the economic value of the item at auction. That is, the economic value controls the narrative. Now one can ask the question, for the owner, when she looks at her artifact, does she see dollar signs or does she see a work of art? Can she see both at the same time? I would suggest though that one of those values predominates.

2. Technique imposes utilitarian values on society. Per Ellul's definition, technique is the ensemble of means which turns people into means and causes people to value means above all else. But art is an end, not a means, so if everything is means, art cannot exist.

This is not to say that artistic artifacts are not created, but the tendency will be for them to be valued as means. Ellul applies this criticism to art in Presence in the Modern World, where he writes, "This remarkable proliferation of means therefore leads to everything becoming servile. In our world everything must serve, which is to say, exist as means. Art and all that was formerly 'useless' or 'gratuitous' must submit to the necessity of 'usefulness'."[9]

Modern people who desire to have an artistic sensibility encounter a contradiction. They know that they should esteem art, and they know that everything should serve a purpose. But true art is always something more than a means to an end. I think this often gets reconciled by people relating

to artistic artifacts in functional rather than artistic ways.[10]

3. Propaganda imposes politicization on society so that art is politicized in a way where potential artistic appreciators must make a political calculation about whether they agree or disagree with the political stance, real or supposed, of the work of art.

Some of the art I have already mentioned falls into this category. People have rejected classical music because it was written by old white men. Those who reject progressive politics typically disdain rap music. In my English department, there is an increasing animus against English literature from previous centuries because it is too white and male and cisgendered. Ellul also comments on the increasing politicization of modern art, how all theater since Brecht "is political above all," and "only political commitment allows the novelist to speak to the people."[11]

Ellul has discussed this issue from the perspective of the artist in *The Empire of Non-Sense* as the "schism between art with a message and esoteric formalism."[12] But I wish to consider this issue from the perspective of the audience. What is the artist asking his audience to be when he creates politicized art? As I suggested earlier, it is quite easy to relate to politicized arts as propaganda, and I think that happens quite frequently nowadays. It is another thing to relate to politicized art as art first and foremost. My starting point would not be the question of whether I agree or disagree with the political stance of the artist but whether I can appreciate his work artistically. This requires dialectal thinking and a sense of human presence.

4. People become ever fictionalized themselves, not by choosing to fictionalize themselves in relation to an artistic artifact but rather because they are unconsciously fictionalized into being something less than human by the social structures surrounding technique and propaganda. This dehumanization makes them less capable of appreciating an artifact as art, because art requires us to be more human, not less human. *In Presence in the Modern World*, Ellul writes,

> [W]e have seen how the sense of objective reality becomes gradually lost and also how the people whom we encounter have ceased to hold for us this objective reality. We are caught up in this increasingly greater abstraction that is occurring in relation not only to facts

> but also to human beings. We can no longer communicate with one another because our neighbors have ceased to be real to us…People have never spoken so much about human beings while at the same time giving up speaking to them. And this is because they are well acquainted with how useless it is to speak to them: conditions are such that the human person has disappeared. What remains is the consumer, the worker, the citizen, the reader, the partisan, the producer, the bourgeois….
>
> In all this, the person had disappeared, and yet it is only to the human person that we can speak authentically.[13]

This perhaps might be the biggest assault of technique on the artistic audience. For me to appreciate an artifact as a work of art, I must relate to it in human presence, not as an abstraction. The fictionalization that Ong wrote about was not the fiction of becoming less than human, which is what we do when we think of ourselves as abstractions. He had in mind a reader fictionalizing herself as a full-fledged person, potentially different from her actual self but fully human. Ellul discusses at great length in *ENS* the abstract nature of modern art that results from the abstractness compelled upon people by technique. Technique's efficiency comes from treating people according to categories and aggregating them, not by dealing with them in all their beautiful uniqueness. Now we can also consider how people have fictionalized themselves as something less than human. I have become some abstract category—a man, woman, nonbinary, straight, gay, white, black, Latinx, etc. and so I encounter art as an abstraction.

In a society where people are more fictionalized than ever, it theoretically seems like it should be easier for people to fictionalize themselves in relation to art and perhaps be the greatest art appreciators ever. That does not at all seem to be the case. Modern life seems to lead to these other reduced ways of relating to art that I have previously mentioned. Humans reduced to abstractions seem very capable of relating to art as propaganda, for example.

However, appreciating art requires me to be more human, not less. It is the concept of presence, which Ellul and Ong typically discuss as it occurs in face-to-face relationship but now we can think about as it manifests when I am not in direct human communication. Presence recognizes humanity

in art, so that just as a person is more than their group identifications, an artistic artifact is more than its political point of view or its economic value, or any other reductionistic assessment that might be put upon it.

In conclusion, I leave the reader with one of my favorite quotes from Ong's article, "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," "There is no *one* thing to say about anything; there are many things that can be said."[14] I feel this is apropos to discussing a huge and multifaceted topic like art. Ellul says it is an illusion "that art can provide a counter-culture to the technical world and produce a counter-milieu,"[15] a position he attributes to McLuhan. In rebutting this hope, Ellul suggests two ways this might be done. First, art might provide a critique of the technical milieu, or second, art might make "us conscious of the psychic and social consequences of technique."[16] Of course, he is here concentrating on the artists themselves and their goals in creating artifacts.

I have suggested a different direction for this discussion. Art can provide an antidote to technique if we focus on the artistic audience, on developing the ability of people to fictionalize themselves in relation to works of art which involves developing many fine qualities that are central to the personalism that Ellul and Charbonneau and Ong so highly valued. This includes aspects of the human personality such as the following:

- It promotes the development of a shared language and emphasizes cultural values and understandings that people share in common, rather than political differences that divide us.
- It encourages people to enter to other people's worlds, including people who are different from us in profound ways.
- It challenges us to treat artistic artifacts not as disembodied objects but as expressions of human personality.
- It promotes artistic values such as beauty instead of utilitarian and economic values.
- It promotes open-ended discussions of our world rather than the closed-off, univocal messaging of technique.

I am sympathetic to Ellul's scathing criticisms of modern art in *The Empire of Non-Sense*, but in this talk I am leaving open the possibility that anything can be turned into art as seen through the prism of the artistic audience.

And so we must ask: what must the audience become to be in a relationship of artistic appreciation to an artifact? What kind of listener must I be to appreciate the works of John Cage, for example? Is John Cage's music art? My answer today is that it seems to be almost impossible for people to fictionalize themselves in a way whereby they artistically appreciate Cage's music. That could be because Cage was not successful as an artist. That could be because listeners are not artistically sophisticated enough to enter his music. That could be because it is well-nigh impossible for humans to find beauty in non-beauty, such as music that lacks organization and harmony. I think a lot about the last option. One evidence of the inhumanity of technique is the apparent impossibility of modern audiences conditioned by technique to artistically appreciate modern art that is conformed to technique.[17]

However, I believe that being an artistic appreciator is one of the most subversive things one can do today in the face of technique and propaganda. Ellul has criticized fiercely much modern art from the point of view of the artist and what they are trying to accomplish, but just as important is the artistic audience itself. Not everyone can be a great artist, but I believe we can all aspire to be an artistic audience. If people reclaim their artistic appreciation, they can push back upon artists in search of art that is rooted in human presence.

Notes

1 Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1982), 15.
2 Ellul (ENS 68) attributes the popularity of pop music to its ability to provide an escape route for listeners from "this intolerable world."
3 Jacques Ellul, *The Empire of Non-Sense* (Winterbourne: Papadakis, 2014), 91.
4 Younes, in his introduction to *ENS,* comments on how the artist's personal life itself becomes a work of art, how the artist actually replaces her art. Samir Younes, "Jacques Ellul and the Eclipse of Artistic Symbolism," in *The Empire of Non-Sense* (Winterbourne: Papadakis, 2014), 13.
5 Chuck Philips, "COVER STORY: The Uncivil War: The battle between the Establishment and supporters of rap music reopens old wounds of race and class." *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1992, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-07-19-ca-4391-story.html.
6 Ellul, *Empire of Non-Sense*, 41.
7 The Bible does something similar to this through the "performance art" in the book of Hosea, when God commands the prophet to marry a prostitute in order to comment on Israel's unfaithfulness to Himself.
8 I am following Ellul's understanding and development of these terms. The term "technique" encapsulates his view that modern societies are dominated by an ensemble of means which dehumanizes people. What he means by the term "propaganda" is similar to how most people use it, except that he believes that propaganda is more ubiquitous and embedded in the workings of modern societies.
9 Jacques Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World: A New Translation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 42.
10 Ellul observes that art assumes a "multiplicity of functions" in a technological society, which leads to "disorientation and uncertainty." Ellul, *Empire of Non-Sense*, 63.
11 Ellul, *Empire of Non-Sense,* 90.
12 Ellul, *Empire of Non-Sense,* 55-59.
13 Ellul, *Presence,* 75-76.
14 Walter Ong, "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," *PMLA* 90 (1975): 18.
15 Ellul, *Empire of Non-Sense,* 71.
16 Ellul, *Empire of Non-Sense,* 71.
17 Ellul uses an apt analogy from the culinary arts—canned goods reduce our sense of taste, but taste cannot be made to accept just anything. Ellul, *Empire of Non-Sense*, 143.

Review of *Theology, Ethics, and Technology in the Work of Jacques Ellul and Paul Virilio—a Nascent Theological Tradition*

Jack Esselink

Michael Morelli, *Theology, Ethics, and Technology in the work of Jacques Ellul and Paul Virilio—a Nascent Theological Tradition*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021.

Many books have been written about Jacques Ellul's writings on ethics, technology, and theology; however, only a few books contrast and compare his work with other contemporary scholars.[1] Michael Morelli's book, which is based on his PhD-thesis, draws important lessons from the work of Jacques Ellul and Paul Virilio. Morelli, an assistant professor in Theology, Culture & Ethics at Northwest College and Seminary in Canada and the author of various articles and essays on Ellul, describes the commonalities between Ellul and Virilio; they both lived and worked in secular post-war France and are both well known for their critical work regarding the role of technology in society. According to Morelli, "Ellul and Virilio directly teach us how to identify, expose and dismantle the modern world's idolatry of technology" (3). Morelli hopes his book will "help readers gain insight […] in [Ellul and Virilio's] writings on technology because these insights do not receive as much attention as others" (17). Morelli clearly demonstrates how the perspectives of both scholars provide a surprisingly complementary critique, one which can help 21st century Christians navigate our technologically mediated world.

The book sets out by describing Ellul and Virilio's context in post-war France. Morelli demonstrates how their works are heavily influenced by the

Esselink, Jack. *Review of Theology, Ethics, and Technology in the Work of Jacques Ellul and Paul Virilio—a Nascent Theological Tradition*. *Ellul Forum* 70 (Fall 2022): 59–62.

role technology played during and after World War II. Both scholars consider technology to be a synonym for modernity and they critically assess technology's role in shaping modern society. Both Frenchmen experienced the dark side of technology during the war as well as the good side that helped rebuild French society afterward. In the subsequent chapters Morelli provides an extensive introduction to Ellul's and Virilio's perspectives on how technology shapes modern society and has become modernity's primary idol. Of particular interest is Morelli's demonstration that Ellul and Virilio trace back technology's roots in the Bible and use their personal Christian faith as the basis for their ethics.

Morelli's book provides a good and comprehensive introduction to Ellul's perspectives on technology, ethics, and theology and is a great primer for anyone who is new to Ellul's work. Ellul understands modern society to be driven by *technique* which he describes as "the most efficient way to produce something for the lowest cost at a given point in time" (33), the sum total of technology, technological discourse, and propaganda. Technique is sacralized in modern society and this sacralization provides justification for the idolatry of progress. Ellul thinks modern man is just as religious as the medieval man, only the gods have changed to technology and science. Ellul traces the roots of technology to Genesis 4 where Cain is depicted as the first person in the Bible to walk away from God and use technology— namely the city and clothing — to protect and make a name for himself. For Ellul, the main responsibility for modern Christians is to clothe themselves with Jesus and reject the way of Cain's worldly [metaphorical] clothing. In putting on Jesus, the Christian enters into freedom from the spiritual powers of efficiency.

Many readers of this review will be unfamiliar with the work of Paul Virilio; Morelli's overview lays a good foundation to grasp his key insights. Virilio takes a phenomenological approach towards technology, analyzing it using the metaphors of speed, motion, and light. His quest towards the spiritual roots of technology begins with the Fall, the moment, as he sees it, when people started to move away from God with increasing speed. Virilio deliberately uses dark imagery to describe the negative impact technology has on society and it is no coincidence, given his background, that many of his

examples relate to the war. His writing on how many different technologies stem from military applications is very insightful and is relevant in 2022 when war has become an important topic in our societies once again. Virilio uses negative imagery to highlight what the world is like without God; this is a hermeneutical approach intended to "bring readers into contact with the brilliant light of God" (73). Virilio's ethics and theology requires one to remove oneself from the race and speed of modernity and start with Sabbath's rest. The Sabbath, for Virilio, is about vacating and filling oneself with the light of God.

The penultimate chapter explores Ellul's and Virilio's critical assessment of the notion of power and technology. For Ellul "social power dialectically interacts with spiritual powers" (145) and technique is clearly a manifestation of the powers and principalities described in the Bible (e.g., Ephesians 6:12). Virilio takes a different approach and uses the accidents metaphor to expose the potential destructive power that is often hidden behind the facade of technology. Virilio argues that in war technique takes up power to "increase speed (drómos), harness motion (kīnēsis), and manipulate light (phōs)"(46) in such a way that the relationship between substance and accident is reversed. Viriolio uses this term suggestively allowing for play between the philosophical meaning of the secondary quality of a substance and the destruction of violent technology. In their analysis both Ellul and Virilio stop short of condemning all technology; rather they expose how power is being used through technology "to legitimize and enhance forms of life that are destructive" (159). In the last chapter of the book Morelli concludes that Virilio's and Ellul's insights are relevant for 21st century Christians and churches. Their theology and ethics reveal the sacred myths that underpin our society and suggest how modern Chrsitians can resist the mass manipulation and violence of the kind they experienced during and after the war.

The book is an interesting read for anyone interested in the intersection of technology, ethics, and theology. Ellul's and Virilio's works are notoriously complex and Morelli does an outstanding job explaining their key insights and merging them into a relevant theology and ethics for today. Morelli's exposition of Virilio will be very insightful to those already familiar with

Ellul. Though the scholars differ in their approaches to technology, their perspectives are surprisingly complementary. Despite this complementarity, Morelli's attempts to demonstrate *commonality* between the works of both Frenchmen is the weakest part of the book. There is not much evidence of interactions that took place between Ellul and Virilio and much of what Morelli suggests in this regard is based on what-if's and could-be's. Nonetheless, this book is worth reading and provides fresh insights from two brilliant scholars of theology and ethics of technology that are highly relevant for Christians and churches in the 21st century.

Notes

1 Cf. Shaw, Jeffrey M. *Illusions of Freedom: Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul on Technology and the Human Condition.* Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2014. Cf. also the themes tab at ellul.org which features brief comparisons of Ellul and several other scholars.

Review of *Plundering Eden: A Subversive Christian Theology of Creation and Ecology*

Stuart Warren

Wagenfuhr, G. P. *Plundering Eden: A Subversive Christian Theology of Creation and Ecology*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020, 206 pp.

People have been a driving force of environmental change throughout recorded history. We have driven once flourishing species into extinction, destroyed entire ecosystems for neighborhoods and cities, and we are faced with a crisis of climate change that could threaten our own existence. There's no shortage of experts ready to cash in on the opportunity to tell us how we got to this point and what we must do to change course. Recommendations from scientists and environmentalists lack saliency among the general public while politicians propose diluted policies incapable of effecting sufficient change. G. P. Wagenfuhr's *Plundering Eden* is a sobering reminder that we may not have a way out of this quagmire, but that doesn't excuse us from trying.

We find ourselves in a world where increasing numbers of people wear their political identities like team sweatshirts. Political polarization is widening social cleavage to the point that we cannot agree to work together for the common good even when we face existential problems. Wagenfuhr is well aware of the impossible task before him, but he jumps into the fray with courage and boldness.

According to *Plundering Eden*, our primary problem isn't climate change or fossil fuel dependency; our imaginations are broken and that same bro-

Warren, Stuart. Review of *Plundering Eden: A Subversive Christian Theology of Creation and Ecology* , by GP Wagenfuhr. *Ellul Forum* 70 (Fall 2022): 63–67.

kenness is causing us to behave in parasitic ways. By his own admission, Wagenfuhr is hesitant to call humanity parasites (xi). Nonetheless, there's little surprise that he agrees with those who conclude that our planet is in trouble. *Plundering Eden* is an ecological explanation of human depravity. The world as we know it and our relationships with one another are on an ostensibly apocalyptic trajectory. Though the opening paragraphs feel like a regurgitation of environmental activism, to Wagenfuhr's credit, the remainder of his text diverges from any semblance of generic political speech.

To be clear, *Plundering Eden* is not a political manifesto aimed at saving the world. Part I introduces the idea of parasitism, Part II analyzes how we were led to this moment in time, Part III provides a reanalysis through a biblical lens, and Part IV answers the question, "how now shall we live?" The book provides us with a paradigm shift away from incrementalism and centrism, urging radical change in our epistemological understanding of our planetary problem and its resolution.

In his search for solutions, Wagenfuhr shares Wendell Berry's distrust of movements. According to Berry, movements "become too specialized… [and] almost always fail to be radical enough, dealing finally in effects rather than causes."[1] Environmentalism is no less guilty. According to Wagenfuhr, environmentalists specializing in decreased consumption "will inevitably increase consumption" (5). Thus, specialists argue for sustainability and efficiency while ignoring the underlying cause of overconsumption: "the problem lies primarily in the human imagination" (5).

In Part I, Wagenfuhr explores the relationship between depravity and the parasitic nature of modern life. Every aspect of human life is marred by sin; imagination does not escape its grasp. Imagination further suffers a limitation of experience, hence the tired cliché that "perception is reality." We can easily perceive a world without fossil fuel, deforestation, and destruction. History and parts of the Global South are our exemplars. We have a much more difficult time coming to terms with living analog lives. As Wagenfuhr puts it, "we have created a god to whom we have enslaved ourselves" (67). Digital environments are addictive. Without oil-based plastics and

rare-earth metals, they cannot exist. For that reason, Wagenfuhr rightly exposits Genesis' recognition that "development requires destruction" (114). We are harming creation just to maintain equally harmful comforts. Our creativity to live in harmony with the global environment is stymied by pressure and desires to live in congruence with a parasitic milieu that encourages consumption.

Imagination develops over time with each life experience informing our perceptions of reality. Children hear stories of ghouls lurking in the dark and cry for help when the faintest sounds lead their imaginations to assume monsters are creeping beneath their beds. There is a sense in which imaginations never mature. Our experiences from childhood to the present inform our perceptions of the world. For example, racism is fueled by difference and fear of the unknown: people who look, speak, believe, and behave differently must be dangerous. Wagenfuhr further demonstrates how broken imaginations cling to the myth of civilization by which people seek to manage, control, and tame chaos. However, the myth of civilization disallows freedom and prevents humans from seeing that our very mode of being in the world is the root of our ecological problems.

Broken imagination leads to destruction. Pioneers destroyed landscapes indigenous populations held as sacred. As Americans continued westward expansion, Manifest Destiny excused and encouraged the mass slaughter of American bison. As Wagenfuhr puts it, "Where disorder exists, [people] will violently impose their order" (xvi). He is right to connect these themes to our treatment and relationship with the earth. In Genesis, God creates people in his image, after his likeness. The home originally provided is a garden inside of Eden. Wagenfuhr explains the role of Adam and Eve as "gardeners of a divine palace garden" (95). In contrast, in the book's introduction he says, "Parasites give nothing back. Sometimes parasites derive so many nutrients from the host that the host dies" (xi). We can see the loss of imagination playout at a microlevel in childhood. Children lack the knowledge of giving back to their environment, but there's an innocence and goodness in their inability to cause massive environmental harm as they explore backyards, streams, and wooded areas. Childhood imagination

and fantasies of living in primitive clubhouses under the cover of living foliage or in the branches of trees gives way to video games, TV, and the eventual necessity of labor for survival in adulthood. In an imperfect way this experience mirrors the Judeo-Christian creation narrative.

Genesis describes creation as good up until the moment the serpent calls God's goodness into question, leading Adam and Eve to "plunder Eden." Discomfort in comparing God's image bearers to parasites is appropriate. This should not be taken lightly and Wagenfuhr does a great job balancing this tension, offering cautious optimism. There's never a moment that he goes so far as to offer no hope of reconciliation or redemption, nor does he allow readers to be so optimistic as to think we are freed from the responsibility of creation care. Though we live as parasites now, God has granted the ability for us to imagine our ways out of resource dependency in the interim and we look forward to a divine future when parasitism is vanquished in eternity.

Readers ought to be uncomfortable with Part II where we are faced with the tension of the fall and our parasitic habits that ensue. To leave readers with this sort of pessimism would be wrong and Wagenfuhr doesn't make that error. Part III turns from a hopeless present state toward a hopeful future. Our goal isn't a utopian pipedream. As Wagenfuhr puts it, "The point is clear, we cannot be reconciled through restitution, or making it good. We cannot even begin to conceive of what making up for our wrong could look like" (143). People have caused irreversible damage. We do not have the capability of righting our wrongs in the ways we'd like. That power belongs to God alone.

Similarly, Wagenfuhr helps readers understand that we aren't responsible for developing workable public policy for the nations to enact. Our goal isn't to establish a theocratic reign as if we were little John the Baptists paving the way for God to reign over creation. Reconciliation is a final act of God. It is forthcoming. We are responsible for creation care, not restoration or reconciliation. As created beings, we lack the power of reconciliation. Wagenfuhr states, "Reconciliation is not restoration of creation, but a new creation" (91).

Part III is timely for two reasons. Dominion theology has become rampant among segments of evangelicals who misinterpret Genesis 1:28 as a call to conquer and rule the natural and political world. Under this view, environmental damage is an inevitable byproduct of our existence. Dominionists function as though they have total authority over land and natural resources. Wagenfuhr reminds readers that property rights are relatively new to the human experience. We cannot own what belongs to God. As globalization expands, all Christians in all places need to be reminded that "God does not transfer rights of ownership or management to humans at any point in Scripture" (126). God provides and God takes. He operates in his own free will and he certainly does not operate at our pleasure.

Wagenfuhr's statement that "everything is broken and everything must change" (131) includes imagination, actions, and beliefs. Our understanding of creation care doesn't get a pass. Like Adam and Eve, we are caretakers. We do not have a right to environmental usury. Wagenfuhr is helpful in developing a clearer understanding that we should care for God's creation precisely because God created it, regardless of our understanding of biblical imagery of the future destruction of the earth.

Moving into the final section, *Plundering Eden* redirects its focus away from analysis toward praxis. This is where some of my fears in prior chapters are realized. Wagenfuhr's depiction of a Christian response to his prior stated evils of civilization paint a landscape of the wild where scars begin to heal and cities crumble. Wagenfuhr writes, "Being a creature means living within the creation, for the creation, rather than outside of it and using it for ourselves… We must learn to put ourselves below the things of lesser value, like this sparrow or that raven," (155). As nice as this sounds, God hasn't called us to nonexistence and that seems to me the only way we can truly fulfill Wagenfuhr's solution.

For as much good as *Plundering Eden* offers—and it is a positive addition to the Christian ecotheology literature—there's a sense in which Wagenfuhr seems to sway near to idolatry of the created. To be fair to the author, Wagenfuhr never states that Christian symbiosis with creation should lead us to worship the created over the creator. With that said, his suggestion is

that we should have nearly no impact on creation, implying that we leave no traces of ourselves behind.

God didn't create us to be mere surveyors of land. Wagenfuhr is right in urging us to "question the goodness of the things civilization calls good" (154-55). Experience is sufficient evidence that humanity has a poor track record of doing just about anything right. However, that doesn't require us to conclude that "the best way we can love and serve [creation] is by simply removing ourselves and our impacts from it," (157). Our tiny planet isn't a hiding place, it's a place God has provided for our dwelling. We should be intentional in our care for God's creation, but our mission has never been to live as ghosts. It seems to me that Wagenfuhr must develop novel understandings of scripture to reach his conclusions.

I will continue to ponder the points he's laid out in his concluding chapters. I'm not sure I will ever find myself capable of fully agreeing. *Plundering Eden* is thought provoking and achieves Wagenfuhr's goal of tearing down and reconstructing how we think about ourselves in relationship to creation. We would do well to take his considerations seriously, rethinking how we can live in our world without adopting its destructive habits.

Notes

1 Berry, Wendell, "In Distrust of Movements." Orion Magazine. Accessed September 12, 2022. https://orionmagazine.org/article/in-distrust-of-movements/

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About the International Jacques Ellul Society

The International Jacques Ellul Society, founded in 2000 by former students of Ellul, links scholars, students, and others who share an interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912–94), longtime professor at the University of Bordeaux. Along with promoting new publications related to Ellul and producing the *Ellul Forum*, the Society sponsors a biennial conference. IJES is the anglophone sister society of the francophone Association internationale Jacques Ellul.

The objectives of IJES are threefold:

Preserving a Heritage. The Society seeks to preserve and disseminate Ellul's literary and intellectual heritage through republication, translation, and secondary writings.

Extending a Critique. Ellul is best known for his penetrating critique of *la technique*, of the character and impact of technology on our world. The Society seeks to extend his social critique particularly concerning technology.

Researching a Hope. Ellul was not only a social critic but also a theologian and activist in church and community. The Society seeks to extend his theological, biblical, and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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