

A Paradoxical World and the Role of Technology in Thana–Capitalism



Maximiliano Emanuel Korstanje
University of Palermo, Argentina

INTRODUCTION

We live in digital times, where events are covered and disseminated by the media in seconds to a much wider audience (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). Technology not only altered our current means of production, but also the ways life is lived as well as our habits, behaviours and social interaction with others (Gold 2012). The seminal texts of Jacques Ellul about a “technological society” shed light on the negative effects of autocracy imposed by the expansion of technological breakthroughs. The legitimacy of elite is enhanced at the time workforce accepts the cultural value of efficacy as the best of possible worlds. One day, humankind will be strictly controlled by Machines which will be characterized by rationality, artificiality and automatism. Ellul acknowledged that technology was conducive to the culture of capitalism posing instrumentality as mediator between citizens and institutions (Ellul, 1964). Scholars and thinkers are divided respecting to the role played by digital technology in the liberal world of consumers. Not too far from the legacy of Max Weber, Ellul was pioneer in adamantly alerting to what extent technology promotes an atmosphere of further alienation for human beings. However, others voices as Guy Sorman (2008) claims that the forces of progress activate conservative counter-reactions that are oriented to prevent a more egalitarian society. Detractors of technology and its progress only are limited to tell part of the truth, which means the aftermaths of new techniques in the fields of economy but ignoring those achievements promoted by technology as the expansion of life expectative

or the improvements in healthcare overt recent years. As Korstanje and Skoll put it, neither good nor bad technology depends on the use people did. Concerned by the paradoxes of Chernobyl, modernity showed that technology enrooted in a world of complexities and uncertainty would be as “a run-away train” very hard to control. The paradox was that the same instrument will make of our life a safer place to dwell become in a global threat that very well jeopardizes our existence in this planet (Korstanje & Skoll 2014). Here some questions arise: what is the role of Technology in our modern World, is technology a mechanism of control or censorship in democratic societies?, in what way?

Although technology introduced a plenty of liberties and rights for humankind, which are protected by democracy, it resulted in a much deeper disciplinary mechanism that leads to censorship. To put this in other terms, in Medieval Times, writers, thinkers whose text defied the authority of King or Catholic Church were jailed, tortured and condemned to the stake. The power of coercion emanating from Prince exerted violence as an efficient instrument of dissuasion, circumscribing the Leviathan’s whims. The dissemination of books was limited to those authors who were conducive to status quo. In this respect, the power was endorsed by the capacity of prince to create terror in others. Rather, in postmodern times, censorship is preferably achieved by over-production without limits and no matter whom or under what theme the writer focuses on. For example, once we key in Google the name Karl Marx or Max Weber we will get thousands of records of different studies containing or citing both scholars. Since

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our limited mind can only be read part of these records (not all), we only are restricted to have a partial viewpoint of the problem. In the world of consumption, where liberty plays a crucial role in order for consumers to channel their desire in many directions, knowledge is over-produced to cause misunderstanding in readers. The larger the bibliography consulted, less the derived understanding. For those readers who are not specialized in sociology it is almost impossible to understand modernity only accessing to ten or twenty works bought in bookstore. This happens simply because the censorship in postmodern times is based on the liberty administered by technology to produce without order in many directions. Conducive to mass-consumption, freedom and democracy delineate the contours of societal order making the produced commodities affordable to consumers, but in so doing opens the doors for an atmosphere of conflict and discontent as never before.

Though this point will be explained in detail in the following sections, let's explain the term Thana Capitalism is used to denote a new stage of capitalist system. In this emergent facet not only technology played a vital role subordinating social practice to gazing but also paved the ways for the needs of captivating the suffering of others. In times of Thana-capitalism, risk sets the pace to death as a mediator between citizens and their institutions. We mean to Thana, as a derived term from Thanatos (Greek) from Death. In the days of Thana Capitalism, global audiences gaze spectacles which are based on news, content of disasters, mass-death or trauma. Citizens who are prone to gaze others' death enthrall their own status as a part of privileged-class.

BACKGROUND

Over decades, common questions asked on the evolution of science in Occident. Three different schools explored the interconnection of technology in the maturation of science. Econometrics, which initiate the first family of studies, signalled

to mathematical algorithms to produce top-down knowledge. Everything which cannot be visually tested was systematically rejected as a source of genuine knowledge. Human habits not number were the key factors that distinguished these emerging disciplines from economy. If classic science was prone with the premise of objectivity between *observer and observed*, sociology and anthropology gradually instilled a hermeneutics dialectics of knowledge which based on individual experience gave innovative outcomes (Cuevas 2005). Though this premise was already-evinced by young Marx, since the means of production mould the ideology for the society to understand environment, it is tempting to confirm that technologies are subsumed under an historical dialectic imposed externally by elite. This suggests that things are used to accomplish broader goals, but the underlying meaning for what we use these different objects is externally and culturally imposed by a privilege class (Marx, 1975; 1967; Marx & Engels, 1983). This raises a more than interesting question, is technology a platform to alienation?

For H. Marcuse, the alienatory nature of technology rested on its capacity to alter the cultural background of society, which legitimized the asymmetries of classes (Marcuse 1991). Capitalism has imposed an "economy of desire" which absorbs the wages of work-force (Korstanje 2015). In this respect, David Harvey (1989) argues that modern means of production blurred the different of space and time, accelerating the gift-exchange process. The oil embargo after 1972 produced a serious crisis to West which decentralized the economic system to the extent, that the concept of reality as it was envisaged by Enlightenment set the pace to multi-layered view of reality (Harvey 1989). In this context, French philosophy pivoted a radical criticism against the role played by technology and science in this every-increasing process. From Weber and Sombart's days, there was no other critical thinker as Jean Baudrillard that attacked the epistemological core of capitalism. For Baudrillard, capitalism has successfully expanded in view of the alternations of the

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