

TECHNICAL TYRANNY

Mihail Ungheanu²²

ABSTRACT

Humanity finds itself at a turning point these days. Due to scientific and technological progress some forces intend to change the way mankind lives. This new way of governing humanity can be called governance and denotes a new kind of running human affairs. It is a technocratic model that tends to reduce human beings to machines and that ignores completely the proper human dimensions of human beings. The rise of management and organization sciences is an example of the fact that human existence is now modelled after the Jacques Ellul called the technical system. The practical result of this development is tyranny.

Keywords: totalitarianism, technique, tyranny, cybernetics, society.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of technique or technology is an essential one for mankind (technique is used in the sense of J. Ellul's le système technicien; usually this expression is rendered as technology in English). As it is man cannot exist, survive, and prosper without it. The fact that mankind is defined by having a world – a being - in-the-world, as Martin Heidegger would express the situation of man –, is possible due the existence of tools and la technique (in the sense used by Jacques Ellul). Technique thus belongs to the conditions of possibility of man, the condition of possibility that man himself produces. Art certainly belongs to these tools man makes.

Technology is thus never neutral because its relation to human nature. Man is defined by the fabrication of new organs that are the tools, as Jean Vioulac so directly affirms. This view is not new. It can be found in the works of Arnold Gehlen or Danny Robert-Dufour or Jacques Ellul. As opposed to the animal, mankind is not confined to a single environment and a set of pre-established behaviors. Also, in opposition to the animal, human beings come into the world in an unfinished state, as if their entire being was left uncompleted.

A human individual is in no way prepared for the environment as an animal. No sharp claws like a big feline or a crocodile, no capacity to fly, no armor like the aforementioned big lizard. None of those. So according to the view exposed above, the faculty of fabricating tools kicked in. Not only that man made tools, but man also made himself. Man has no real essence. Those tools, and the experience of working with

²² Researcher at the European Centre for Ethnic Studies, E-mail contact: mihail_li@yahoo.com_

them – writing can be counted among the – do structure and influence our thought and behavior. According to Vioulac and sounding very Marxist, the theoretical models of thought are loaned from the realm of production techniques (thanks can be and is a subcase of the fact that human thought is structured by metaphors, which do have cognitive import and are not replaceable by a definition). According to him, this makes human thought dependent to the practical realm of technique.

THE CLASSICAL RELATION BETWEEN TECHNIQUE AND SOCIETY

In the opinion of Pierre Francastel, in the past century, there is no antinomy between art and technique. This so-called antinomy is just the present-day version of the classical thesis about the gratuity of art. They are nevertheless wrong. They belong somehow together and, thus, opposing art to technique or aesthetics to utility is wrong. Until modernity art and technique have belonged together. The tool was an extension of the hand and bodily activity. Some aspects of bodily activity and manual manipulation of tools disappear when automatized machines are being used. He contends that opposing art and technique is not only a modern point of view. Technical and esthetic values were already differentiated and opposed during the history of mankind but opposing each other is false. Art and beauty are not without purpose. Art and aesthetics have their utility, which has always existed, even when one cannot see them. They have always been bound together.

The opinion that art and technique are opposites is false. Artists and people that see things in this way are wrong. Human desires and necessities still dictate to and technology, affirms the French sociologist in the aftermath of the second world war. In the past the beautiful and the practical belonged to the same phenomenon. In those days there were no products that were only practical and objects that were only destined to esthetic contemplation. All objects had those two aspects even from the beginning of humanity. The work instrument is made to serve a certain purpose but there was no prescribed form that the instrument had to take to function properly. There was no absolute determination between the purpose of the tool and a particular form thereof. According to historical and ethological research in older cultures, but also in the past ages of the European culture, there are an infinite number of variations for the same kind of tool in different human groups. The pure form of the tool was an abstraction. On each tool can be seen the person or social impression that the artisan had imprinted on it. Art and technique have always belonged together.

What we call art, in the modern sense, meant *techne* (or the know-how that guides an activity) in ancient Greece, that is technique. Until the advent of modernity, there were no changes in this relationship between art and utility. Medieval architecture can be said to be the product of both aesthetic and spiritual aims and of purposes of technological development. When an artisan did his job and produced an object of his trade, he was not only following rules, but he was also

inventing the method that would allow him to approximate as much as possible the ideal model that guides his doing. Thus, the techniques that are used evolve and change, improve, and so forth. Francastel is asserting in a categorical way that all the arts were born out of the handling of matter and that every action that man imposes on the matter implies two components. A free and creative one and one that is utilitarian. Opposing art and technique is wrong. The technique is a phenomenon that is present in all domains of activity. The techniques man uses command all arts and all activities. A technique is a recipe for doing things, attaining a certain result. In this sense it is ubiquitous and an essential part of almost everything we do.

On the other hand, every technique entails something that belongs to art. There would be a true opposition between art and utility only if the art product would be the product of a completely gratuitous fantasy of a person. This assertion does not acknowledge the sociological role of the art. That holds whether the artisan or the artist produces objects with esthetic values or practical things. From this perspective opposing art and technique permanently is just groundless. But since Francastel's article dates from 1948 and he admitted that one should research if due to the new developments in technology, the relationship between art and technique did not transform.

The relation between art and technique changed. The birth and development of the machine did bring changes with it. The tool ceases to be the extension of the human hand. It replaces both the hand and sometimes the mind. The machine takes over from the human mind the part pertaining to the adjustments and corrections of an activity, a part that seemed reserved for the art. Art had a sociological function to accomplish and, in his view, if contemporary people find that art produces ugly objects is because they look for their aesthetic values in the past and not in the present. It remains nevertheless true that a lot of products of contemporary are ugly. The misappreciation of modern art and the belief that art and technique are opposed could stem from this fact that people hold to values systems from the past and that they did not acquire a new aesthetic taste.

The relationship between art and technique is affected by the fact that new materials come up, by the fact that new needs arise, and all these give a new direction to the development of technique. Not taking this into account leads also to the view that art and technique are opposed. The French sociologist thought that art still influences technique and that the finality of the technique is imposed upon it from outside its domain. The finality that the mechanical arts acquired, as they dubbed technique in the Middle Ages, depended also on the needs of the client and of the imagination of society and engineers, architects, etc. Thus, even in the middle of the twentieth century, Francastel concluded that nothing changed in the relationship between art and technique. The adaptation of technological development to the life condition of a certain age did not belong to technique alone, but to art. Of course, his work and point of view were not acquainted with the development of cybernetics. The technical object incorporated the *Weltanschauung* of an era, and its behavior, including both utilitarian and social/aesthetic values. Art creates new languages for

expressing new ideas and feelings, according to the age wherein it takes place, just like technique comes with new innovations. In this sense, they reflect the age they are in and so does politics and the way it is done. The technique seems for him to be something that man and society can master as a mere instrument. But is this so? Does technique or technology really support human endeavors and a humane life?

THE ASCENDANCY OF THE MODERN TECHNIQUE

Thinkers such as Leroi-Gourhan or Martin Heidegger saw technique and the tool as an extension of the hand – which was the main instrument of rearranging the world. The first seeds of mechanics are in his view the signs of a mutation of what technique is supposed to be. The technique becomes cunning, ingenious invention. It becomes know-how, a kind of practical and foreseeing knowledge that guides action. From now on the technique becomes a kind of knowledge that inheres the practical work, not a science based upon theoretical principles and reflection. Technique becomes manipulation. Present-day age technique is based on theoretical science, according to him. With the advent of modernity, techniques ceased to be based upon personal experience, an isolated endeavour of few people. Modern technique is based upon notions borrowed from physics and mathematics. It becomes machine-like, that is machine-like.

Mathematics applied to physics becomes paramount and the development thereof entails the discovery and use of other materials than wood or iron, for example, steel. This development imposes new requirements on man. Creating and using the new type of tools requires more precision and theoretical reflection. Without precision and new materials, the mechanisms known as machines could not have been built. The technique becomes emancipated from its original source, the hand. The main and proper feature of the machine is to be self-moving and the workers that are bound to it are instrumentalized by being made to execute a single predefined and repeating gesture. The machine does not emancipate man, it bounds man to it, and it cuts man from his own know-how, from the different kinds of knowledge he possessed. Man is robbed of some of his own features that are transferred to the machine. This is visible in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries regarding the development of computers, their networking, etc., and the so-called artificial intelligence. Something else is being transferred to the machine: the decision-making capacity of man. This became way easier with the introduction of the feedback mechanism.

Cybernetics is the discipline that manages to bring together all these features of the new technique, of the technological system in Jacques Ellul's words. The feedback mechanism makes it possible that the machine improves its own activity, that it starts to learn and correct itself. The machine is a logical system, a program, a way of enacting and doing things according to a certain structure. The computer, the cybernetic machine is not made for one purpose only but can be used for many. It is

a kind of universal machine, adaptive to a lot of circumstances. It does not produce proper work. It runs and governs different tasks. That is also the meaning of its Greek name. Cybernetes mean pilot or governor. This discipline and its principles have invaded society and are permeating all the activities of man. Cybernetics has taken a leading role in human society under the guise of the science of organization and management. The managerial society is its mask. It is based on a type of logic akin to or even identical to the one of the markets.

One of the most comprehensive treatments of the problem of technique can be found in Jacques Ellul's work. He thinks that it represents the most important problem of the life of modern man. The technique is, as J. Ellul so clearly states, is the most important social and spiritual factor in the modern era. The technique is not something reducible to the machine, although the way a completely automated machine works is the ideal of technical usage. Without the birth of the machine there would be no world of the technique. Technical progress had created a kind of inhuman environment wherein man lives. The machine was invented and integrated with a social and spiritual environment that was changed and transformed by it. What really creates the modern world is not capitalism as such, but the development of the technical system. The machine burst into the society of the XIX century, a society that was not prepared for its arrival. The technological system – the standard English translation for Ellul's concept of *le système technicien* – brings about a survey of everything that can be considered practical in all domains of life, of everything that can be integrated into the machine or the mega-machine that society will become. The technique integrates the machine into society thereby producing a change in its makeup. Through technique and the technical mindset society begins to be adapted to the machine; the social realities, behaviors, thinking, etc. began to be ordered, rationalized, and rejected when they didn't adapt to the new ways of being imposed by the technical progress.

The technique is efficient and spreads everywhere its iron law: the iron law of efficiency. The technical system integrates everything it can. The man is adapted to the system and not the other way around. The technique, once extended in all the areas of life, ceases to be an object for man. It becomes her own substance. It begins to absorb him gradually. Equating the technical system with the machine does not match the situation. Man is not simply adapted to the technical system that entails the application of new kinds of laws on human action. The superior know-how that the machine incorporates is now transferred to all the domains that previously were not accessible to it. The development and expansion of the technique were made possible in modernity by the development of science. The technique is commonly seen as the point of application of science to reality. But in some domains, the technique precedes science, for example, in physics. If the technical mean does not exist, then there will be no progress.

Modern science, despite the theoretical subbasement, is subservient to technology. What matters is application and getting results. Science had become a means by which technology goes forward. The technique applied to social life is what is referred nowadays as organization or management "Organization" is a

technique. The technical system is encompassing all domains of life and connects across all of them. And what lies at the core thereof is the search for efficiency, of increasing efficiency. A partial definition of technics is that it represents the practical expression of man's desire to exert rational control over things. The expression of this desire in social life is managerial action. "Organization" is a kind of technique, an aspect of the technical system that engulfs life. Even the modern political organization known as the state is made possible by the development of different types of techniques be it in the administrative domain, in the way armies are built, and so forth. The technique starts to her full development in the nineteenth century, accelerating it in the twentieth. Research is done only from the perspective of the application. The search for increased efficiency is the guide, the main force that drives technical development and expansion. As already said the technique or the technical system had become its own substance, a reality.

The technique had ceased to be a simple go-between man and the world and had become something different. It is no longer a simple collection of means and tools, but an end. In ancient civilizations technical endeavors were limited and applied only on certain occasions. The relationship between these was inverted. Modern civilization depends on technical means completely. Everything depends on technique: transportation, production, economy, personal comfort, etc. In those civilizations and in the past of what is now modern civilization the technical means were under the control of man. They were adapted to him not man to technique. Roman law was practical, build upon a minimal set of principles that needed personal evaluation and judgment when confronted with a situation. The existing means and tools were meant to be used extensively till all their possibilities were exhausted. There was no need to invent new ones (laws in the case of Roman law) every time a new situation or a new need/desire arises. Maximum results using a minimal and limited set of means. The idea was to perfect the existing means at one's disposal.

The same principle was applied in all other domains. Each artisan was trying to perfect his mastery over the technical means. The techniques were stable, they were not revolutionized permanently. The human being was on the first place, not technical development. But this relation was turned upside down Since the nineteenth century, the technique has become an autonomous reality, conditioned only by the search and calculation of efficiency. The research and experiment have ceased to be individual and have become abstract, mathematical, and industrial. Research is done collectively. The researchers are functionaries of the technical system. The state and powerful companies and now involved therein and they define it. The individual takes part in it, but only as an abstraction. In the present-day world the technique is no more limited to strict domains of life or certain geographical areas, since it was bounded to certain ethnic or specialized groups of people. It has invaded all areas of life and all activities of mankind and has produced a limitless multiplication of means; it perfects continuously all the instruments that are already at the disposal of man. The technique has now spread all over the world. It has some

defining features that did not apply to the ancient techniques: automatism, self-growth, universality, autonomy, and inseparability.

Automatism means that the choice that one must take in certain circumstances regarding a problem will be made automatically in the direction of the most efficient technique. The most efficient, the newest, and the most technical way of doing things have to be used. As it develops and spread across the whole human existence, the technical system will eliminate everything that is not technical and will try assimilating the non-technical wherever possible. A technical attitude in politics means that the human factor is going to be the subjected to a series of pressures that should mold it according to technical requirements. Freedom will be cut down. All sources of unpredictability will be shut down. The hazard must be abolished, and a rational regularity must be imposed upon the subject-matter of politics.

Since technique and science require regularity there is another factor that must be eliminated from the realm of politics: man. Human individuals are sources of unpredictability, that is, from the technical point of view, sources of disorder. Technical progress tends to develop in geometrical progression. One invention in a domain may lead to other inventions and new technical innovation in another. The older technique conditions the newer ones. Though the intervention and activities of mankind are still necessary the development of technique is a movement which has as its aim itself. The only purpose of technique is her own growth and spreading. An infinite movement. Wherever she is applied she stay identical to herself. Whatever is touched by it takes technical feature.

The technique is a whole. It does not support or accept moral judgments. Moral is something alien to technique. Technique is a mean to do something and that something can be done only if someone uses the technical mean according to its technicality. The technique has become an environment that mediates between man and world, man and man, and man ant himself. It creates a model for social relationships, too. The technique colonizes man. The manifestations of technique are universal. The technique incorporates a kind of vison of the world, which is exemplified by the people living under the reign of the technical system. People no longer adapt the technique to them; they are adapted so that the technical system can go forward. Cybernetics and management are an expression for the technical system and of the subservience of mankind toward technique.

CONCLUSIONS. MANAGEMENT AND CYBERNETICS

From tool, one arrives at cybernetics and management. What is management? According to Baptiste Rappin management is related to hand but also to home and to the way one used to lead a horse. The English verb “to manage” is a loan from Italian – maneggiare. When met in American English, manager meant something akin to an impresario meaning a person tasked with taking care of someone else’s affairs and interests. In English, the word applied to the realm of horse races and

afterward to the domain of sports in general. The Italian verb *managgiare* corresponds to the French *manier* - to manipulate, to make use of. Both verbs are related to the Latin word for hand *manus* - hand. From this stems the meaning of *mando*, of giving a mandate to someone, to delegate a task to someone. The manager was someone that through his skill or deftness catches and then controls a horse. As such management has to do with utilizing, manipulating, and leading something. It means to manipulate or handle something with skill. Someone leads someone else or makes other people do his or her bidding. To this meaning comes another that the word acquired when it arrived in America. "To manage" took the sense of taking care of the home and the activities associated with that, including the education of the children, spending, etc. The noun *management* has another meaning now. "Management" denotes a set of techniques of efficacy. The works of the hand imply a kind of Promethean relationship with the world. Man becomes the master of the world that remodels it according to his own wishes and needs. Even the Germanic variant of verbs pertaining to hand - handling, to handle, *die Behandlung*, *handeln*, *die Handlung*, *Handhabung*, entail this connotation. But the transition to the industrial age led to another meaning to the word in the direction of efficiency.

The Industrial Revolution replaced the manual activity of the worker with the machine. Work becomes something mechanical, and the machine becomes the norm. The machine becomes the model a worker must imitate. Features of the human worker are from that point transferred onto the machine. The culmination of this process can be seen in the birth of the computer (an early phase because of the necessity of calculating the flight path of enemy aviation and targeting/opening fire against it) and the rise of cybernetics. It can be said that mankind builds the golem not to be served by it but to serve it. What else is the AI that should run entire smart cities? But another name of the golem should be "organization" before it is applied to the Artificial Intelligence.

What is organization? The organization is the application of the principles of scientific management to the whole of human existence (or of existence as such). The terms that frame the definition of organization are purpose, finality, actions, feedback, information, system, etc. "Organization" is a central term of the science that Norbert Wiener elaborated on during the second world war. That science is cybernetics. Information is opposed to the increasing dis-organization of the universe. Information is organization. Living beings are such systems of organization that have another important feature: feedback loops, the capacity to learn, monitor themselves, and change their behavior. The concept of organization that cybernetics engenders denotes a feedback loop, which means it is a sort of collective completed activity in which the processes of control and evaluation have replaced the process of surveillance in the act of verifying if the behavior of the living being aligns to a certain strategy (in the case of different associations, organizations, etc. if the behavior of the employee's members align with the management plans). This is the modern basis of management theories of today. And is no accident that

Wiener's last book is entitled *God and Golem, Inc* which retells the story of what happens when a golem goes out of control. The idea of the golem is mentioned by Wiener in the foreword to his groundbreaking work *Cybernetics* in 1948.

For Wiener, the men of science should be the ones who offer the guarantees for adequate use of technical innovations. Technical inventions are neutral, the effect thereof depends only on the use that someone makes of them. Scientific activities have a messianic meaning. The new discoveries help to maintain organization in nature, therefore blocking the way of the progress of entropy. This task is now incumbent on the managerial class. The management and the organizational techniques are thus fulfilling the same task. Blocking entropy in the world. The managerial organization of society has the power to transform the world, and to increase order. Wiener's position is the current position on techniques. Those are seen as neutral, and the effects thereof depend on the usage man make of them. Thus, the managerial techniques are considered to be morally neutral and if one is properly trained that person won't misapply them. This whole conception hinders the possibility to critically examine the "technical system" (Jacques Ellul), thereby producing an inflation of surveillance and controlling devices, and so forth. Also, it produces a collusion between the inflation of the managerial devices and the voluntarist (and utopian, totalitarian, despotic) discourse around sustainable development, social responsibility, governance, and so forth.

Management is the art – *techne* or the technique – to govern people's inner subjectivity. It works in a subtle and invisible way. It affects the psyche of the people under its rule. It makes uses, leads, and manipulates what one may call human desire, the main motor of human action. The managerial techniques are applied not on the people that are the driving forces behind an enterprise, the people who came with the purpose and the idea that set up the whole thing, but upon the ones that are doing the execution work. Those people are being estranged from themselves (since they do not have any inkling about the idea/the purpose that is the main motivation behind the existence of the whole enterprise), from their desire to work and the work they must accomplish. The management aims at bridging this gap. Its job consists in accommodating, patching up, repairing. For the managerial technique man is reduced to the cognitive-behavioral dimension of his existence, which I supposed to be governed only by policies based solely on information. The managerial approach does not aim at modifying the way work is done. Instead, its target is to modify the worker and adapt him to the work. The worker must be adapted and modified to match the organizational managerial logic. Adaptation is the key-concept here. This managerial view of things and of governing humans entail a removal of essential features of the human being. The process represents the opposite of the process entailed by the work artisans did. There the matter was subdued by the hand, by the worker. Now the worker is subdued and is being worked upon from outside becoming estranged from himself.

It is now obvious that the relationship that existed between art and technique as Pierre Francastel understood it has changed. There is no more room for personal

judgment in confronting new circumstances, no place for negotiations with reality. The technique has engulfed all the areas of human life under the guise of the principles of organization. Politics were once understood as the art of government, be it of state, people, or even one's life. But politics in this sense tend to disappear. Politicians are to be replaced by technicians or technocrats. When organization takes over a new world is being born, an order that alienates mankind. The art of politics modeled after cybernetics and management is no longer true art of politics. It is a technique of governing and according with technical and scientific principles that leave no room for freedom or for humanity.

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