

# We Have Nothing To Say

Technology and the  
Economizing of  
Communication

by Goat

FERAL DISTRO

How forget that? How talk  
Distantly of 'The People'  
Who are that force  
Within the walls  
Of cities  
Wherein their cars  
Echo like history  
Down walled avenues  
In which one cannot speak.

- from Of Being Numerous by George Oppen

We are tired of going untouched and unsatisfied, dragging ourselves through our pathetic lives that have no meaning, that grow more meaningless with each passing day. We sleepwalk from our bedrooms to our jobs, to restaurants and to dinner parties, and we know what will happen, which means we know that nothing will happen. This society, filled with so much money, so many straight lines, so many people, so much paperwork, so many machines, and so little verve, so little life, so little friendship, so little to discuss, so absent of touch, so absent of the sensuous, so absent of meaning, is revealing its own bankruptcy using the very scientific instruments it created to dominate the world with in the first place. Our wager is this: the dissatisfaction with the promises of the techno-capital utopia are spreading like a virus and this world cannot bear us becoming conscious of this fact.

But the virus spreads as doublethink. We want to clarify this dissatisfaction to clear the way towards destroying this world (or getting out of its way so it can destroy itself.) To accomplish this, we are enlisting Jean-Pierre Voyer's An Inquiry into the Causes and Nature of the Poverty of People and Jacques Ellul's The Technological Society. We also refer to a contemporary text that seems to be heavily influenced by both of the aforementioned texts, Guillaume Paoli's Demotivational Training, as a reflection of how intimately enmeshed the market economy is with technology.

Voyer's inquiry demonstrates that the fundamental misery of modern life is the absence of communication, the misery common to all slaves of all ages. He demonstrates this by revealing how the exchange and flow of

perhaps fundamental to the whole anarchist critique of anarchism that defines the post-left. In addition, anarchists in North America have been collaborating with indigenous radicals – who generally do not see a difference between their spiritual life, producing their own food, and erecting a blockade – for several decades which has also brought the spiritual question into the discussion. The No Gods part of the anarchist maxim “No Gods, No Masters” may have lost its luster in the barren landscape of tech and commodity worship. In a decentralized, anarchic future, there are likely to be small groups that use Catholicism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and their sects, as a common language for their ways of life. To the extent that they can manage to prevent themselves from metastasizing, we have no problem with them, but we'll see. Technique and the commodity speak Arabic and Lakota too.

We don't want to save the world. We want it to decompose and to live in its ruins. We are then, even at our most ferocious, survivors, not warriors. Sometimes fighting is survival, the body's immune response to depression, to having nothing to talk about, to meaninglessness. But fighting can just as easily become activism in this world, which contains all the same ideological constructions of work and progress. Activism can be an addiction, just as damaging as all the others. Before acting, we suggest disinfecting our minds of this world's ideas, and trying to become invisible. In a world that commands us to construct ourselves as technological society's subject, refusing to exist as a plastic, flexible, digital creature weakens the network of control. Most of this world doesn't even exist. If we stop believing in it, how long can it last?

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land is literally gone for the majority of humans. One consequence of urban life is the impossibility of generating meaning by connecting with the land base. No one is so stupid as to look at concrete and see God there (well, almost no one). Anyone reading these words descends from people who created forms of daily life that generated meaning through their connection to the land, its creatures, and its spirits. The march of progress has created a person that doesn't have a past, a horrific zombie slave of the technological God's universe: White people. White people, devoid of meaning, empty of connection, without discernible features besides their citizenship. They only are real to themselves and to the rulers as creatures of the state. Poor things. It is these White people today who hum the mantra of this world, "Everything is relative", and it is these White people who attempt to spread this malignant nihilist gruel to every corner of the world using microloans and laptops. "Everything is relative" is the economized phrase of the well known Native American expression "all my relations." The death of spirit embedded in everything is relative becomes apparent when juxtaposed with *all my relations*. What was in motion has become stagnant. What was emergent and plural has become singular. What meant being possessed by, and being enmeshed within, has simply become what 'is', an immutable reality where action and communication are pointless. "Everything is relative" means everything is for sale, and everything is free to be screwed. "All my relations" means an endless conversation with the more than human. Flipping a compost pile or blowing up a bank or lifting a roadkill deer into a truck bed with your pal is the spiritual practice, the magical practice. In this world, insisting on not turning food into something for sale is as puzzling to the mutilated modern mind as the pre-hunt ritual in the Amazon might seem to us. Resisting commodification by working in the gift, in the rare moments it is possible, is like an acid tab for the uninitiated: a little goes a long way.

It is curious to us that both Ellul and Voyer have ended up on the side of spirituality. Ellul remained an anti-institutional Christian throughout his life. For his part, Voyer says that "*the savages are right: the world is full of spirit,*" and he later commented with aplomb on how 9/11 – in its officially sanctioned Spectacular narrative – is the revenge of the faithful, of spirit, against the meaningless world of bourgeois nihilism. It is worth reflecting on the large proportion of post-left anarchists who yearn for a spiritual revival. John Zerzan, John Moore, Bellamy Fitzpatrick, Feral Faun, Wolfi Landstreicher, and Hakim Bey are the most prominent examples, but it is

money become the actual living part of this world, while the humans in it behave as money and commodity mules, living always under the weight of money, and moving around the products that money buys. In the process, we cede all of what makes us human, what makes us a peculiar species in the world, to the economy, and to money. What makes the human peculiar is that we talk and tell stories. But in this world the stock market, the economy, and our bosses always have the last word. We see Voyer as the bedrock of this essay because we agree with his simple expression of the most fundamental problem of this world. The essential question is this: why is it that we have nothing to say?

We want to spend the space of this essay revealing that Voyer's critique is so fundamental and essential because it is a critique of technological society, although he almost never mentions technology. We draw from another French thinker Ellul, to help us with the task. Ellul, writing at the same time as Voyer's mentors and collaborators, the situationists, said in *The Technological Society* that "it is useless to focus on capitalism" because technology is secretly the autonomous force running the world. There is a tremendous amount of complexity in the relationship between technology, capitalism, and money. This an attempt to lay these connections and their consequences bare.

### **Defining technology and technique to bring about their ruin**

Whenever we see the word technology or technique, we automatically think of machines. This notion...is in fact an error

*The Technological Society*

It was the textile machines that destroyed what was left of the independent agrarian way of life in rural England. It was an oil rigging machine and the greedy policies administered by dozens of office workers that caused the Deepwater Horizon mess and devastated the lives of creatures in the Gulf of Mexico. It was dams, canning factories, and modern fishing boats that drove salmon and the people who enjoyed a life together with them on the West Coast of North America to the brink of extinction. It was the atom bomb that scarred modernity with Hiroshima and the still present anxiety of thermonuclear war. And this doesn't account for the deep psychological and spiritual trauma for which technology is also responsible. Tinder, Marvel movies and fair trade coffee aren't worth the price to be paid for modern life. We must destroy the belief in the inevitability of technological progress.

To understand what is necessary to destroy a belief, we have to understand what it is we believe. Fortunately for the owners of this society, the common parlance usage of the word technology is a deception. The belief in the transcendent power of technology is deeply entrenched but naming it is especially elusive. Technology is usually used to describe things like gadgets, planes, satellites, and smartphones. Using Ellul as our guide, we will show that this definition excludes the majority of social arenas and disciplines that are mobilized to make gadgets and machines a part of this world. Most of the technological world is best represented by the image of the office worker at their cubicle pouring over data and documents, managing the tension of reproducing technological life. This deception is catastrophic for theory; it completely obscures the interdependence of high tech on social organization and the management of the masses. The defenders of this society are desperate for these domains to appear to be separate. For example, Americans are made to believe that they live in the land of free enterprise, free of control imposed by the dreaded 'planned economy' of Communist regimes. This is complete bullshit. How else could Amazon Prime guarantee next day delivery without the fastidious management of a planned global economy? Managing workers through organizations and human resource departments, the gargantuan quantity of gadgets that masses of workers can produce, assembly lines, media spectacles, propaganda, and the use of psychoanalytic techniques by marketing firms form a unified logical whole, with common characteristics. In addition, each of these techniques are made possible by, and are contingent upon, the functioning of all the others. Technology-as- gadgets then—its common parlance use—doesn't do technology justice. This is a furiously technical society. Efficiency and order lurk around every corner, and every corner that blocks the movement of progress is erased. So while we don't always think it necessary to come to terms to start essays, we do think it is necessary to spend a bit of time discussing what we talk about when we talk about technology.

All humans use tools, but not all humans worship the study of the development of technical operations. There is much confusion about this. All human groups tend to perfect the techniques that make their way of life possible. Gatherers know where certain patches of plant foods exist on the land, when they will be ready to harvest, the best means of harvesting, how they must be cured if necessary, and the various ways to prepare

provokes generalized chatter. One can easily understand that the enemy will do everything in its power not to have this question addressed.

#### An Inquiry into the Causes and Nature of the Poverty of People

One night, during the twilight of an Occupy camp we'd been frequenting, a man began unfolding a small table near the center of camp. After he erected it, he set up a coffee maker and plugged it into a net of extension cords that lead to a generator. A friend chatted the man up, and he told us with excitement that he was going to brew coffee and sell it for \$0.50 a cup. Our friend suddenly became stern and assertive, and told him, "You can't do that here. We're not selling stuff here." Here was the seed of a group magical taboo. The camp, like all the others, was destroyed days later, but this magical taboo lives on. Standing Rock, for all of its shortcomings, can boast the honor of having maintained a habitat of industrial resistance free of commerce that lasted nearly a year and hosted tens of thousands of people. But unlike Occupy, prayer and spirituality were explicit goals and practices at Standing Rock. Many natives we met there from varied backgrounds and factions all insisted that non-natives begin to develop a spiritual life.

Money and technological progress have reigned within the spiritual void opened by the Enlightenment for several centuries in Europe, and they have conquered almost the entire globe. Technology is what secular people invest their belief in, and spending and making money is the daily practice of this peculiar form of malignant spiritual nihilism. The reigning sense that life is meaningless is a lie. This world, the world of progress, the world of the commodity, the technological society, is meaningless, but only because it is founded on such absurd logic. That logic is this: The ends justify the means, and the ends are means. The means justify the means. But just as any elementary school prisoner learns by the time they matriculate, you can't use the same word in its definition, lest the word become meaningless. So then, this world is meaningless, but we don't know if life itself is meaningless. What we can see is that humans generate meaning as a matter of our existence, of our daily activity. Even our dreadfully isolated technological society bombards us with meaning, it is just meaning that is meaningless, meaning that is false, a world that is totally false. The irony of this world is that to be a nihilist in a nihilist society is to believe that life has meaning!

Many still look to the sky for meaning, not to the land, simply because the

would have been closed to them. But their essential function is to act as vicarious intermediaries to integrate into the technical society these same impulses and feelings which are possessed by millions of other men. Herein lies their sociological character. Certain deep ecstatic instincts and impulses would otherwise escape the jurisdiction of the technical society and become a threat to it. Movements...are a sociological necessity to a technical milieu.

This sheer pessimism would have been anathema to Guy Debord and his merry Situationists. An additional reason that Ellul's work is less known is simply that his emphasis on the critique of technology was perhaps too dissonant for his era to accept. A half century ago, it was still possible to believe in the coming techno-utopia. We wager that no one really believes this today. Polls have demonstrated that Americans are no longer optimistic about technology, and here we are forced to contend with the strange schizophrenia that characterizes technological affect. A schizophrenia plagues the modern mind that holds a techno-pessimism and techno-optimism in its head simultaneously. We feel the peril and the convenience in our gadgets at once. This sort of tension cannot last, it will erode itself and decompose. Similar to Marx, Ellul seems to believe in the reality and power of the object of his study more than is appropriate, and this is where his pessimism meets with Paoli's observation that demotivation—of the worker or activist—is precisely what this world is producing and cannot bear. Because society can never deliver on its promises, it is generating a deficit in the realm of motivation and belief. This is perhaps the Achilles heel of the dominant order.

### **Applied Anti-Tech**

Why can't people talk to each other in public places, places that are so incorrectly named? Here is the essential, unique question that contains all the others. Every other question that claims to be interesting in itself is an impostor, reformism, a diversionary maneuver on the part of the enemy. On this question, above all on the response to this question, the divide opens between the friends and enemies of money, the friends and enemies of the state. The question of the silence of people in the streets is the essential question. The response to this question is the strategic response to all questions. The response to this question suddenly

them. This technical operation or technique is perfected and made efficient more and more with each time it is performed. Techniques are economized; they tend toward efficiency.

Techniques are not necessarily material tools, but they are also forms of social organization like the division of labor or magical practices. For Ellul, the essence of technologies is that they are means to an end that are perfected over time. They answer the question 'how?' This is why magical practices are technologies, or techniques. They are means to some end within their cosmology.

In most societies, social and spiritual practices create an assembly of obstacles to the pursuit of technical operations as an end in itself. As a result, the accumulation of technical operations is limited. The modern world is just the opposite. There is at present almost nothing in the way of the pursuit of technology for its own sake. Technology, that "neutral" phenomenon, as people often say, slips into every aspect of modern life. In order to convey this interrelated and interdependent character of the technological order, Ellul adopts the monolithic word technique. We use it as well, but we will use technique and technology somewhat interchangeably from here on to refer to the totality of technical operations in every field of human activity for a given society.

For Ellul, technique grows out of the machine, and the machine is the pure expression of technique. But eventually the machine becomes a minor element in the vast realm of technique.

[L]et the machine have its head, and it topples everything that cannot support its enormous weight... Everything had to be reconsidered in terms of the machine. And that is precisely the role technique plays. In all fields it made an inventory of what it could use, of everything that could be brought into line with the machine. The machine could not integrate itself into line with nineteenth-century society; technique integrated it. Old houses that were not suited to the workers were torn down; and the new world technique required was built in their place. Technique has enough of the mechanical in its nature to enable it to cope with the machine, but it surpasses and transcends the machine because it remains in close touch with the human order. The metal monster could not go on forever torturing mankind. It found in technique a rule as hard and inflexible as itself. Technique integrates the machine into society. It constructs the kind of world the machine needs and introduces order where the incoherent banging of machinery heaped up ruins. It clarifies, arranges, and

rationalizes; it does in the domain of the abstract what the machine did in the domain of labor.

This shows how technology based on the machine spreads its logic through every detail of life in order to ensure its survival and reproduction. A similar confusion between tool and the obsessive study of the totality of tools exists with the way the word market is used in common parlance. The old market, the 'bazaar', was face-to-face, happened at a certain designated time and place, and was generally based on haggling. As Paoli shows, the market of the olden days is in every significant aspect the opposite of the market-economy. The global market, The Economy, is impersonal, unlimited by time or space, and all products are pre-exchanged with determined prices. You can purchase solar panels manufactured by Asian slaves at 3am from the comfort of your Tempur pedic mattress without communicating with a single soul if you have the money, a smartphone, and internet. This peculiar similarity in the way technology and the market are misconstrued as something ostensibly limited, but are in fact pervasive and totalizing, points to the deep intimacy between capitalism and technology.

Technique creates a new kind of human, one who is flexible, or is endowed with "plasticity" as Ellul says, because this new subject is forced to let go of values as the steamroller of modernity transform reality at an ever accelerating rate. Technique refers to the relentless logistical operation that characterizes modern life. Each of us are enjoined to coordinate, manage, and interpret the awesome power of techno-capitalist society in order to survive. But logistics are the pinnacle of military thinking, not social life. In this world all spontaneity is integrated as a detail into the dominant plan. And without spontaneity, creativity, ecstasy, and freedom begin to be bleached of any meaning.

### **Marx's technophilia: why the left will never be able to critique technology**

As late as 1848, one of the demands of the workers was the suppression of machinery... [M]en still suffered from the loss of equilibrium brought about by a too rapid injection of technique, and they had not yet felt the intoxication of the results. The peasants and the workers bore all the hardships of technical advance without sharing in the triumphs. For this reason, there was a reaction against technique, and society was split. The power of the state, the money of the bourgeoisie were for it; the

applied to the most granular tasks. As technique continues to integrate everything, it becomes more and more dependent upon the minor improvements of the technical world produced by its workers.

Paoli's title Demotivational Training mocks the raging war within corporations to figure out how to extract creativity from their human resources who have grown remedial as a result of living in the very world technique creates! Paoli slyly employs the degradation of life against itself in a desperate attempt to find a glimmer of hope for resistance. To hasten what he theorizes as the epidemic of demotivation plaguing late capitalism, Paoli coaches us to fight the drive to improve our work environment and allow the system to slowly degenerate. In the closing section of Demotivational Training, he argues for us to "cancel the project" because radical projects are often the kindling of dominant society's fire.

Although Ellul never suggested canceling the project, he was keenly aware of the futility of them. We were troubled throughout our reading of The Technological Society by why Ellul has not received more credit for providing a total critique of society. One reason is that he clearly did not have a militant public relations orientation like his situationist peers. Another reason is that Ellul's analysis lead him to the conclusion that the technological society had not only become autonomous, but that revolt, incapable of stopping the techno-behemoth, was a new kind of opiate of the masses.

Technique diffuses the revolt of the few and thus appeases the need of the millions for revolt. The same could be said of all the "movements" started since the turn of the century in response to the frustration of the most elementary human impulses. But can it be maintained, therefore, that social movements such as surrealism, youth hostels, revolutionary parties, anarchism, and so on have failed? They have failed in that they have not achieved their own goals of re-creating the conditions of freedom and justice or of allowing man to rediscover a genuine sex life or intellectual life. But they have been completely successful from another point of view. They have performed the sociological function of integration. Technical means are so important, so difficult to achieve and to manage, that it is easier to have them if there is a group, a movement, an association. Such movements are based on authentic impulses and valid feelings, and do allow a few individuals access to modes of expression which otherwise

no goals, and on the other a technological morality that frames everything. “[E]verything which is technique is necessarily used as soon as it is available. This is the principal law of our age.”

These traits of technique—the pure pursuit of means as an end, and the immediate implementation of newly discovered means—are more pernicious than they first appear to our post-modern secular eyes. The concern of this world is to figure out how to get things done. These are the laws built into every conversation, every computer, every blueprint, and every tool. Effects and affects are always peripheral, secondary, useless. Experience and feeling are always at the mercy of the cause of technology.

An instrument as complex as a personal computer is obviously an advanced realization of the “integrated causality” Ellul names, and it simply cannot exist without a technologically advanced global domination apparatus. It is representative of the depths of the prevailing naivete that we can’t imagine or realize what it would take to produce and reproduce a vegan burrito, but some still think computers will magically keep producing themselves in our utopias. This isn’t to suggest adopting a morality with regard to technology, it is to demonstrate that we are already intensely moralistic about technology; most people think it is good (while retaining an un-confessed pessimism). This belief simply has to go so that new ethics regarding technology and tools can blossom.

One approach to establishing these ethics can be found in Demotivational Training. This text has a considerable amount of theoretical overlap with The Technological Society, in particular Ellul’s pessimism about the utter lack of means for recourse in the face of the power of the global technocapitalist system. But Paoli sees this pessimism as a peculiar kind of ethic and form of self-defense within a system that is desperate to economize, integrate, and motivate all of us.

The crux of Paoli’s argument also shares an analogy with a small, but fundamental concept describing the nature of technique that Ellul calls the ‘self-augmentation’ character of technology. People have a tendency to simplify and perfect their tasks and work, which ostensibly should improve quality of life over time in an ecologically balanced culture. But within the unified totality of the technological apparatus this urge is inverted against us. Each increase in efficiency adopted within a particular technical field slowly spreads and augments the totality of technical operations. It is the problem of how reforms rescue the sick society they intend to change,

masses were against.

In the middle of the nineteenth century the situation changed. Karl Marx rehabilitated technique in the eyes of the workers. He preached that technique can be liberating. Those who exploited it enslaved the workers, but that was the fault of the masters and not the technique itself. - The Technological Society

We had the opportunity to see the well known autonomist Marxist Silvia Federici speak in late 2018. At some point in her talk Federici said, “I’m not against technology”, and then spoke at length about all the problems with technology—pollution, land dispossession, social disintegration, etc. And yet, she prefaced this with, I’m not saying I’m against all these things. “Don’t get me wrong gang. I still worship where you worship.” Federici’s hedging of her position about technology is representative of most of what we know of the contemporary left. Through Ellul’s lens of technique, which includes the techniques of managing massive organizations, we can also see why Marxists need to stay on the side of technology in order to envision their coordination of the vast industrial technological apparatus in their communized end game.

The fundamental premise of every political doctrine, to the extent that they refer to a person’s disposition on capitalism, have already conceded to the technological imperative. Demotivational Training observes that people talk about the economy the way they talk about God, demonstrated by the imperative embedded in almost all discourse, “How can we get the economy to grow?” This imperative is disguised language for technological progress, for new means for creating new products. This would be obvious if it wasn’t obscured by Marxists, most of whom are still focused on how we will communize these means when the social war finally places them in the hands of what’s left of the proletariat.

Communists, #accelerationists, tiqqunists, appelists, communication theorists, and most anarchists (i.e. the radical left) carefully avoid taking anything less affirmative than the ‘neutrality’ position on technology because they still need to organize people at some level to continue producing the goodies of modern life that they seem to think they won’t need to give up after their revolution. As the Situationists, still the gold standard for the best of Marxist theory, said, “[Advances in material development] could be turned to good use—but only along with everything else... You can survive farther away and longer, but never live more. Our task is not to celebrate such victories, but to make celebration victorious—

celebration whose infinite possibilities in everyday life are potentially unleashed by these technical advances.” We find this optimistic attitude about technology more or less preserved in contemporary post-situationist theory such as Post-Civ: “Primitivists reject technology. We just reject the inappropriate use of technology, Most technologies are being put to rather evil uses—whether warfare or simple ecocide—but that doesn’t make technology inherently evil”, and #accelerate “an accelerationist politics seeks to preserve the gains of late capitalism while going further than its value system, governance structures, and mass pathologies will allow.” Sneakier still is the pamphlet, “Instructions for autonomy”, which suggests that autonomy is something to be learned from The Party. Obviously autonomous actors need instruction (read: coercion) for operating technocivilization, because too many of us would just leave this world behind if we were given the chance.

All this lightweight theoretical work on technology neglects the fundamental mantra of technique, that because it was possible it was necessary. It is this logic that has unleashed technique and the means of production on humans and on the planet. It is impossible to separate the appropriate use of any technique from its full spectrum of possibilities, for it is the investigation of the full spectrum of instrumental possibilities that reveal each individual technique. Each stage of technical development becomes dependent on the prior stage either continuing or becoming replaced with something more efficient. Either way, the basis of huge inputs of energy and human plasticity must be reproduced in order to reproduce the means of production. This is especially the case with advanced industrial technology like microchips which are only possible as a result of several previous stages of technical development. To ensure this continues it is paramount to nurture a belief in progress.

Coercion, management, and organization are inseparable from the physical means of production. Marxists and the left have to ignore the reflection of the machine in social relations because they need to somehow coordinate the masses of workers in their vision of communism or communization. The only way to reproduce modern industrial technology is to guarantee the production and reproduction of a whole cornucopia of raw materials whose distribution is spread throughout the planet. It is impossible to envision accomplishing this without coercion. Marxists need organization for their theory to be coherent which explains their superficial attitudes about technology. If the Marxists began a

masses in every area” says Ellul.

Ellul says, “[Man] is a device for recording effects and results obtained by various techniques. He does not make a choice of complex, and in some ways, human motives. He can decide only in favor of the technique that gives the maximum efficiency. But this is not a choice. A machine could effect the same operation.” :: “Alienation is not the alienation of work...it is the alienation of the essential human activity—exchange—and the alienation of that which in this activity can be alienated, the idea of exchange. The more exchange becomes general and universal, the more it becomes the affairs of things and the more humanity becomes simply the spectator of the human activity of things.” says Voyer.

Both texts are an attempt to challenge the totality at the depths of its foundations and in the process their critiques corrode into one another, each from their particular perspective. The key point of connection is their analysis of the economy, because economics can be defined (to the chagrin of economists) as “the science of efficient choices.”

The technological God is the deity that fills the breach opened by the bourgeois revolution. He is the true man behind the curtain. Destroying this belief in technological progress, and its various calling cards - that everything is relative, that we believe that we don’t believe anything anymore, and a superficial apathy masking warm feelings for progress - is the prerequisite to the downfall of this society.

### **Techno-pessimism: Ellul’s Technological Society and Paoli’s Demotivational Training**

...if a sudden change should occur and public opinion should turn against technique...the whole social edifice would be at stake.

#### **The Technological Society**

We are living in an era in which technology is continually rousing partisans into its morality, a morality of means, of the ever more purified pursuit of means. “[Technique] evolves in a purely causal way: the combination of preceding elements furnishes new technical elements. There is no purpose or plan that is being progressively realized. There is not even a tendency toward human ends. We are dealing with a phenomenon blind to the future, in a domain of integral causality.” We see here on the one hand an articulation of degraded postmodernism with no beliefs, no ends,



epitomized by the machine, to the totality of techniques and their pursuit, including techniques of social conditioning and social massification. This complicates the inquiry into the nature of the commodity because it means that the commodity is a technique, a tool, a means. The commodity could not have been unleashed without the immense accumulation of techniques, and vice versa.

Capitalist technique is designed to make things that think about money. Seizing these techniques—the state, the factories, the media apparatus, public transit, laboratories —and projecting them into even the most optimistic of circumstances, as theorized by communization theorists, will still result in producing things that think. Voyer either misses, or regards as insignificant, that the universal equivalence that Value and the commodity realize is a masterwork of rendering human communication efficient. It streamlines and harnesses the communication of billions of wage-slaves. If the commodity is a product of work that is pre-exchanged, machines pre-accomplish all meaningful work, so that a commodity is in fact a pre-accomplished product that is pre-exchanged. At last, this society has realized its end game of having no reason to speak or do anything. Texture has finally been abolished! Marx became enamored with the power of the means of production and the specter of his mistake is still with us.

The similarity we noticed between these two texts is apparent to anyone reading them side by side. There is an endless number of analogies between Voyer's inquiry into the commodity economy and Ellul's investigation of technique.

Ellul says, "Technique transforms everything that it touches into a machine": "The essential characteristic of the commodity is that it first reproduces its own conditions, its perpetual self-justification, the new unknown worlds necessary for its development, and that nothing ever can oppose it in this domain where it stands unrivaled to the point that it is capable of destroying the world if nothing essential opposes it" says Voyer.

Voyer says, "The civilizing role of the commodity is to socialize in its horrific way things that were not social": "Technique cannot be otherwise than totalitarian. It can be truly efficient and scientific only if it absorbs an enormous number of phenomena and brings into play the maximum of data. In order to coordinate and exploit synthetically, technique must be brought to bear on the great

thorough investigation of technology, they would be forced to abandon their position!

The Situationists distinguish themselves, along with anarchists, for never having made calls for the seizure of the state, but they still were proponents of workers councils that would seize the means of production. For Ellul, the means of production only exist as a result of techniques of the state. "The basic effect of state action on techniques is to co-ordinate the whole complex. The state possesses the power of unification, since it is the planning power par excellence in society." After all, the state funds massive scientific ventures that open the way for technological progress and defends them with its courts and armed bureaucrats. It follows then that there simply is no difference between seizing the means of production and seizing the apparatus of the state. Here is Marx's debunked idea of seizing the state still alive and well.

Many people take no issue with positioning themselves as anti-capitalist and anti-state, but they seem to lose their nerve when confronted with the question of adopting an antitechnology position. Let's be clear: most of the gadgets we (are forced to) enjoy today are the result of the state, capital, and technique. There will not be the communization conception of 'flows' of humans moving with joy and spontaneity from one site of production to the next to continue reproducing the world as we aesthetically and formally experience it. Just about everything must go. We cannot continue to have the material stuff of this world if we want to abolish this world. Abolishing this world necessitates abolishing its means of production.

### **Techno-Capital Spirituality**

Nothing belongs any longer to the realm of the gods or the supernatural. The individual who lives in the technical milieu knows very well that there is nothing spiritual anywhere. But man cannot live without the sacred. He therefore transfers his sense of the sacred to the very thing which has destroyed its former object: to technique itself. In the world in which we live, technique has become the essential mystery

- The Technological Society

Money truly is god.

- An Inquiry into the Causes and Nature of the Poverty of People

Voyer provides us with a critique of the Situationists. His critique is that the Situationists didn't scrutinize Marx with enough care and as a result the owners of society were able to defeat them by recuperating their ideas. Thus we must make Voyer's critique of Voyer, which is to say, to critique the Marxism in his thought. The aim here is to arrive at a critique that is beyond society's capacity for recuperation.

Voyer continues Marx's investigation of the commodity by taking capitalists at their word. This allows him to articulate capitalist cosmology. The ritualistic activity of capitalists, their ruthless pursuit of profit, invests money and commodities with universal Value. We encounter Value everyday as the pre-established price of all the shit we buy. "Value is the ability that products of work have to exchange themselves in thought without any human intervention." Marx spent hundreds of pages turning Value into something real, and in one sentence Voyer reveals it as nothing more than a spook. From here, Voyer provides us, as Marx and the Situationists never did, with an adequate definition of what a commodity is:

a product of work that accomplishes exchange in thought, a product of work that by itself makes an abstraction of everything that could be an obstacle to exchange, a product of work gifted with spirit, a pre-exchanged product of work. "Value" signifies nothing other than the thought of the commodity. "Commodity" signifies nothing other than a thing that thinks and talks. Some sing and dance...but all of them are really saying, underneath their apparent chatter.: "I am only in appearance bread, in reality I am wine, iron, cotton." In fact what they say is even more basic, more general, they say, "I am only in appearance bread, wine, etc. In fact I am three dollars." What do commodities think about? Money. Money is the idea that is in every commodity.

At the core of Marxist thought is the focus on the relationship between the means of production and the immense accumulation of commodities, the economy being the collection of the totality of all the means of production and commodities. For most Marxists, just as trees, fungi, rain and animals make forests, humans make the economy. It is natural. Voyer begins his inquiry by showing that the economy is nothing more than an idea that runs on belief, that only exists as belief, and thus, does not really exist. The economy is the idea of a force that economizes everything. This is precisely what technique does to everything it touches. Here is where the

commodity form and its general abstraction in the economy dovetail with Ellul's conception of technique. Each of these ideas point to the application of efficiency to every sphere of existence, including human communication. Voyer says:

The economy is the visible part of the commodity, the visible part of a world in which things practice humanity—practice universal exchange using humanity as a means. The invisible part of the world is the silence of man. The real part of this world is not the visible but the invisible part. The reality of this world is not the self-serving blabber of commodities but the silence of man. Thus in this world the true is only a moment of the false.

In our secular society, technological progress and money are God. Their pursuit ennobles the pious industrialist. Money acts as the holy spirit dwelling within all commodities, the means of production is the body of God on Earth, and the technological God issues new means and innovations for sustaining the economy's endless growth.

But Voyer dismisses this fundamental relationship between the commodity and technology because he did not scrutinize Marx's belief in the liberatory potential of technology. In a footnote of *An Inquiry*, Voyer ridicules Ivan Illich and those who focus on tools for not understanding that, in our world, tools are first of all commodities.

For this economist, as for all economists, he has no doubt that the economy is the reality of the world, and that changing the world will result in a change in this reality. But in fact, the reality of the world, that is to say, the reality of its unreality, is not the economy but the commodity. The reality of the world is not "an industrial mode of production," nor a market mode of production, but the commodity... The economy is the bourgeois conception of the commodity, the bourgeois conception of the unreality of the world. And so the conformist economist Illich would like to reduce the central question of publicity to a simple question of tooling, and to hide first, that the modern tool, before being a tool, is a commodity and, second, that what is fundamentally wrong with the modern tool is what is fundamentally wrong with the commodity.

The problem is that Voyer is using a flawed conception of the tool as a tangible object, separate from other means. As we have noted, Ellul expands the definition of technology from the emphasis on tools