

**JACQUES ELLUL, *PROPAGANDELE* [PROPAGANDES],
ARAD, SENS PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2024, TRANSL.
OCTAVIAN SOVIANY**

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ABSTRACT

Jacque Ellul was a French sociologist and Protestant theologian. His work encompasses a large variety of issues, one of his main themes being the technological development/ enslavement of society and man by it. His book on Propaganda is not just merely a book on the subject matter, it is a work on the way the so-called technical system/society affects humankind. Propaganda is not just a tool of a certain kind of regime. It is born out of the political necessities of the democratic regimes and out of the inner infrastructure of the technical society. It is a pervasive activity that affects the inner life of man, traumatizing him permanently, and instilling in him a state of subservience and obedience, even if the targets of the propaganda are not aware of this external influence. His work on this matter represents a step toward emancipation because there is no way to get out the predicament in which present-day humanity finds itself without becoming aware of the difficulties humanity has to confront.

Keywords: Ellul, propaganda, technical society, technocracy, alienation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Romanian reader has now at his disposal one of the most important texts describing what is propaganda. The book we are talking about is in French called *Propagandes* or in the Romanian translation *Propagande*, offered by the Sens Publishing House from Arad. The book is written in a very concise and clear style, offering a definition and description of what the phenomenon of propaganda truly is. Jacques Ellul was a French sociologist and Protestant theologian whose work encompasses subject matters from both these fields.

One of his main contributions pertains to the importance that technique has gained for human existence and how this phenomenon should be seen as the most important spiritual problem of the twentieth century. As seen by the world we live in today, the issue of technique or the technical system/society is at the core of the world's problems; the foremost spiritual issue of the twentieth century was the problem (and is) the problem of technique, of the technical system, as Ellul called it (or *das Gestell* in Heidegerian terms).

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Propaganda is not to be understood primarily as a political weapon, although it is in a secondarily exactly that, but as something more profound. Propaganda has become generalized and is present everywhere while being, at the same time, a secret activity³⁴⁶. All propaganda is concerned with efficiency. Propaganda is done in order to bring results, to provoke an action – the main thrust behind it since it is a technical activity, which is a priori concerned with efficiency). It should be a powerful weapon *im Dienst der Politik*. As such propaganda belongs to the technical universe, to the technical or technological system since its main concern is based on the search for efficiency. Propaganda, to be properly understood, should be studied as a global phenomenon that encompasses the whole of society and not just some tiny and separate groups in a nation. The nation as such and as a whole is the target of propaganda. Propaganda encompasses many aspects and actions and has an institutional dimension. Among them can be counted psychological action, psychological war, reeducation and brainwashing, sensitivity training, public and human relations. These activities are here to adapt the individual to a certain society, activity, etc., not to emancipate him. All of these belong to propaganda as a global phenomenon. Of course, there is also propaganda in a restricted sense when it is done official, overt by an institution with a definite and set of means, etc. In this sense, propaganda is defined by the combination of organizational and leadership techniques pertaining to action. In its true all-encompassing form, propaganda is a whole and it does not matter if it was done by the (former) democratic countries of the West and the former socialist countries of the Eastern bloc. It has the same nature irrespective of the state that is doing it Nazi Germany, DDRA, Maoist China, the European Union, UNESCO etc.

Propaganda is currently deemed to be a necessity. According to Ellul, when a phenomenon is considered to be a necessity, then it becomes something taken to be a kind of unavoidable fact or process, a kind of power that cannot be opposed. As such, necessity is something that impinges upon human freedom. In addition to this, there is the tendency of mankind to reify these necessities, to give them a kind of sacred status, so that man builds and adopts types of attitudes and ideas, by which he can justify his lack of action/non-action. These attitudes and ideas, justificatory theories are called by the French sociologist the “religion of facts”, and of the inevitable, of the subordination of all values to so-called facts, of blind obedience to necessity, of obedience to something external, etc. When mankind sees things through these lenses, it ceases to think critically about these seemingly inevitable facts and so-called necessities and ends up confusing probability judgment with value judgment. Consequently, the very idea of reflecting on them disappears as does the idea of changing one’s own behavior and attitudes or changing external circumstances. To label a phenomenon as necessary – whether it is or is not, is to refuse to address the issue, is to refuse to reflect on it, and is to grant it a kind of counterfeit legitimacy.

³⁴⁶ Jacques Ellul, *Propagandele*, Arad, Sens Publishing House, 2024, p. 9.

The necessity of propaganda does not equal to its legitimacy, does not determine it though. The universe determined by necessity is the world of man's weakness, or as he puts it, of man's negation, of man's denial. When confronted with something that is a necessity, the first step to take is to become aware of it and the starting to examine it critically. The same must be done in the case of propaganda, the necessity attributed to it must be scrutinized and it must be brought to light that under this label of "necessity" there is no legitimacy to be found. This label works as a source for counterfeit legitimacy for enacting actions and policies deeply harmful to man.

To acknowledge that man is alienated by so and so a phenomenon, make it possible to attain some degree of freedom. Ellul's works on propaganda, on the technical system/society are, thus, steps in this direction. Propaganda represents a danger for mankind since the target of its endeavor is man, his soul, his ideas, his inner life, and his capacity to act. The continual exercise of propaganda, which is at odds with the professed principles of democracy, makes a truly democratic and free society impossible. It is important to understand the context of a phenomenon that someone researches and tries to understand. At one level propaganda is a weapon, wielded by specialists, political parties, corporations, or whoever has an interest to foist upon a group, on society, and so on, at another level, propaganda is something different. It is the product of the technical society, of the technical system wherein we live. This is a society driven and ordered by the search for efficiency, characterized by an increase of the means at its disposal and a reduction and evacuation of true goals; in the technical system or technical society, the means take precedence over the goals and aims and become the goals of the existing society. The means determine the goals that are chosen. For this society, propaganda is a necessity. The problems that are plaguing it require propaganda to promise the solution to these very problems, solutions (technical in nature) that give birth to other problems, which are going to be solved by more propaganda. Propaganda offers fake healing to the problems that befallen the individuals, the individual being "healed" in the sense of adaptation and integration into this fold.

2. PROPAGANDA AND THE TECHNICAL SOCIETY

As hitherto seen, propaganda is less the political weapon of a regime than an activity triggered by the existence of modern technicist society. It is a process that encompasses man in its entirety. The propagandizing process contributes to creating uniformity that leads to the creation of a more and more integrated society. Propaganda has to be understood in the context of the expansions of the powers of the State, of development of governing and administrating techniques, of the development of machines, of organizational sciences, etc. Another purpose underlying it, is the integration of all individuals in the new societal structure without much oppression, smoothly, to make man obedient toward it, unable to have a

critical thought or approach toward the problems that exist in it³⁴⁷. The purpose of propaganda will be fulfilled in the moment the individual integrates himself with enthusiasm in this technocratic society without any adverse feelings, being convinced of the supreme goodness of this integration and this type of society. Propaganda is a technique based on more than one science that underlies its proceedings, like sociology, social psychology, and so on. Science, be it physics, chemistry, or sociology, is technoscience. It is a search for power and efficiency.

Ellul describes what propaganda really is, what and how many types of it exist, what are its conditions of possibility, what are its features, how it comes into being, what are the effects it develops, and so on. Propaganda must be understood in the context of modern technique, which no longer can be conceived as being a simple tool over which man reigns supreme. Modern technique – Ellul does not use the word technology because technology is the discourse on technique – is a system of means, an environment wherein modern man lives, an environment that molds man's soul and attitudes, mankind's thinking as such, and the continuous search of rational means for attaining efficiency. The technique is a type of being-in-the-world, an impulse, and quest for increased efficiency by the most rational means, it is a worldview concerned with efficiency and power, with transforming the world and man's nature. This is the frame in which propaganda as a rational means to produce something has to be understood and described. As the technique can be understood as a total social and spiritual phenomenon, so is propaganda. Propaganda is not reducible to publicity, even if there is an overlapping between the two. It is a total social, political, and spiritual phenomenon that affects the entirety of society and each individual. It is an expression of the technical mind-set and attitude that underlies modern society and that tends to erase politics as an activity defined by its own set of rules and values, centered around debate and dialogue, as Ellul's work on *La illusion politique* [*The political illusion*] shows (basically, the decisions and the policies taken are based on experts whereby the true political dimension of the decision is denied; no more discussion and debates are necessary).

One of the main uses of propaganda is the conditioning of the people as groups and individuals. This conditioning is both imposed and wished by the people that are caught in it – by the need for moral justification, security, stability, need for integration in a group, be it society, nation, State, etc., both necessary and irreversible, unavoidable. This drive for integration is present in the uprooted individuals of modern society. Organic groups are disbanded or on the way to disbanding, and the people need to be integrated with a new structure. Everyone is caught in, or on the way to being captured by such groups or organizations – for example parties whose true function is to integrate people in the State, syndicates, states, international enterprises, international organizations, or international political blocks. The same drive is also generated by international relations, and the competition between states, which makes the need for inner integration in a state

³⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

much stronger. The democratic states are the one that pushed for propaganda, although the non-democratic have perfected and made also use of it. International competitions between different geopolitical actors, for example between the West and the block of socialist countries, also belong to this context. Such competition and conflicts make propaganda within the nation even more necessary. Not only that, but even the democratic states have to engage in such doings that affect the individual in a fundamental way, alienating him, denying its dignity and humanity. Propaganda in all its manifestation is a whole and there is no such thing as good or bad propaganda, in the sense of morally good or bad. It is an attack on the human psyche and soul.

The background of Ellul's understanding of propaganda is constituted by the conception of technique as a spiritual and global phenomenon. His view has some roots in the work of the Russian theologian Nikolai Berdyaev who wrote about technique and the incoming of a new era, the era of organization³⁴⁸. The organization is a kind of world or artificial environment imposed upon the natural and social world. It is what Ellul names *la technique*. Propaganda as a global phenomenon is an expression of this era, of this system underlying it. Berdyaev names the technical enterprise as *cosmo-urgos*, as creating or creator of worlds. Technique, of course, is not something referring to material things. Berdyaev indicates its non-material aspects: there are techniques pertaining to writing, accounting, psychoanalytical techniques, and so on. One of the main features of the technique and society molded by it is its capacity to integrate and thus to annihilate and convert every opposing force that tries to make itself manifest within.

3. PROPAGANDA AND MASS SOCIETY

Even if propaganda can be seen as a tool, it is not just an instrument. It is a global phenomenon, stemming from the technical system. It is guided, just like the technical system is, by the need for efficiency. Efficiency is the alpha and omega thereof. Propaganda is an expression of the way modern society has been transformed through technique. It targets both the individual and the group/the masses. It does not address the isolated individual in a crowd taken in its singularity. It ignores its particularity and considers only what the individual has in common with the others³⁴⁹. Propaganda leaves only the impression that is tailored according to the individuality of each person it is addressed to. Belonging to a crowd weakens the individual making him or her more permeable to the action of propaganda and creating the false awareness of oneself as being a mature person, capable of independent thought and impervious to manipulation. She is bound to the

³⁴⁸ Daniele Cérézuelle, *La technique et la chair [Technology and flesh]*, Paris, L' Echappee, 2021, pp. 236–241.

³⁴⁹ Jacques Ellul, *quoted work*, 2024, p. 26.

massification of society, and it represents an encompassing force that makes a true individuation of the individual, creating neurotic and infantile behaviors. Mass society and individualism are not opposed. In a sense, they are the same because individualism destroys the structures that can be used to stop massification. Real existing individualism does exactly this, it uproots and alienates mankind, making it possible for the taking over of society by technocracy and propaganda. Propaganda works especially well with the lonely crowd. The promised “emancipation” brought about by the dissolution of the traditional frame of reference and the social mores, institutions, and so on is what makes possible the apparition and the efficiency of propaganda since this process leads to a situation wherein the individual feels that he has no certainty, no security, no real reference, provoking feelings of vulnerability and the sentiment of lacking power. This is a void that propaganda fills, providing a false therapy and a false empowerment. It is the perfect instrument of social integration and alienation of man. Propaganda does not directly attack the prejudgments, preconceived ideas, stereotypes, etc. of the individuals or society. Instead, it tries to make good use of them. The primary aim to accomplish by the propaganda is to elicit action from the propagande, to set up in him the readiness to act when the time comes. It offers a kind of comprehensive view of the world and the existing facts, and, at the same time, it builds up the inner mechanisms that lead the ones undergoing propaganda to act even against his or her own deeper convictions, precluding any act of doubt and reflection from its victims. By removing any act of reflection and personal points of view, the individual is put in a state of accepting and condoning the abnormal conditions that exist in society, a group, etc. It offers a set of pre-given set of answers to the problems that actuality possesses. This act might be called rationalization, an act of self-justification that is needed because man feels the need to be justified in his thoughts and actions. It also falsifies reality creating artificial problems, which need to be solved. It is like a self-propelling and self-fueling mechanism. In a sense, propaganda works as a kind of inner environment that affects and contaminates every possible anti-poison that might be used against it.

The birth of propaganda in its modern form is due to the democratic states. One of the conditions of conditions of possibility is the international situation, the competition between the democratic states themselves, and the competition with non-democratic states. In the realm of international relations, the competition between states/corporation/power blocks has made it necessary that the democratic states adopt propaganda techniques and in the inner domain the necessity of integration of a multitude. And here comes a contradiction to light. The propaganda techniques are by their nature undemocratic and, thus, they contradict the principles that are supposed to build democracies. They are also a denial and an attack on the nature of man, to freedom as such. The existence of propaganda depends on the existence of mass media, too. Another condition for attaining its aims is the destruction of micro-groups, of annihilating the possibility of the individual to find means of resistance and mental balance in these groups.

4. NO ROOM FOR MULTIPLE INTERPRETATIONS OR DIALOGUE/DEBATE

Propaganda, in order to accomplish its purposes, has to be total, to encompass everything. All existent means must be used: written press, radio, TV, and nowadays the internet, etc. Each of those has its own way of working and produces specific effects and each can be used to address a different part of society and an individual's life. In other words, all aspects of mental and psychic life are under continuous attack. The people as a whole and everyone are targeted in their entirety. Every aspect of the inner life, feelings, and thoughts are the targets of the propagandist's activity. Both the private and public spheres of society are under attack. The individuals are continuously fed motives, ideas, and a global frame for interpreting the world that are meant to induce in the individual a state of readiness, which will compel him to act when the time comes according to the intentions of the propaganda³⁵⁰. Propaganda creates and makes use of myths – global images of reality, which must invade the mind of the people targeted. Individuals and masses are to be transformed in their inner workings, thus. The global image, the myth, that propaganda imprints or seeks to imprint upon the human psyche should be ideally able to be interpreted only in one way, should make it impossible to arrive at different conclusion or to allow different interpretations, and should occupy the whole field of consciousness. It should invade and occupy the entire inner life and field of consciousness of the person. The attitude of someone caught and invaded by propaganda is an exclusivist, sectarian one; other ideas or points of view are excluded. Propaganda does not tolerate debate or divergence. No tension should exist among the ideas, feelings, views, and actions that the individual who fell under the spell of propaganda. No real opposition to the content of the propaganda should exist in the public sphere after the propagandizing process took place, or, if total unanimity is not reachable, the opposing forces should be confined only to an extremely reduced faction among the people. Ideally, the desired effect sets in at the moment when the adversary gives up his position and point of view and becomes an instrument of it. The fulfillment of propaganda in this sense is illustrated by the self-criticism that so-called deviants from the party line had to make in the former USSR in front of the party or in fake trials whereby recognizing that they were saboteurs, enemies of the people, and so on. The enemy of the party/government/etc. undergoes such a powerful and sweeping inner change that will make him concede that he, as the enemy of the party/government, is evil, disgusting, that the party/the government/etc. is right. The adversary is thus converted. Propaganda tries to produce a conversion process in its targets.

³⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

5. TYPES OF PROPAGANDA

The mechanism underlying propaganda is totalitarian (not in the political sense). It demands the abolishing of every different opinion or thought, and it tends to occupy the entirety of the inner life of the individual, of the masses, and of society. Education, art, literature, history, diplomacy, and other domains pertaining to the intellectual and public sphere lose their independence and thereby become instruments of propaganda.

To achieve its main end – action, propaganda has to instill a global change of worldview in the person and society in its entirety. Propaganda can be direct and visible, but it needs to be prepared by sociological propaganda, which creates a certain climate that makes it possible for the explicit and visible propaganda to work. Sociological propaganda is akin to pre-propaganda activity that creates a certain spiritual atmosphere, that creates ambiguities and spreads images, feelings or ideas that seem to lack any definite purpose, etc. All these types of propaganda have to go together, one can't work without the other one, just as much written and oral propaganda go hand in hand. Hidden propaganda is the most efficient at making people take a certain course of action without them becoming aware of the external force directing their feeling and behavior. Propaganda is or should be a permanent ongoing process, it has to be exerted without allowing any breaches in its reach and effects, it should take place in and during a very long time. It must make it impossible for its victims the access to any external points of reference.

There is pre or under/infra-propaganda (implicit) and active propaganda, crisis propaganda. Implicit propaganda is very important. It prepares the terrain for the explicit and directed one. This sublevel of propaganda mobilizes the citizens, it makes them ready to get into action when the time comes. If one is to get into action, one has to be prepared, to be motivated both psychologically and materially. It opens the individuals to certain external influences that will make them ready to act, to participate in an action at a certain point in time. At this infra level the propaganda has no precise, definite content, it is not about a certain idea or point of view. Instead, it acts through psychological and perceptual manipulations, under modification of one character, by infusing certain feelings and stereotypes when it should. It takes a long time to achieve this effect and it is under the level of perceptions, it permeates the inner life and modifies even some tendencies present therein. Two instruments are at its disposal: conditioning and myth³⁵¹. Propaganda is a kind of behavioral training, which tries to induce reflex condition in its targets. That is, under certain circumstances, due to the presence of some trigger words, signs, symbols, persons, images, etc. a certain behavior would be enacted. The mind and soul of the individuals are, therefore, made anew in a sense. This is the precondition for the success of the more overt and explicit propaganda.

³⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 58.

The other element of the workings of the propaganda is, as already mentioned, the myth. The myth can be understood as a global motive/driving image, a vision of objectives and purposes that are deemed desirable. This is a vivid image that takes control of the individual's psyche. It contains everything that one should wish for and that outlaws/excludes out of the field of consciousness everything that does not match it or that does not pertain to the values embodied in this driving image. The myth of the race, of the proletariat, of the State are some examples. But the myth and the reflex condition must be steadily renewed.

A well-done propaganda encompasses all the time of the individual and society. It is a process that becomes an environment wherein the individual lives and breathes as much as the technical system. Propaganda achieves its goals by setting up a frame – this environment – which engulfs the individual in a torrent of images, ideas, etc. that build imperceptible influences. Those are efficient by their permanent repetition and continual bombardment of society. In this manner the propaganda machine get what it needs: the adhesion from the individuals. This process has to be permanent because the ideas, convictions, the images and the feelings required to make the individual act in a certain way need a very long time to take root and to grow. It is a stream of impulses, of small imperceptible shocks that address diverse feelings and thoughts using different types of instruments. It is like a permanent sensorial bombardment. When the effect of the previous impulse fades away, a new one comes in. This ongoing process overwhelms the individual, and their capacity to adapt and to resist. Such a process is not a spontaneous one. A certain kind of social organization and society is the ground on which is built. It requires an extensive organization and an apparatus overseeing it. This society rose up at the same time with the development of modern science and technique.

The main thrust of the propaganda is not to modify ideas, but to set in motion an action from the part of the omnes undergoing its effects. Someone – individual, group, or the entire society – must be engaged toward a precise course of action. Someone has to be made in an irrational way to commit an act. This is done by creating in the mind of the propagande of an active and mythical belief/set of beliefs and setting some reflexes by using the most efficient means at its disposal. An important observation of Ellul is that it does not matter what ideas someone entertains, there is no direct or causal link between them and their behavior. It is a space where propaganda sets in. Propaganda does not appeal to the intelligence of the targeted individual because the process of building up intellectual convictions is long and hazardous. What this process seeks is to obtain a decision to act that is short without involving any debates, or questions that might jeopardize the triggering of the intended action. This is not achievable if there is deliberation and choice at work. The triggered action makes the effect of propaganda irreversible³⁵². If the action took place, it means that it was a collective action. The act the individual accomplishes must belong to a collective action, otherwise one cannot

³⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 56.

speak by an action triggered by propaganda. Propaganda takes place in groups (nation, etc.). Such an action makes sense only within a bundle of convergent reflexive individual actions. Such a coherence requires the existence of an organization. The organization behind the propaganda action coordinates and creates the needed inner unity of each individual so they can become a unitary force that manifests itself through an unitary act. The reflex action that propaganda triggers is only a beginning, a first impulse that is took over by the organizing force and extended, binding it to other similar acts and prolonging its effect. Once the triggered action takes place, there is no going back. After the action has been undertaken, the individual has to adhere to it, to find a justification for it.

Propaganda does not arise from nowhere. There is a basis for propaganda. It cannot originate from anything. The grounds can be found in the individuals sand their life. It finds support in needs – real or imaginary and in deep undercurrents of society. Making individuals ready to commit themselves to an action is a way to describe one of the main goals of propaganda. Another way to describe its goals is to understand it as a mechanism through which obedience and subjugation are produced³⁵³. Propaganda does indeed negatively affect its targets. It changes their inner lives and increases the probability that the individuals and society become more and more passive, unable of true independent thinking and action. The effects brought about by the propaganda are deep, modifying not only the opinions or attitudes of the individuals but also the inner impulses, and mental and emotional structure³⁵⁴. Each instrument used by propaganda produces a different effect, which can be combined by the necessary use of all the means at the disposal of the propaganda expert. How does this effect look?

Propaganda works with whatever tendencies and feeling are found in the individuals and society. Ellul calls the effect crystallization since it uses vague and undefined tendencies, often lacking in a precise object, present in the human psyche. Propaganda provides the objects for these tendencies and organizes these feelings, etc. in a coherent system. Afterwards, it freezes this structure, thus, crystallization. Prejudices and stereotypes are reinforced, justified, and hardened; propaganda does not work against them but with them. The individual is told that harboring these prejudices and feelings is justified. After the moment when the propaganda has begun to utilize and direct these prejudices, hatred, and so on, it begins to be very difficult to retreat from them or to change the attitudes.

Where vague ideas and tendencies were present, there is now a supply of already made judgments and ideas, value judgments, and so on, which provide the ammunition for conflict. No more personal reflection and thought is needed and, strictly speaking, those become impossible since the inner life of man is colonized by propaganda. Prevailing stereotypes, and current ideas are standardized, reinforced and hardened whereby patterns of thought are furnished for many

³⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

³⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 251.

aspects of life. Propaganda codifies political, social, and moral standards, which is itself necessary. But propaganda furnishes this process with so a powerful force that makes it impossible to change them or alter the process. The individual thinks that all these pre-given sets of beliefs, ideas, etc. are theirs, though they are collective in nature. This process occupies the whole consciousness of the person and pushes out other feelings, ideas, etc. What is personal or individual disappears from the affected person³⁵⁵. The mind becomes closed to new ideas and inner conflicts. Therefore, one can say that propaganda creates monolithically individuals, completely unified whose opinions, and beliefs are no longer accessible to criticism. There are no more tensions, inner conflicts, unanswered questions, no self-doubt, or self-criticism in these individuals. They have been filled with unwavering certitudes and self-righteousness.

The result of the process described above is the alienation of mankind and the individual. Since it is an ongoing process, it seems to be permanent. An alienated being is no longer itself, but someone or something else. This loss of one's being might mean to belong to someone else. The individual who has become the victim of the propaganda leads an artificial, false life, acting on impulses and drives foreign to their being³⁵⁶. It also reinforces the inclination of the individual to lose himself in some bigger structure or group, it sets in the process of dissolving one's individuality and particularity, to free the individual from his inner conflicts, doubts, and suffering, and to lead him into a fusional unity in the group.

As already shown, there is propaganda and propaganda. There are many types thereof such as political and sociological (as already mentioned propaganda, strategic and tactical, explicit, agitational, vertical and horizontal, rational, and irrational. Among these, there is another type of more fundamental propaganda, the sociological propaganda. The sociological propaganda is the more fundamental and stems from the very fabric of society. She is not the result of a conscious deliberate decision. Its birth is spontaneous.

Another type of propaganda is the integration type thereof. She is the most interesting and is akin to the sociological one in a sense. It denotes the spreading and infusing of an ideology, set of beliefs, norms, and judgments by means of the existing social context. It is the opposite of the propaganda from above, which is done in a deliberate manner. One could say that it builds the conditions of possibility for the other types of propaganda, that without it there would be no molding of the human psyche. The political, social, and economic structures allow an ideology to permeate day-to-day life, making possible the participation of the masses and the adaptation of the individual. It is diffuse and creates a climate that surreptitiously influences people without signaling it is propaganda. It works via customs and habits. It creates new habits and patterns of thought from within in an unconscious manner, new criteria of choice and judgement are thereby adopted as

³⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 254.

³⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 260.

if they sprung from the individual and not from the environment. It is a process of gradual adaptation that molds the individuals unconsciously making them receptive to external influences. As a method, it is used unwittingly by the experts. Advertising, public relations, etc. combine themselves and produce and imbue the life of the individuals with a certain conception about life, etc. This is propaganda at the deepest level. Propaganda has to modify the environment, and, at this level, it must proceed gently. It lays the ground for the coming alienation.

Another great distinction in this area of study is between agitation propaganda and integration propaganda, the rough equivalent of Lenin's distinction between agitation and propaganda but somewhat in reverse, and the distinction between propaganda of subversion and propaganda of collaboration with the enemy. Propaganda of agitation is the most visible and loud, most of the time her contents are subversive, and are used against the government by the opposition; it is oriented toward rebellion or war. This model of propaganda can be used against a certain kind of people by the government such as the kulaks in the former USRR or the unvaccinated nowadays. It is the flashiest type of propagandistic activity, but, when a revolution or *coup de d'etat* succeeds, there is another kind of propaganda that has to replace it. This is the integration propaganda. It is meant to transform everyone who partakes in it, transforming everyone into soldiers of the new order whatever that might be. It is a process that works gradually, imperceptibly, slowly, demanding long time periods to achieve its purpose. In Mao's terms, this is "political education".

Due to this type of propaganda that Ellul names "integration propaganda", man becomes completely alienated and an expression of the group. Authority does not dissipate in thin air. It changes, becoming anonymous, collectivist, etc., and all-present, invading from all corners. Horizontal propaganda is one from within the groups, while the vertical one is the one might call "classical" being done by a leader and conscious forces behind the scenes, by experts; it seeks to influence the crowd underneath and uses all the centralized means of mass media. The propagandists are outside of it. Vertical propaganda is political in nature; the other one is sociological. It is done in a reflective, deliberate way, using all the media that exists, from top to bottom. The ones affected by it, even if they are in a crowd, remain alone, isolated. This type of propaganda requires passivity from the part of its targets. This does not mean that they don't act, they do vigorously and passionately, although it is not their action as we have already seen (though the victims of propaganda think it is their own). They are completely alienated and transformed into objects; they are seized from the outside. Propaganda, not only this one, seems very akin to (demonic) possession.

The horizontal propaganda unfolds inside the groups, between equals, and in the absence of a (formal) leader. This way to do propaganda requires a conscious adherence from the part of the propagandas, the content is presented in a didactic manner, and it is addressed to the intelligence of the targeted individuals. The one doing propaganda plays the role of an animator, someone who discusses things,

and sometimes his presence is not known. Though the adherence to this propaganda is conscious, it is still involuntary because its targets are caught in a dialectic between the individual and the group, being made subject to the pressure coming from the group/environment. This dialectical mode of propaganda leads to accepting it in a voluntary manner. It is an intellectual adherence because the targets can express and clearly understand the contents that are foisted upon them. Nevertheless, it is not a genuine acceptance because whatever comes with the content, the information, and the reasoning behind it have been falsified from the beginning. What is remarkable in this context, is the small group within the process takes place. It must proceed at a slow pace, with repeated meetings and discussions, and through all of those the individual will discover their own conviction, which – surprise, surprise – will be identical to the one of the group. Horizontal propaganda needs a huge organization of people, while the vertical one needs the centralized mass media and public communication apparatus.

6. INFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA

There is also rational and irrational propaganda and the problem of information. Being informed seems to be necessary for being a free person, even a condition for liberty. Sometimes propaganda is deemed as irrational and information as rational, it furnishes facts. But it is not so simple. The content of propaganda is often rational. Another preconception is that propaganda is based on lies. Ellul shows that there are cases when lies are used, but truly successful propaganda makes use of facts and truth. For example, advertisements for automobiles or laptops are based on information pertaining to the technical aspects of those products. So, propaganda can be very rational. Propaganda can be based on facts, statistics, and economic ideas as was done by the Soviets one in the 1950s. Despite the factual information, it was propaganda since it tried to prove rationally the superiority of the communist system over the capitalist one.

The irrational type of propaganda tends to disappear because one of the main urges that feed propaganda – the need for self-justification – reaches a point where serious arguments, and content related to facts, need to be present in the propaganda streams. The urge to self-justification requires man to believe they act rationally. Frenzied propaganda is unusual or was unusual when Ellul wrote his book on this subject. Because propaganda tends to become more and more rational and in relation to the existing facts, the difference between she and information fades away. Shocking and more violent propaganda is less efficient than one more fact-oriented and rational. A great dose of fear instills immediate action while a dose of reasonable information creates an adhesion for a much longer period of time. Despite all the factual content, the information, and the facts the propaganda conveys, what remains is the myth that sets people into action. What is left in the individual is the global driving irrational image, the mythos, a vision of the future,

and the emotional pressure. This will make the individual act, not statistics, empirical facts, or the rational content mediated by propaganda. The secret consists of eliciting an irrational response based on rational and factual elements. Information is not efficient; propaganda is needed to make things move. Though democratic state has made possible modern propaganda, in itself propaganda is not democratic³⁵⁷. A propaganda that respects or seeks to respect the human person is not an efficient one³⁵⁸.

Another consequence of the propaganda is the disconnection and separation that unfolds between the ones exercising power/propaganda and the people. This separation is of the same kind the development of technique has wrought that is the one between the new aristocracies of technology and the normal people. Despite the differences between the different propaganda types, the effect of all of them is the creation and reinforcement of the segregation of the groups. It annihilates dialogue, makes it impossible, and it demonizes the opponent. They become an enemy, and if the opponent refuses to see himself as enemy, it becomes the unknowable, something laying beyond any kind of acknowledgment, recognition, respect, and so on. Society becomes a world of perfect isolated cells wherein each speaks alone to himself, wherein each becomes convinced of his self-righteousness, of being always right, etc. The more people speak, the more increases the lack of contact and communication.

7. SOME CONDITIONS THAT MAKE PROPAGANDA POSSIBLE

Propaganda is dependent on some conditions that make it possible. One condition is the existence of a society with a strong middle class. People living in misery are not open to the effects of propaganda. A certain level of welfare and education is necessary. The modern inventions that have produced modern transportation means (they allow people to gather and to form a multitude, to take part in common actions even if the participant comes from afar), the mass-media are also a condition of possibility, and we should add the IT, the internet and other networking devices. Large-scale propaganda would not be possible without them. Another condition is the existence of mass society and individualism. Mass society and individualism go hand in hand. Individualism and mass society are not contradictory. The so-called emancipation of the individual promised by modernity takes place by destroying the small organic groups to which it belongs like the family unit, for example. It destroys the organic small groups that are the make-up of society. The breaking up of these bonds – family, village, parish – left the individual alone in the face of the whole society or the State. The atomized individuals make up a society since they are no longer part of an organic structure. A mass society cannot

³⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 368.

³⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 367.

exist without those separated individual, self-enclosed unities, truly isolated monad, and prisoners of their identity determined by mutual relationships. Propaganda is bound to operate only in an individualistic society, lacking in organic bonds between its members³⁵⁹. Because the individual claims to be equal to every other, he becomes an abstraction, a ghost without flesh, a number.

In theory, in an individualist society the individual is the supreme value and is free. The reality looks otherwise. He is subject to many forces and influences and is not a master of his life. In an organic group, an individual is under some influences but is protected against external pressures such as propaganda. Since the organic group has a well-structured spiritual, material, and emotional life, it offers an environment that can resist the penetration of propaganda. These structures are not sensitive to psychological contagion something important for the success of mass propaganda. The breaking up of such micro-structures, and the migration to an urban area produces the condition of uprootedness necessary for the existence and accomplishment of propaganda. The individual becomes the beginning and end of all things, all judgments, values, etc. that came to him simply by being part of an organic group. He must become the measure of all things; he cannot do otherwise but become the source of his own judgment. He has no longer access to the accumulated experience and values of the former organic group. The responsibility is so big to crush the individual and he is in a minority position; every individual becomes a minority. This is a breeding ground for propaganda. The individual is now confronted and engulfed by large undercurrent of society, by a stream of stimuli against which he has no defense mechanism. He is undergoing the influence of an increasingly centralized state (transnational corporations, international foundations and other organizations, all expression of the technocratic spirit) and mass society. The individual becomes less stable and new needs and troubles will haunt him, those demanding solutions that propaganda will be happy to offer.

A mass society is individualistic, made up of local groups and organizations that are weak, filled with strong undercurrents, a place where individuals belong to large and influential collectives. In this society, there is a certain psychological unity of the people living in it and a uniformity of material life. Despite the still existing differences, there are some unifying points in this mass society like the interest in technique, a certain mythology, the longing for welfare, and the same prejudices, etc. The simple reality of belonging to a mass society where people can easily gather in crowds changes the psyche of mankind. This change follows from the existence in that kind of society. It does not need the presence of propaganda to arrive. The person birthed by this society is more gullible, more available more *bereit*, more suggestible and excitable for the intentions of propaganda. Under these circumstances, propaganda becomes not only possible but a necessity. The civilizational circumstances, and the effects of the technical and social development call for it. From the mass society come to light symbols and

³⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

stereotypes. Those exist in other types of societies and small groups but are not so abstract and ready to be manipulable as in modern/contemporary society.

8. CONCLUSIONS

As Ellul states, propaganda is much more than the expression of the political will of a party, state, etc. It is totalitarian because it tends to engulf everyone and everything. Propaganda as a manifestation of the technical system is also an expression of what Herbert Marcuse named one-dimensional or functional way of thought, a form of thought that makes it impossible for the people caught in it to even think of alternatives when confronted with reality. "Functional" denotes the aspect of efficiency inherent in this way of thinking and speaking, the inherent quest and claim to power inherent in the technical system/modern technique, which shines through language and thought.

As already seen, one of propaganda's main features is its kinship to the act of informing oneself. Most informed (from mass-media) and educated people think they are immune to propaganda while considering every opposed view to be propaganda. This is an effect of the close relationship between propaganda and information and one of the debilitating effects of the permanent streams of propaganda impinging on people's psyche. Most constituent parts of society, institutions, and organizations have become parts of the giant propaganda machine. Syndicates and parties play the same role: to integrate the individual/the group into the system and to alienate them from themselves, creating a new personality. Everything and everyone become "parts of the machine", as a Jethro Tull song says. Propaganda models and creates a false subjectivity in the individuals. Nevertheless, even if it is a negative phenomenon, democracies must appeal to propaganda. Propaganda became a reality with the apparition of the great democratic nations and the necessity of facing a stern competition at the international level. To do so, a state has to create a unity of feeling and thought in society and its citizens, otherwise, participation in the international competition would become extremely difficult. Since efficiency is another name for the main goal of the propaganda, the idea that this process might respect the dignity and freedom of the individual vanishes. The conditions of international relationships, the geopolitical problems, alliances, the diverse iterations of the Cold War, or the imposition of the Climate Change religion affect and distort the inner working of different states, cultures or other socio-political entities involved. The democratic states, but not only them, are bound to use the two myths of democracy and exports them (promoting tyranny as propaganda seems a little counterproductive). It is a necessity that cannot be avoided and, therefore, democracy is subverted by the very existence of propaganda. Propaganda, just like technique, is a kind of what Martin Heidegger called being-in-the-world, and an unavoidable function of a society engulfed by the technical system and by the subordination of man to the machine –

even in an abstract sense: an organization is a machine supposed to bring unity and functional order in a group. This process of alienation and surrendering has begun at least with the invention of the mechanical clock, which possesses in itself the source of power. The case of the mechanical clock is an example of the encroachment of technology on human life. This mechanical device dictates the rhythm of human life, and not only in the cities. Groups and people are no longer acting according to their or nature rhythms, but according to the rhythm of the clock and the one imposed by the necessities of the technical system (which includes as subsets the systems of communication, transportation, commerce, industries and service, the system culminating in administration and the managerial techniques – modeled after cybernetics and communication theories, this system being organized in networks). IT and cybernetics that have finally brought unity to the technical system, which now possesses, according to Ellul, a feed-back capacity. The development therefor leads to an increasing presence of the state in society (such large-scale system as communication, economy and nuclear energy production and management require a more and more centralized force) and to a fusion between the state and other entities – like enterprises and corporations. Such large-scale systems as communications, transportation, energy, and especially the use of nuclear power create the need for the apparition of this centralized system. The progress of technique leads in this direction, despite the claims made during the industrial development or more recently that new technical discoveries would lead to a decrease of centralism and interventionism of authorities in social life. Technical development increases centralization and the concentration of control in fewer hands – the technocrats.

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