

The Ellul Forum

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Jacques Ellul & Latin America

Issue 40 Fall 2007

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“Technique, in all the lands it has penetrated, has exploded the local, national cultures. Two cultures, of which technique is one, cannot coexist. . . . We shall continue to have the appearance of different civilizations . . . But their essence will be identical.”

-Jacques Ellul

The Technological Society (1954; ET1964), p. 130

The Ellul Forum

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From the Editor

Ellul's work has a worldwide impact. His three master works, *The Technological Society*, *Propaganda*, and *The Political Illusion*, translated into English in the 1960s, pushed his scholarship from France and the European context to the international arena. *The Ellul Forum* has documented that geographical spread, most recently including Canada, Mexico, the United States and Korea. This issue is oriented to Latin America.

Joyce Hanks lists for us the Spanish and Portuguese writings on Ellul, selected from her comprehensive book, *The Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology* (2007). Mark Baker situates Ellul in Honduras. The immediate occasion for this issue was the Media Ecology Association (MEA) Annual Conference at the Tecnologico de Monterrey university in Mexico City. MEA centers on the work of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan in Canada; Mumford, Walter Ong and Neil Postman in the United States. It includes Ellul as one of its important theorists. Ellul himself argues with McLuhan in his *Humiliation of the Word*, he and Mumford work in parallel, and Neil Postman depends heavily on him. MEA and IJES have official affiliation, with MEA granting forums and papers on Ellul scholarship.

The MEA conference featured two major sessions on Ellul, and two papers from those meetings are included here in summary form. The Tecnologico de Monterrey-Estado de Mexico specializes in technology and science. One of its professors, Maria de la Luz Casas Perez illustrates how she introduces Ellul to her students with the goal of inspiring them to further study of his work. Professor Stephanie Bennett wrote her doctoral dissertation on Ellul and communications theory. With the prominence of cell phone technology in Mexico, she was asked to present her research considered important on both sides of the border. One of Mexico's distinguished scholars, Fernando Gutierrez, specializes in technology and society, and is a strong advocate for scholarship on Ellul in Latin America. His summary of internet technology in Mexico is an overall argument for Ellul's relevance as communication technologies grow exponentially around the globe.

Should this issue bring to mind additional work on Ellul on the South American continent, send it to the editor for information and possible publication in *The Forum*. For the 2008 issues, David Gill and I solicit your contributions also. The theme of the Spring issue is theological (Islam) and for the Fall issue we return to politics.

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The Internet as a Media Extension: The Case of Mexico

by *Fernando Gutiérrez*

Fernando Gutiérrez is Chair of the Department of Communication at the Tecnológico de Monterrey, Campus Estado de México; Vice-President of the Internet Association in Mexico (AMIPCI), member of the Media Ecology Association (MEA) and coordinator of the World Internet Project in Mexico (WIP). His latest research focuses on the new media ecology in Mexico and the impact of new technologies in society. He studies in the International Law doctoral program at the Salamanca University in Spain. He earned a Master degree in Electronic Commerce and another one in Information Technologies from the Tecnológico de Monterrey. He teaches Communication Technologies and Society, and Design and Digital Production.

Abstract: In recent years, we have been studying the organization and arrangement of complex media environments and the new media ecology in Mexico. As in other parts of the world, this new media ecology is the product of some important technologies that have been altering the environment and contributing to the formation of new societies with particular characteristics that differ from the general culture. One of these technologies is the Internet. The purpose of this work is to show how environments are changing in Mexico and the manner in which the Internet gives a fresh perspective to traditional activities in this society.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have written in *Remediation* (a term they define as the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms) the following:

“Like other media since the Renaissance –in particular perspective painting, photography, film, and television- new digital media oscillate between immediacy and hypermediacy, between transparency and opacity. This oscillation is the key to understanding how a medium refashions its predecessor and other contemporary media. Although each medium promises to reform its predecessors by offering a more immediate or authentic experience, the promise of reform inevitably lead us to become aware of the new medium as a medium. Thus

immediacy leads to hypermediacy. The process of remediation makes us aware that all media are at one level a play of signs, which is a lesson that we take from poststructuralist literary theory.” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 19) [Note: hypermediacy means that knowledge of the world comes to us through the media. Viewers know they are in the presence of a medium and learn through acts of mediation.]

Any new technology should do work that is clearly and demonstrably better than the one it replaces, but this doesn't always happen. When a new medium is created, it will eventually overtake those media from which it derives its content for innovation. The older medium becomes a ground upon which the new medium stands as a more noticeable configuration. Marshall McLuhan suggested this idea in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*.

But in the history of mass communication, no new medium has yet made an earlier one obsolete, despite the repeated predictions at the time of each new arrival.

- Photography was supposed to mean the end of painting.
- Film was supposed to mean the end of the novel.
- Radio was supposed to mean the end of newspapers.
- Television was supposed to mean the end of film and radio.

What did happen was that the new medium changed its predecessor but did not replace it. The older medium always adapted itself to fit into the new mix of competitors –redefining itself according to its intrinsic strengths. In this regard, Douglas Rushkoff wrote in *Media Virus: Hidden Agendas in Popular Culture*:

“We should understand the media as an extension of a living organism. Just as

ecologists now understand the life of this planet to be part of a single biological organism. Media activists see the datasphere as the circulatory system for today's information, ideas, and images.” (Rushkoff, 1996, p.7)

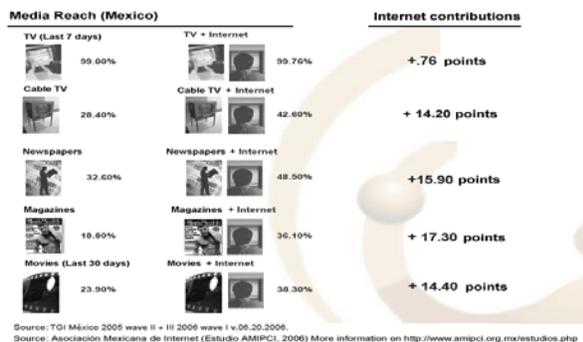
New media extend the old media. For instance, after reading an article in the newspaper or magazine, we may become curious and decide to find out more by surfing the Internet. In this sense, the Internet is also a complimentary tool media for newspaper readers. We can observe the same situation with other traditional media. The Internet extends the functions of this conventional media, and the power of users.

McLuhan said that the media are extensions of our human senses, bodies and minds. And it is also interesting to point out that in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Sigmund Freud had already taken note of the possibility of considering tools as an extension of man:

“With tools, mankind perfects its organs (...) With the camera, it has created an instrument that transfixes fleeting optical impressions, a service that the record player renders to the no less fleeting auditory impression, both constituting its innate faculty to remember, that is, its memory. With the help of the telephone, it hears from distances that even fairy tales would respect as unachievable. Writing, originally, is the language of those who are absent; housing, a substitute for the maternal womb, the first abode whose nostalgia perhaps still persists among us, where we felt secure and well.” (Freud, 1930, p. 34)

But also, new media are extensions of traditional media. In the following figure we can see how the Internet extends the power of some traditional media. This is the case of Mexico.

Figure1. Internet Extends Media Reach in Mexico (2006)



The Internet is an extension for other media industries, not their replacement. Traditional media use the Internet to identify what the public wants, to get interaction, to amplify technical capabilities, and as a new platform for advertising. But, as Neil Postman explained, a new medium does not merely add something to the culture; it changes everything.

The Internet has contributed to the formation of new societies with particular characteristics that differ from the general culture of which it is a part. When a new technology like the Internet acquires importance in a culture in a given location, certain elements of the society begin to be redefined. In this sense, then, society results from the new technology. For Postman, the consequences of technological change are always fast, often unpredictable and largely irreversible. Technology is always shaped by the social, political and economic systems in which it is introduced.

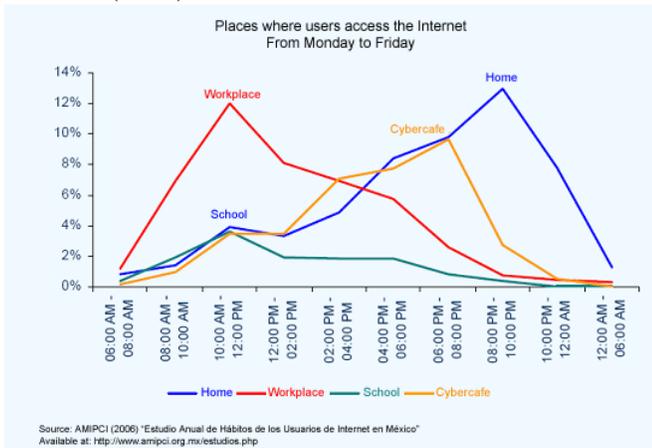
In any medium, what passes for critical discourse is not independent of the medium in which it is produced and circulated. Media change, therefore, is far more than just a new piece of equipment; changing the medium affects all of our technologies. The Internet, for example, gives a new coloration to every institution. In the past, newspapers, radio and television changed society. Nowadays, the Internet is doing the same. With the introduction of its technologies everything is changing: political campaigns, homes, schools, churches, and companies. The World Wide Web is not merely a software protocol and text and data files. It is also the sum of the uses to which this protocol is now being put: for marketing and advertising, scholarship, personal expression, and so on.

The invention of the Internet has altered the world we live in. Not since the industrial revolution have we seen such profound change in the way we work, we shop, we get our news, and conduct business. The Internet extends the traditional human abilities to see, to speak, and to manipulate. The revolution is not so much one of content but of distribution. Computers allow the manipulation of old content and old media in unanticipated ways.

The Internet as a different tool favors the processes of communication and information exchange within audiences whose dimensions could be considered medium-sized, allowing the users to develop close contact. In this way, by allowing us to share pastimes or have areas of common interest, the Internet can fill an important space abandoned by the conventional mass media.

The Internet occupies a great portion of young peoples' time. According to a Burst Media survey, published on AdAge.com, in the United States teens between the ages of 13 and 17, nearly four in 10 teens (37.4%) are spending at least three hours daily online outside of school settings. Just one in five (19.6%) say they're spending less than an hour online outside of school. For teens, the Internet is a more meaningful source for movie and TV news than word of mouth or local newspapers (O'Malley, 2006). In the following figure, we can see in the case of Mexico how the Internet is occupying important spaces that other media cannot fill.

Figure 2. Places Where Users Access the Internet in Mexico. (2005)



People in Mexico can use the Internet at their schools, libraries and cybercafes. The Internet and traditional media rarely occupy the same physical space. For instance, the opportunity to watch television outside a home environment is less common. There are more public places for the Internet than for television viewing.

The Internet is used more for informational purposes, while television is used more for entertainment and relaxation. Home computing may be displacing television watching itself as well as reducing leisure time with the family. Television viewing is lower among Internet users than non-users in some countries. The competition between television and the Internet is largely happening at home. It is rather difficult for a person to watch television and go online at the same time, especially given the amount of interactivity and involvement needed for the Internet. The following figures show the impact of the Internet versus other media.

Figure 3. Internet Movies vs. Other Media (United States)

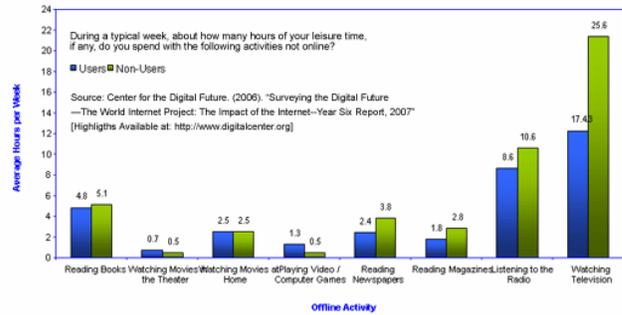
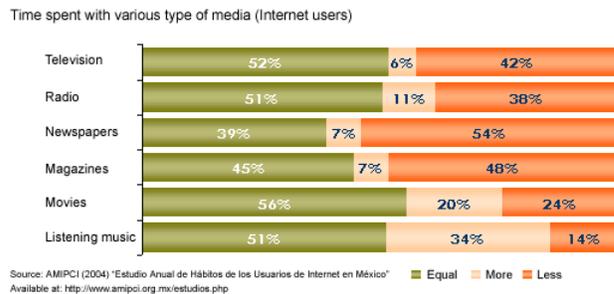


Figure 4. Internet vs. Other Media (Mexico)



In Mexico, people are watching less television and reading fewer newspapers since they began using the Internet. Radio's niche in the media ecology is in many ways modest. It survives because it reaches arenas other technologies do not reach. People can go online while playing the radio in the background. In this sense, there is a positive relationship between the Internet and radio use. The fact that the internet is changing the media business has prompted many traditional media companies to develop digital strategies.

“New digital media are not external agents that come to disrupt an unsuspecting culture. They emerge from within cultural contexts, and they refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar contexts.” (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 19)

It is only lately that educators have recognized that the tools of instruction may change, but the problems of learning, ingesting and applying information remain the same as they have been since schools began. That's why Postman said that the “Digital Age” will not pose any problems for us that are more complex than those faced by people in other centuries. Once again, these new digital technologies are giving a new perspective to everything: The same situation occurred with conventional media in other times and it's important for us to understand it.

In some ways, television has affected learning, school performance, the relationship between voters and politicians, family traditions, and so on. We are now observing that the Internet, and new digital technologies are doing the same. Technology is not an educational panacea. It is only a tool to help solve a broad based problem. We have to use technology rather than be used by it. Mexico has become in Postman's terms, a "Technopoly", a system in which technology of every kind is cheerfully granted sovereignty over social institutions and national life and becomes self-justifying, self-perpetuating and omnipresent. (Postman, 1992)

New technology presents new possibilities and these new possibilities awaken new desires. The intelligent use of the Internet could introduce favorable modifications in our informational models. As a communication medium, the Internet has certain unique characteristics, particularly its total interactivity and its formidable transmission capacity. These characteristics permit any user to access this massive media outlet. It is not far-fetched to assert that through the Internet, the dream of an authentic "global community" could finally come true.

The audience of the traditional mass media faces the problem of a lack of information because of the fewer number of sources which cover news events, and for other processes such as censorship, self-censorship, and agenda setting. Now the problem is that we have information overloaded, and consequently information is difficult or impossible to assimilate. We think that the more information we have, the better we will be in solving significant problems, and that's not necessarily true. Many people talk about the advantages that a new technology offers in a particular field, but

almost none of them talk about the costs of these technologies. And it's important to start to think more about it.

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Jacques Ellul: Humankind in the Presence of Technology *by Maria de la Casas Perez*

Maria de la Luz Casas Perez is a Professora de Planta, Escuela de Negocios y Ciencias Sociales at the Tecnológico de Monterrey-Campus Cuernavaca. This summarizes her paper presented on June 6, 2007 at the 8th annual convention of the Media Ecology

Association in Mexico City. Translated from the Spanish by Marcos Campillo Fenoll.

I do not limit myself to describing my feelings with cold objectivity in the manner of a research worker reporting what he sees under a microscope. I am keenly aware that I am myself involved in technological civilization, and that its history is also

my own. I may be compared rather with a physician or physicist who is describing a group situation in which he is himself involved. The physician in an epidemic, the physicist exposed to radioactivity: in such situations the mind may remain cold and lucid, and the method objective, but there is inevitably a profound tension of the whole being.

Jacques Ellul in *The Technological Society*,
author's foreword to Revised American Edition

I would like to start this essay with a personal reflection and an acknowledgment of gratitude. When Professor Claudia Benassino asked me to give a talk in memory of Jacques Ellul, she incited me to reread his writings and to question some of the underlying aspects found throughout his complete work.

At first, my major concern focused on the inability to dedicate the necessary amount of *time* that such an act of reflection deserves. I must also admit, on another note, that I was probably threatened by the worries of not being able to measure up to his thought, and therefore, of not being able to share with you today a valuable commentary. Nevertheless, I mustered up the courage to revisit Ellul's work, which led me through unsettling paths little explored by me before and attracted me each time more and more into the spell of technology and the revalorization of humankind in the presence of its eternal charm.

According to his most knowledgeable biographers, Jacques Ellul published more than fifty books and numerous articles. Among all these writings, where we can find outstanding works on theology, philosophy, history, sociology, and other fields, the one that demanded my attention the most was a work published in 1954 and entitled *La Technique ou l'enjeu du Siècle*. It was translated into Spanish merely as *El Siglo XX y la Técnica*, a translation that from the very beginning deprives the title of its most enriching notion: one that implies precisely a witty critique and reflection resulting from humankind's fascination with technology. What is at stake? What is it that brings science and technology into consideration? To what extent has technology deprived us of one of the most important manifestations of humankind's rationalization and to what extent has it generated new manifestations? What are the implications of all this?

In his insightful work, Ellul writes about –and refers to– the conditions that the twentieth century posed as well as the development and evolution of technology since its oldest origins to the modern era. However, many of the ideas that the writer expressed in 1954 are nowadays more valid than ever. Some of his most outstanding ideas establish that among the inherent characteristics of all technology are rationality, artificiality, automatism, self-augmentation, monism, universality, and autonomy. Ellul considers that all of these characteristics generate an artificial system that

subordinates or eliminates the natural. Suffice it to say that Ellul arrives at this categorization after a long examination of different periods in the history of humanity, where the author discovers that the technological phenomenon is a constant feature of human history.

Ellul assumes that, through all those periods in which the human being has been faced with the need to recognize the presence of an invention or a new discovery, mankind's astonishment has been always the same. Nevertheless, he points out that even though current technology offers the same characteristics that all previous technologies offered, its current development has been extremely fast but not less amazing because of this; a critique and consideration that, as Ellul himself describes, does not make man become spectator but participant, becoming nevertheless, in many instances, a victim.

Nowadays, technology is recognized as science and technique's instrumental arm, as the ultimate articulation of mankind's rationality and intellectuality in benefit of more sublime ends. For Ellul, technique and consequently technology represent the outcome of the articulation of all the rational methods that allow absolute efficiency for a given period of development.

What is interesting about this phenomenon is that while technology, at its origin, was a tool that adjusted to man's needs, nowadays the opposite phenomenon is taking place: that is, man is the one adjusting to technology. Technology is forcing us to redefine ourselves as human beings and as a complete society. It gets inserted, it is measured out for us, it controls us in each of our daily activities, and therefore it becomes a complete civilizing subproduct. Its existing condition is secured. It is not that man has created technology, but current technology is the one creating man, adapting him to its needs.

We have become accustomed to technology working well, to its determining our living cycles, to letting it tell us what to do and when to do it. Computers, electronic alarms, instant messaging systems, they all condition and guide us. Our whole life is duplicated in its records, our *raison d'être* is established under technology's observant and constant gaze, under which efficiency is not constituted as an option, but as a need imposed upon every human activity.

The essential question for Ellul is then: to what extent can we distinguish between what technology offers us and what do we lose under technological progress? To what extent has technology allowed us to live in a better way and to what extent does its presence dehumanize us completely?

If twentieth-century technology (which by the way we largely enjoy or endure – depending on how we perceive it– currently in the twenty-first century) is the result of an undeniable fact: just as technology from previous times consisted in replacing the human muscle, we are now witnessing a second revolution consisting in the replacement of the human brain. And if new technology replaces our brains in order to store, order, and systematize an amount of data never before possible in the history of humanity, is it not also possible that it has deprived us of the ability to think by means of our intellect?

It is maybe because of this that current technology is an eminently motor-driven technology, and hence not related to rationality. In order to use it we simply need to push some buttons with the least effort possible and without the requirement of any basic training. Contemporary technology is then characterized by the fact that it has sublimated the attitude of a complete civilization. Its fundamental device in this intellectual transformation is the notion of comfort. What technology can make for us and our constant dependency on comfort is what has eventually made us so manageable and subject to technological domination.

Of particular interest is Ellul's notion of comfort as the mark of man's personality vis-a-vis the space he inhabits. In this way, while in medieval times mankind was not concerned in the least with furniture but the proportions and the materials which spaces were made of, nowadays we are more concerned about objects and the extent to which they can provide us with some comfort. It is because of this that we can bear the overcrowding derived from overpopulation, a phenomenon to which we have grown accustomed. Because of this we are able to tolerate a growing decrease in the minimum space required for living; in fact, to such a extent that we are reduced to technological solitude. Let's think, for instance, about the new hotels aimed at executives that have burgeoned in Japan, where guests get hardly enough space to slide into a small bed surrounded by artificial atmosphere-building elements.

It is not fortuitous, however, that man has given way to the technological race in order to put aside even his very own interests. As Ellul states, the exceptional development of technology that we witness nowadays is derived from a previously unknown conjunction of different elements, such as a long technological maturation or incubation, the demographic increase, the economic situation, an almost perfect flexibility of a malleable society open to the propagation of technology, and a clear technical

intention. In sum, it has been the fracturing of human societies, among other things, that has become a fertile land for technological domination.

But Ellul reminds us that evolution follows not the logic of discoveries or a fatal progress of technologies, but *an interaction of technology and the effective choices that mankind makes in its presence*. Therefore, while the nature of the relationship between technology, society, and individual is common to all societies, their relationship is not the same in the modern world. For instance, while in previous times the presence of technology was limited by religious or political conditions, in our contemporary world technology is not limited by anything. On the contrary, it spreads towards all domains and encloses all human activities. Its evolution is so fast that it puzzles not only the man in the street, but also scientists and philosophers, posing harder and harder problems.

Throughout all of his writings, Jacques Ellul did not hesitate to promote ecology as one of the essential conditions of human balance. His approach, innovative as others, mentions what we now know as Media Ecology, that is, the ways by which the media affect not only our perception, understanding, feelings, and values, but also the ways in which we interact with the media, that is, technology, enables or hinders our survival possibilities. If, as Ellul says, technology is the product of rationality and artificiality, then reason has led us to the idea of an artificial progress that mankind has paid through an ever growing subordination to the instrument of his freedom.

Because of this, humankind needs to seek his own ecology, his own balance. Ellul finds it in spirituality, not through an opposition to science and technology but through the expression of a project, that can only be carried out by taking its own ways of expression. This way, action becomes a subproduct of reflection, having technology as an intermediary. Balance is essentially what is important here; not to lose sight that even though technology works as a mediator between nature and humanity, humankind should not get lost in an artificial world which it knows nothing about. This is precisely the risk, giving in to technological and artificial needs that dictate our lives instead of responding to humankind's inherent need: finding our own place in the world.

Silence and Mobile Media: An Ellulian Perspective

by Stephanie Bennett

Stephanie Bennett is a member of the faculty of the School of Communication and Media at Palm Atlantic University. Her doctoral dissertation on Ellul at Regent University was entitled The Disappearance of Silence: A Dialectical Exploration of the Interpersonal Implications of Person Mobile Media as Viewed through the Lens of Jacques Ellul's La Technique.

Cell phones, iPods, and the wireless Internet are no longer exotic digital devices used on occasion for emergency situations or used intermittently to overcome the relational obstacles of distance and time. Increasingly, these technologies are being used in primary ways that substitute face-to-face communication for interaction that is mediated. As the relational ramifications of an increasingly mobile society begin to unfold it is important to ask ourselves how these new media influence the effectiveness and richness of interpersonal communication praxis. This essay takes a broad overview of one aspect of the interpersonal situations these new media engender, that is, the erosion of silence as a necessary component of the communicational landscape.

The Disappearance of Silence

One of the largely overlooked ramifications of the new media environment is the exponential rise in acoustic output and intake, an ancillary effect that intensifies the amount of extraneous noise in and around conversational space. This has much bearing on the effectiveness of the interpersonal interaction, particularly as it affects the degree to which one can adequately listen, process, and reflect upon the message. As a result of both internal and external noise, the increasing lack of conversational room to pause, ponder and thoughtfully consider what is being said is already evident in the public sphere, and, when viewed through the lens of Ellul's concept of *la technique*, presents legitimate concern for the richness and durability of traditionally constructed and maintained human relationships.

Unforeseen Consequences

When viewed through the prism of history the many unforeseen consequences linked to technological advance do not typically become evident until after a major shift in societal norms has already taken place. From the alphabet to Johannes Guttenberg's printing press; to the telegraph, film, the radio and television; to the digital media of today, "media sketch out our world for us, organize our conversations, determine our decisions, and shape our self-identity, they do so with a technological cadence, massaging in our soul a rhythm toward efficiency."⁽¹⁾ Over time, these media of communication engender as great – or even greater – influence on the way society is structured than what they make possible by way of convenience, comfort, or other immediate benefits. That is, these changes do much more than add something new to the world; they become part of the ecological framework of society. Today's media environment is rich with many options for communication, but the technology most prominently rising to the fore is the cell phone, and thus is the focus of the following pages.

The Social Penetration of the Cell Phone

"What characterizes technical action within a particular activity is the search for greater efficiency."⁽²⁾

When Jacques Ellul penned the above statement, the computer was still in the early years of commercial use. By the time he died in 1994, personal computers were not as yet available on the average person's desktop (3). Now, as the nascent stages of the 21st century unfold, the world has long since embraced the personal computer and is in the midst of experiencing a new love affair, this time with personal mobile media (PMM), the cell phone being the most popular device among them. In fact, in the United States, with 81% of cell phone users reporting that their cell phone is always on, and cell phone sales topping \$207 million, a great deal more noise is being introduced into the public square. This intense proliferation has already begun to nurture an "always

on” mentality, one that advances something one might call a “24/7 social environment.” The blinking, buzzing, multi-tasking cacophony that ensues also serves to situate the average mobile media user in a position as to always be ready to receive information (often from multiple sources simultaneously), with one of the least apparent changes to the interpersonal situation being the diminishment of silence.

Similar penetration into the marketplace exists in many other nations; some -- such as England and Italy-- are growing with even greater proportional use among its citizenry.(4) Africa has recently surpassed Finland and Switzerland, two of the earliest adopters in cell phone growth. In Latin America and Mexico, use of mobile computer technologies has grown exponentially, as well. In Mexico alone, there are 54 million mobile users, as of January 2007.(5) With approximately 2.2 billion cell phone users throughout the world, it may even be said that talking-in-transit has become the magnum opus of modern media.(6) Because of technological growth around the world, Ellul's analysis is relevant outside France and the U.S.(7)

In the midst of this “digital revolution,” increased amounts of auditory and visual stimuli stream into the human central nervous system as new mobile media project ever-increasing mounds of information into physical locations where individuals are attempting to converse. This “more efficient” and convenient mode of conversing not only provides means for people to expand communications outside the limitations of time and space, but it is restructuring and reorganizing the way the world conceives of communication. It is changing the delicate balance between silence and speech – eroding the dialectical nature of speech to bring about a type of interaction that conforms to technical necessity.

Silence, La Technique and PMM

“In this terrible dance of means which has been unleashed no one knows where we are going and the aim of life has been forgotten [. . .] Man has set out at tremendous speed – to go nowhere.”(8)

One of Ellul's primary theses regarding technology is that the goals of life disappear “in the busyness of perfecting methods;” the ends are lost in a self-propelling force that he terms, *la technique* (1951, 1989; p 64). This force encroaches because the “magnitude of the very means [is, *sic*] at our disposal;” allowing us to “live in a civilization without ends” (Christians, 2006 p. 127). Thus, the issue of concern regarding use of PMM is not the desire for more

efficient and convenient access to others, but the uncritical acceptance of these means as appropriate for every situation. When this happens, the dominating, self-propelling necessity threads itself throughout all aspects of everyday life, exchanging greater, teleological goals for the means used to attain them. In other words, instead of using cell phones and other PMM to nurture the intended goal of relationally rich connections, these devices quickly become a personal necessity, collapsing the ends by their compulsory use, trading the process of communication for fascination with the method. Christians posits Ellul's thesis as “inescapable;” contending that to the “degree that the technicized dominates, healthy livelihood disappears (2006; p. 127).” When viewed in relation to personal mobile media then, what may appear to be more freeing to the human soul because of factors such as convenience and mobility may actually be in opposition to freedom.

Silence in a Technological Society

While Ellul (1985) did not theorize formally about the role of silence in the communication process, his thoughts on the dialectical nature of speech and silence hold much prescience.(9) According to Ellul, language never belongs to the evident order of things. Rather, he suggests, that language “is a continuous movement between hiding and revealing. It makes of the play in human relationships something even more fine and complex than it would be without language” (1985, p. 16). Max Picard, (1888-1965) a twentieth-century philosopher who viewed silence as “the necessary bed” or platform, from which conversation must spring” also approached speech and silence as dialectically connected, anthropomorphizing silence as the “friendly sister of the word. (33)” Picard's conception of this dialectical relationship avers Ellul's ideas on the importance of dialogue and affirms the role of silence as having much to do with the creative spark of language as well as the choices one makes in using particular words or phrases.

The infusion of this creativity is what Picard called the “fullness” of speech as opposed to what is commonly called empty chatter; for Picard did not view silence as simply the absence of speech or the absence of noise. Instead, he perceived silence as a phenomenon in and of itself, contending that in order to maintain the creativity of the human spirit speech must retain its connection to language, maintaining the embrace and exchange of “the other” so as to prevent language from becoming a mechanical routine (p. 33). Interpersonal exchanges via the cell phone often occur too quickly to manage much creativity and often reduce conversation to de-contextualized sound bites.

One of Ellul's (1964) contentions involves the nervousness with which modern men and women have to cope because of a constant drive and clatter to find the most efficient means to communicate. This situation is exacerbated with the use of PMM. His position finds some clarity with a query concerning the average citizen's quandary: "What does he find (when he gets home from work, *sic*) He finds a phantom. If he ever thinks, his reflections terrify him" (1964, p. 376). The questions that are left lingering demand an attention. What is this terror? Does it conflate with an environment saturated in too much exogenous noise? Does the sheer quantity of information, both in the form of external noise and internal message overload leave human beings so busy reacting to stimuli that we have no time for reflection? For Ellul, the constant flow of information (data, images, words) is most problematic because it obstructs the ability to enter into meaningful dialogue (1985).

Meaningful Dialogue

Meaningful dialogue is not only difficult via cell phone and wireless devices, but often serves to reduce the significance of the communication taking place. Thus, when making regular use of PMM as the sole (or primary) mode of communication it may bring much comfort to individuals relating at great distances, but accomplishes this in increasingly in mediated fashion with extra layers of separation and space between interlocutors. Not only do the missing non-verbal communication cues impact conversational coherence, but listening become more difficult, and the act of engaging in meaningful dialogue is sorely diminished.

Further Philosophical Implications

"There is always a margin around our conversation. More precisely, conversation is like this printed page, framed on all sides by white margins, without words, but which can be filled in with any word at all. The margins situate a conversation and give it the possibility of rebounding and beginning again. They allow the other person to participate with his marginal comments. [. . .] Here again, we are dealing with the unexpected. And we up against the mystery of silence."(10)

Both axiological and ontological, the philosophical implications involved in this discussion are varied and complex, far more extensive than this short essay will allow us to address. One aspect of the problematic that must be mentioned is the interrelationship between PMM, silence, certainty and mystery. The "idea" of mystery in connection with

communication is very much embedded in a philosophical approach to language, which is captured in Ellul's thoughts on the way meaning and mystery intersect:

Meaning is uncertain; therefore I must constantly fine-tune my language and work at reinterpreting the words I hear. I try to understand what the other person says to me. All language is more or less a riddle to be figured out; it is like interpreting a text that has many possible meanings. In my effort at understanding

and interpretation, I establish definitions, and finally, a meaning. The thick haze of discourse produces meaning.(11)

Ellul's "thick haze of discourse" necessitates time for reflection along with a respect for the non-verbal elements in interpersonal communication. Both of these elements intersect with the use of personal mobile media and are worthy of greater exploration.(12) Moreover, an essential aspect of the communication process involves pre-conversation, or the intrapersonal sense-making that takes place prior to an interaction. Healthy intrapersonal communication necessitates a measure of "silent time" or solitude, and although the measure of such may differ widely for each individual, quietude is necessary for all. Whereas present trends and "cell phone behavior" might refute this need as superfluous, "time spent thinking, reflecting, is not wasteful" (Stewart, 1990). Forsaking it compromises quality and coherence in numerous ways. Without the strong, functional, structuring apparatus of the intrapersonal, conversational coherence may be seriously compromised.

True Presence and the Art of Listening

Among other dynamics of PMM, the mobility factor changes not only daily communication behavior, but the very way people think about being together. Lack of true presence, a substitution of virtual relationships for actual ones, acquiescence to sound bites instead of conversation, and the veneration of multi-tasking to the status of a core virtue are but a few of these. To ignore the symbolic and dialectical significance of speech and silence could be an incontrovertible social ill and horrific consequence to the flourishing of human beings. Ellul (1994) expands on its symbolic significance of language by lauding the way in which it is used to communicate, saying:

We are in the presence of an infinitely and unexpectedly rich tool, so that the tiniest phrase unleashes an entire polyphonic gamut of meaning. The ambiguity of language and even its ambivalence and its contradiction between

the moment it is spoken and the moment it is received — produce extremely intense activities. Without such activities we would be ants or bees, and our drama and tragedy would quickly be dried up and empty. (p. 123)

Ellul embraced the ambiguity of language as integral to the human being and as inferred in the above quotation, using the symbolic tool we call language (and using it well) he explains is “the” human feature that separates us from the beasts. To ignore or truncate the process into something mathematical, scientific, or strictly utilitarian is to denigrate the beauty and intrinsic worth – even necessity – of language as a mean to comprehend our humanness. As Ellul explains so eloquently, “Speech does not take its pattern directly from what there is “to say”; it creates in addition a sphere of unexpectedness, a wonderful flowering which adorns, enriches, and ennobles what I have to say, instead of expressing it directly, flatly, and exactly.”(13) Instead, of the expedient transmission of information, conversation is an art, one that requires the commitment to listen relationally.

For Don Idhe (1976) listening relationally involves a process that is different from abstract listening, and it necessitates a certain measure of silence, for, he explains, “silence is the hidden genesis of the word.”(p. 202). To clarify this, Idhe uses the term, “communicative silence,” which inheres a type of listening that must occur in order to invite speech, suggesting that primary listening precedes meaningful conversation. Further, Idhe explains the significance of silence as a human experience, positing its inception as much farther back than the socialization process of a child. Listening, as a primary part of learning and communicating, begins in the womb. He contends:

Long before [the child, *sic*] has learned to speak he has heard and entered the conversation which is humankind. He has been immersed in the voices and movements which preceded his speaking even more deeply in the invisible language of touch and even that of sound within the womb. Listening comes before speaking, and wherever it is sought the most primitive word of sounding language has already occurred (p. 202).

This key component in the communication process is impossible in an environment saturated with too much noise.

Toward Solution

The development of relationships-on-the-run might not be problematic if the dynamics involving salient and rich conversation could be satisfied by computation or simply by the successful exchange of

information, but interpersonal communication entails many unquantifiable elements such as the often humorous, emotion-laden, highly nuanced, meaning-rich and other unique qualities that bring a fullness and depth into a human exchange. We must ask ourselves if we are willing to invest in interpersonal relationships that are driven by the principle of utility but lacking in the *poetic*. If not, it will be necessary to take the extra time to foster communication that does more than celebrate quick, efficient, and productive interpersonal interactions. This is by no means the easiest way to proceed. Yet, to inspire the kind of communication that is qualitatively rich and relational one must be increasingly intentional about creating an environment that is conducive to conversation. Uncritical acceptance of a 24/7 mentality fostered by the availability and use of personal mobile media may be one of the quickest routes to dismantling the time honored conversational arts. Without at least a modicum of silence, the hectic pace and acoustic congeries of 21st century life usurps the freedom we cherish. Subjugating silence to the technical necessity of a world of unrelenting information and noise not only increases communication breakdown, but is likely to result in a mental posture devoid of rest, reflection, and quiet repose.

What to do? From a very practical standpoint, this means, among other intentional acts, that we must *really* listen to others. It also means that we avoid the temptation to drive the beautiful mystery of human communication into a technological cul-de-sac. In our busy world of rapid information exchange a healthy respect for the integration of silence can add to the nurturing of a well-balanced, productive, and flourishing life. Without this respect our fascination with all things technological will inadvertently eclipse the beauty and mystery of the gift that most bespeaks our humanness – that ability to use human speech with the dialectical presence of silence as a necessary path to meaningful and vigorous dialogue.

End notes

1. Christians, C. (2000), *Studies in Christian Ethics*, p. 83.
2. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. (1964). p. 20
3. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Research Project, at that time there were fewer than 1 in 7 people online at this time.
4. Per capita, Western Europe has the highest percentages of cellular users. In 2005, 930 out of every 1,000 people owned a cell phone. [June 28, 2007]

<http://www.c-i-a.com/pr0206.htm>. Today, in England, there are more cell phones than people.

5. *El Universal* newspaper; [retrieved June 28, 2007]

<http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/397926.html>

6. By the end of 2005 there were 1.8 million cell phone subscribers throughout the globe. Mobile Tracker News. [May 21, 2007]

<http://www.mobiletracker.net/archives/2005/05/18/mobile-subscribers-worldwide>. Today, cellular use has catapulted to roughly 2.2 billion subscribers.¹

7. The 2006 National Survey of Latinos,

http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/Latinos_Online_2007_topline.pdf

8. Jacques Ellul (1951, 1989). *The presence of the kingdom*, pp. 63-69.

9. Discussion of the relationship between dialectic and rhetoric has a long history, and highly respected scholars differ greatly in interpretation. Some, like Aristotle, maintain that dialectic is a part of rhetoric; others, such as Plato, uphold dialectic as “higher” or more important than rhetoric, pointing to rhetoric as a means of persuasion through eloquence while dialectic involves argument and a more reasoned and respectable approach to truth. As a dialectician, Ellul’s perspective seems to be the opposite of Kenneth Burke’s in that (as a Rhetorician) Burke positions rhetoric as replacing dialectic as the operative mode. However, in Burke’s dramatic theory of communication, there are overlaps and intersections between Ellul’s depictions of the tragedy and drama of life and the terministic screens through which people communicate. This train of thought may find application to the contemporary configuration and use of PMM in interpersonal communication, in general. The fullest expression of interpersonal communication makes use of both the rhetorical and dialectical modes. With the present use of these digital devices, it is evident that communication behavior requires an incorporation of both. This may be especially so in the present age when the tools of technology have become increasingly sophisticated and embedded in daily use.

10. *Humiliation*, p. 25

11. From Jacques Ellul’s chapter “Seeing and Hearing: Prolegomena” in Anderson, Cissna and Arnett (1994) *The Reach of Dialogue*.” p. 121.

12. Detailed explication of these elements is available in my dissertation, available via ProQuest. “The Disappearance of Silence: A Dialectical Exploration of the Interpersonal Implications of Personal Mobile Media as Viewed through the Lens of Jacques Ellul’s *la technique*.”

13. (*Humiliation*, p. 17).

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A Honduran Mayor's Experience of Ellul's Political Illusion

by Mark Baker

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In the midst of introducing me to his boss, and greeting my family, Jacobo Sanchez pulled me aside just long enough to say, "Ellul was right!" In a way that said it all. I knew what he meant. At the same time Jacobo's statement begged for further explanation and conversation. Questions immediately flooded my mind. This chance meeting in La Ceiba, Honduras, a city neither of us lived in, did not, however, allow for that conversation. I vowed to myself that on a future visit to Honduras I would visit Jacobo and follow-up on that comment.

In the early 1980's, fresh out of college, I taught at an evangelical bi-lingual school in Tegucigalpa. I met Jacobo, at that time a university student studying chemical engineering. He was charismatic, confident and fun to be with. We spent hours in wide ranging conversation. Many of my beliefs and assumptions were shaken by the poverty and injustices in Honduras and the revolutions in neighboring countries. Jacobo enthusiastically encouraged my critical thinking. (He, a Catholic, also challenged and transformed my conceptions of Catholics.) We became soul mates. We actively sought to convince others that working for justice for the poor and oppressed was central to the Christian faith, and we reflected on ways we could do that ourselves in the present and future.

I also first encountered Ellul's writing in that time period. Jacobo and I read and discussed a number of Ellul's books. Ellul added to our growing sense that a commitment to God called for commitment to radical change. Ellul also challenged us to think more critically about the means we might use to bring change—including the use of political power. I interpreted Ellul as warning us against the political option, yet it was easy for me to be negative about an option I did not realistically have. Jacobo, however, read *The Political Illusion* and *The Politics of God*,

Politics of Man from a different setting than I did. He knew politicians. For him becoming an elected government leader, or a high level bureaucrat, was not an unrealistic idea. Jacobo took Ellul's warning seriously, but rather than ruling out participation in politics Jacobo entered the fray with the hope that because of what he had learned he could be a different type of politician.

In 1985 Jacobo's uncle, Oscar Mejía Arellano, became a candidate for President and Jacobo worked in his campaign. His uncle lost, and in January 1986 Jacobo shared the following reflections with me. (In June of 1983 I returned to the United States. I went to Honduras each summer, and while there visited Jacobo until he graduated and returned to his home city El Progreso. His words are excerpts from a transcription of a cassette recording he sent me in January 1986).

I had the chance to travel around the country and see hunger, sickness, and ignorance in my people. I saw a lot of problems that need to be solved. I was happy because I thought I would have some power, some power to solve these problems. That was the beginning of the process. . . As the days were passing by I was changing. I was thinking just about power, the sweet taste of power. . . I started seeing myself in a suit with a silk shirt in this big air conditioned office, with a big desk, in comfortable chair--sitting there having people coming asking me for favors. . . I am not saying I'd be a corrupt person. . . In the back of my mind, of course were big dreams, big concerns about the people, . . . but I lost perspective.

I was in the this boat and we were sailing in the water of politics and I had realized that the important thing was to keep yourself within the boat. You could see a lot of people swimming around, trying to get into the boat, and some people within the boat pushing them and drowning them. And I was there thinking, "that's good because then I won't have to fight anyone else for my share of power." I was thinking that, and I am a Christian! I love my

neighbors, but I was becoming part of this, becoming selfish. . .

You have to be really careful because the gap between the powerful and the oppressed becomes wider all the time. In my speeches I was saying we'd seek justice, health, education and agrarian reform. When I was saying things like that I really meant them because I think it's what is best. But I was on a stage seven or eight feet above the ground and I didn't talk to my people. No, I was with the men on stage, and when we talked among ourselves we did not talk about the needs of the people. . . I remember we were developing a strategy so we could gain more power in the congress and the supreme court. We were just seeking power, power, power. . . And they were saying, "I'm going to buy this house," "this farm," "buy that car," "get this for my family." I never heard, "We have to do this for the people." I never said it. . .

I'm telling these things to you because I know you love me and will pray for me so that I can see the light and gain more wisdom. . . I know your ideals and your dreams and how much you love my people. I love my people too, and I am seeking justice for them. I know that this feeling that burns within me was set there by God. I failed.

Jacobo's first foray in politics confirmed many things he had read in Ellul. He continued to read Ellul, and still had a burning passion to rectify situations of injustice and to lessen the suffering of the poor. His experience in politics had left him feeling great disappointment and disillusionment. He had, however, learned that he could give speeches that moved people. He loved to see how people had reacted to his words, and the thought played in his mind: "why give speeches for others? Why not speak for myself?" Four years later he did. In 1989 he ran for mayor of El Progreso, the third largest city in Honduras. He won the election and became mayor in 1990.

In the summer of 1990 my wife and I, once again living in Honduras, ran a two-month program for some university students involved with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in New York state. On our way to the beach for their final debriefing we passed through El Progreso and I had arranged for us to visit Jacobo. I had not seen him for a few years. He sat behind a large desk in an air conditioned office. Aides sat at his side. While talking to our group various people interrupted the meeting to get his signature, ask a question, or to report someone was waiting for him. He dealt with each one quickly and returned to his animated description of the changes he was trying to bring about in the city; how he was using his power to help others. For instance, he explained how he helped the poor and

landless to get land. I felt a mix of things—excited by what he was accomplishing, yet wondering if he was remembering the lessons he had learned in 1986.

I was even more confused when, two years later, I read in the Honduran newspapers that Jacobo was in Jail and accused of misusing public funds. He was forced out of office. In the end he was found innocent. The real story was that he had been betrayed by some in his own party who saw him as a threat to politics as usual. I left Honduras that year to begin my doctoral studies, and did not see Jacobo again for over ten years until, as noted above, we ran into each other by chance in another city.

Now two years had passed. I was once again visiting Honduras and Jacobo came to Tegucigalpa to spend the afternoon with me. He immediately began explaining the phrase he had mentioned to me two years earlier. "You know that book you gave me by Jacques Ellul, 'The Political Illusion,' it's true." Yes, he had read it before he became mayor and acknowledged the reality of Ellul's insights, but he aimed to be different. Re-reading it four years after his time as mayor, however, he had read more realistically and honestly. It served as a helpful tool for reflection. True he had taken positive actions—things he is grateful he had the opportunity to do. He did not just give handouts, but began projects that people worked themselves to obtain the results. He grew in his speaking ability, but also became ever more enamored with the feeling of being able to move a crowd. He learned to say the things they wanted to hear. The longer he was in office the more absorbed he became in seeking power for himself, the more he was changed by the power he obtained, and the more he found himself using laudable goals to justify questionable means.

Looking back he can see how the power changed and corrupted him. He did not see it at the time. He thought he was avoiding what Ellul warned us about. While he was mayor, one aide, Sergio, told him, "you are changing." Jacobo ignored him, and listened to all the others that praised him. Ironically after Jacobo lost his position Sergio was the only one who continued to visit him. All the others disappeared.

We had a great discussion that afternoon. It fascinated me to hear his insights on politics today—global and Honduran. After two hours, however, I leaned forward and asked, "But where are you today? What about all our talk of justice 20 some years ago?" He looked at me and said, "I think about it every day when I wake up, and a plaque of Isaiah 58 hangs behind my desk at work."

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the

yoke, to let the oppressed go free....

Then he described changes he has made at the factory he runs, changes resisted by the owner, changes that have required him to confront other powers that Ellul has written about. That, however, is material for another article.

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Book Notes & Reviews

Jacques Ellul

La pensée marxiste: Cours professé à l'Institut d'études politiques de Bordeaux de 1947 à 1979

Edited by Michel Hourcade, Jean-Pierre Jézéquel and Gérard Paul.

Paris: La Table Ronde, 2003. 255 pages.

Jacques Ellul

Les successeurs de Marx: Cours professé à l'Institut d'études politiques de Bordeaux

Edited by Michel Hourcade, Jean-Pierre Jézéquel and Gérard Paul

Paris: La Table Ronde, 2007. 218 pages.

Reviewed by Joyce Hanks

University of Scranton

Jacques Ellul's courses taught at the University of Bordeaux (including at the Institut d'Études Politiques, which he helped found) often broke new ground, influencing the thought of generations of French students and students from abroad. Until recently, our access to this material has been limited to Ellul's own adaptations of his course materials made available in book form (*The Technological Society; Propaganda*). Now, thanks to the herculean efforts of three dedicated Parisians (two of whom studied under Ellul), we have two additional Ellul courses available: Marxist Thought and Marx's Successors.

Like Ellul's previously published books based on his university lectures, these two new books are models of carefully organized and presented thought. Hourcade's, Jézéquel's, and Paul's efforts have involved locating notes taken by several students, as well as tape recordings (made by Bill Vanderburg when he studied with Ellul), and molding them into a smoothly readable whole. The editors have tracked down references, explained allusions, and often cross referenced Ellul's lectures where they intersect with material in his published books and in interviews he gave. Additional footnotes compare Ellul with other writers, or show how he was ahead of his time, signaling trends that would become important much later. We owe a

considerable debt of thanks to all three editors, to the former students who gave permission to use their notes and recordings, and to Denis Tillinac of La Table Ronde for his willingness to publish Ellul's lectures.

The first of these volumes traces how Marx's ideas relate to those of Hegel and Feuerbach, and offers a broad outline of Marx's thought, including a presentation of his publications. Separate sections explain Marx on materialism, history, economics, and politics. Throughout the book, Ellul evaluates other scholars' understandings of Marx. Readers familiar with Ellul will expect to find references to Technique, but the editors have helpfully set these and other comments by Ellul apart from the rest of the text, using a symbol (¶) and bold type to indicate that they involve Ellul's opinions, predictions, and updating of Marx's thought (this same system identifies Ellul's personal views in *Les successeurs de Marx*). Readers who already know Marx well may want to concentrate on these readily identifiable paragraphs to get a view of "Ellul on Marx." Others may want to begin with the final chapter, devoted to Marx on political and social issues: ideology, the State, democracy, religion, alienation, the proletariat, and class struggle. Ellul shines especially in this section, where the influence of Marx's thought on him makes him quite persuasive and exceptionally clear.

The section that closes the book explains the importance of Marx in Ellul's thinking and the reason he has chosen to teach a course on Marxist thought. For those who have felt perplexed by Ellul's frequent references to Marx, this book may answer a host of questions.

The second book, on Marx's followers, includes notes on two different courses in that category. The first follows the fate of Marx's thought in France (Jean Jaurès, Georges Sorel), in Germany, especially as Marxists reacted to Lenin (Eduard Bernstein, Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg), and in Russia (Lenin and Plekhanov). The second course traces the development of Marxism in Czechoslovakia.

Ellul delineates the effects of certain contradictions, paradoxes, and predictions in Marx's thought as his early successors attempted to apply his principles to their country's situation. As Ellul sees it, conflicts among Marxists developed because of the incomplete state of Marx's published thought, its dialectical nature, and historical developments not foreseen by Marx. Marxist intellectuals battled communist parties, and followers attempted to define a "Marxist" so as to exclude those they considered heretics. Ellul describes the adaptations of

Marx's ideas to new developments in capitalism, the economic situation, and World War I.

Ellul's course on Marxism in Czechoslovakia concerns a much later period, after World War II, anti-Stalinism in the 1960's, and the effects of science and Technique on socialism, especially with respect to economics. Many of Radovan Richta's ideas (and to some degree, those of Ota Sik) bear a striking resemblance to Ellul's, especially as expressed in *Changer de révolution* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1982). Indeed, in the introduction to this course, Ellul makes it clear that he saw something new in these Czechoslovakian thinkers: a Marxist way of viewing technological society that made him hopeful for the first time in decades. Ellul also points out where he differs with the Czechs' views, so we get a balanced impression.

The editors have also prepared Ellul's lecture notes on Social Classes. This shorter work, privately published and circulated in 1998, was reviewed by Gabriel Vahanian in *Foi et Vie* (July 1999).

It is certainly to be hoped that these volumes will find their way into English, with added indexes, bibliographies, and probably some additional explanatory footnotes. They constitute concise, clear, and valuable introductions to Marx and his followers, as well as a slant on Ellul's thought we cannot find elsewhere in his published works.

Willem Vanderburg
***Living in the Labyrinth of
Technology***

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005

Reviewed by Richard Stivers
Illinois State University

Bill Vanderburg brings a unique perspective to the study of technique even as he is greatly indebted to the work of Jacques Ellul. *Living in the Labyrinth of Technology* is the third volume in a trilogy on culture, nature, technique, and the individual (whom many of us in the social sciences have forgotten). A full understanding of this highly important book requires a reading of *The Growth of Minds and Cultures* and *The Labyrinth of Technology*. Yet the author has done an excellent job of incorporating key ideas from the previous volumes into this one; consequently, this volume can stand alone.

Vanderburg's work, this book in particular, is the necessary complement to Ellul's work. Let me explain. Ellul's theory of the technological society is not a universal and philosophical theory of society (such as that of Talcott Parsons) applied to modern societies; rather it is a theory of what society has become in a technological context. Nor did Ellul attempt to create a scientific sociology in which

findings in the social sciences and history are integrated into a work of empirical generalizations. Instead he studied a number of important topics, such as propaganda, politics, and visual images, within the context of a technological society.

By contrast Vanderburg, as Ellul notes in the foreword to *The Growth of Minds and Cultures*, has created a work of scientific integration. His work is not merely interdisciplinary, but integrated into a cohesive, consistent whole. *The Growth of Minds and Cultures* contains a theory of culture, one that explains the so-called micro/macro problem. Social scientists have vainly attempted to explain the culture link between the individual and society. My reaction to Vanderburg's first book, as was Ellul's it turns out, was "He's explained the cultural link." In *the Labyrinth of Technology*, Vanderburg develops a concept of preventive engineering based on the best research on the biosphere, society, and technique. In this the third volume, he has brought together the main ideas of the previous works into a comprehensive theory of biosphere, society, and the individual under the dominion of technique.

For me as a social scientist, the issue of technique's impact on culture is central. I have been waiting for him to apply the concept of culture from the first book to a technological society. He has done this. I will spend the remainder of the review on this topic.

Vanderburg's theory of culture which resolved the issue of the individual and society, was based on a set of related concepts. One is the idea that culture is an open system, an organic whole, a social ecology, that is the result of human experience, most of which is at a metaconscious level of awareness. A central cultural dialectic is that of unity and diversity. All successful cultures provide for diversity, e.g., male and female, at the same time symbolically organizing the diversity into a unity. What sets apart Vanderburg's theory is the idea of metaconscious depth of experience. Experience runs from the personal to the societal. The former is about experiences unique to the individual, the latter about the common experiences of everyone in society. In between the micro and the macro are experiences common to those of the same sex, age, ethnicity, race, and class, on the one hand, and those of family and friendship groups, on the other hand. The brilliant insight is that each set of experiences is enfolded (made sense of) into the next higher level of experience. My personal experiences are set within my experiences in friendship groups and family, and these within those of my sex, age, and ethnic group, and those within my experiences as a member of society as a whole. The most profound level of metaconscious experience is that of the most common experience. *The more general the experience the greater the degree of depth.* We are less conscious of these metaconscious experiences and they are linked to the anchor of all cultures—the experience of the sacred. His theory explains both socialization and the inevitable tension between the individual and the group, and the group and society.

How does technique affect culture? First, technique supplants experience. In a technological society we learn less and less from custom and interpersonal

experiences, both skills and ways of being, and more in an abstract, external, rationalized way. The culture begins to lose its ability to symbolize and thus integrate the differentiated experiences of the diversity of status groups in society. At best, metaconscious knowledge related to experience exists in a fragmented way, only within one's occupational group or perhaps a special interest group. Consequently, culture loses its essential unity—a symbolic unity in the form of a narrative about the past and future. The diversity of culture overcomes its unity. Technique can only integrate a society at the level of logic, not meaning. Furthermore, technique as the modern sacred is exclusively about power, our own power. Consequently, all our relationships to nature and to each other are transformed into power relationships. Meaning is ephemeral and political.

Using open systems theory in a highly creative way, Bill Vanderburg has provided an indispensable service—placing biosphere, society, and individual into a dialectical context that enables us to perceive at a single glance the tragedy of our actions driven by the technological will to power.

Mark D. Baker

Religious No More: Building Communities of Grace & Freedom

Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press 1999; Wipf & Stock, 2005. Spanish version: *¡Basta de religión!: Cómo construir comunidades de gracia y libertad* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairos, 2005)

Reviewed by Ken Morris

Boulder, Colorado

Mark Baker's book, *Religious No More: Building Communities of Grace & Freedom*, reluctantly offers a definition of evangelicalism as "a specific movement that sought to reform fundamentalism from within" (167 n.19). A similar characterization could also apply to Baker's book, which arose out of the author's years of missionary experience in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and his reflections on those experiences during MA and PhD studies at New College Berkeley and Duke University. Like evangelicals who sought to reform fundamentalism while preserving what they viewed as the positive theological and social aspects of the movement, Baker offers a thoughtful and timely critique of evangelicalism from within.

Baker knows about what he writes. As his book explains, Baker grew up solidly inside American evangelicalism, graduated from Wheaton College, and self-identifies as an evangelical. He currently is associate professor of mission and theology at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California, and an IJES board member. Drawing on his experiences from an evangelical

upbringing in the U.S., his decade of missionary work in evangelical contexts in Latin America, his close reading of Jacques Ellul's critique of religiosity vs. living faith, and his training in theology and biblical studies at New College Berkeley and Duke, Baker has important insights to offer.

Baker's book begins with the premise that North American evangelicals can detect fallacies in their proclamation of the Christian message by examining how it plays out under the challenges of poverty, injustice and entrenched legalism at churches born out of North American mission work in Honduras. In the first part of the book, Baker uses case studies from churches in Tegucigalpa to demonstrate how legalism in Latin American churches offers solidarity among evangelicals and other social benefits, but also acts as a barrier to deeper, more authentic Christian community.

Baker recounts how, when the Honduran congregation he was working with sought to address this concern, its members ended up studying the book of Galatians for a number of weeks, which spawned the central ideas of this book. Baker's critique of legalism among Honduran evangelicals led him to take a new look at parallel legalisms found in North American evangelicalism.

The second part of the book summarizes the key insights Baker gained as a result of that contextual study and his subsequent doctoral work with Richard Hays and Frederick Herzog at Duke University. Baker contrasts the traditional interpretation of Galatians, which tends to reinforce the individualistic and overly spiritualized character of North American evangelicalism, with the interpretation being advanced by Hays and other New Testament scholars that the apostle Paul downplays concerns of individual guilt and salvation and focuses on the gospel's communal inclusiveness. This section is not a verse by verse exegesis of Galatians—although Baker is currently writing such a commentary in Spanish for the *Comentario Bíblico Latinoamericano* series (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairos y La Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana). Rather, Baker takes the reader through Galatians section by section, summarizing key hermeneutical issues and the range of interpretations, and offering his own insightful conclusions.

In the book's concluding section, Baker briefly proposes how the insights he has gained from reflecting on his missionary experiences and contextual and scholarly studies could have an impact on North American evangelicals. He is not alone in his concern over the individualistic and legalistic tendencies in the evangelical church. The Emergent Church movement is also addressing these concerns and gaining a growing following among younger generations of evangelicals. See, for example, Brian McClaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (Jossey-Bass 2001). Nor is Baker the first to raise concerns about corrosive effect of religiosity on deeper Christian community. M. Scott Peck's work on community building has long noted an astonishing lack of interest in, and even resistance to, efforts to deepen community among Christians across the faith spectrum. See, for example, *A World Waiting to be Born: Civility Rediscovered* (Bantam Books 1993), pp. 351-353.

Interestingly, Dr. Peck's observations about the barriers to true community in church congregations parallel in significant ways Baker's conclusions. But to my knowledge, Baker is among the few evangelical scholars who are combining missions experience with solid biblical exegesis to produce the kind of practical theology that has real potential to contribute to reform within North American evangelicalism. For that, his work could not be more timely.

Jack Clayton Swearingen
***Beyond Paradise: Technology
and the Kingdom of God***

Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007. 350 pages.

Reviewed by Jacob VanVleet
Diablo Valley College, Concord CA

Former Scientific Advisor for the Secretary of Defense and Founding Director of Engineering Programs at Washington State University, Jack Clayton Swearingen has produced a monumentally important work on the impacts of technology. By critically and cautiously analyzing the dominating role that technology plays in our everyday lives, Swearingen helps awaken us to our naive acceptance of the ever-new forms of technology and their negative material and spiritual effects. More importantly, rather than simply criticizing technology, he provides practical responses to our current technological predicaments.

In his opening chapter, Swearingen provides historical examples of how technology has transformed socio-economic sectors as well as the Western psyche, resulting in such changes as automation, assembly lines, and a profound shift in human values. Efficiency, speed, and continuous progress became the goals and deciding factors in new forms of technological development. These motivating principles, of course, failed to consider possible negative outcomes, such as depletion of natural resources, health risks, and most importantly, spiritual consequences.

Swearingen goes on to argue, in chapter 2, that we have allowed technology to hypnotize us and to control our lives and decisions. This can clearly be seen in our utter dependency on the complex network of technology that directs our lives. We no longer question technology, but we uncritically trust it – even to the demise of ourselves and the earth. Swearingen provides several powerful illustrations of our optimistic and unrealistic trust in technology, including the development of missile defense programs, the surge in personal safety and security systems, and the installation of metal detectors in schools across the country. Swearingen maintains that we ought to seek out the root causes rather than look for quick “technological fixes” to the many dangers we are trying to avoid.

In chapters 3-4, Swearingen discusses at length various communication technologies, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and the latest nanotechnologies. He argues, with Jacques Ellul (whose influence is clear throughout the

work), that technology is not morally neutral. Every new form of technology is value laden, and due to this fact, there are severe physical and spiritual impacts. These impacts are outlined in detail in chapters 5-7. Here, Swearingen carefully, and with much insight, details the environmental, aesthetic, social, and finally the spiritual impacts of technology.

In the following chapter, Swearingen surveys various attitudes and responses to technology since the Enlightenment, including utilitarianism, realism, Luddism and postmodernism. His overview provides a framework for the concluding chapters of *Beyond Paradise*, which are the most noteworthy of the work. In chapter 9, the author calls us to recognize our enslavement to personal mobility, and to work toward transportation systems that are truly sustainable. Subsequently, the author begins to develop a theology of technology in chapter 10.

Specifically, we need to respond to technology in a manner that is guided by various principles found in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. For example, Swearingen maintains that Christians should look to the example of Jesus to inform our values rather than to the technologically devoted “spirit of the age.” Swearingen states: “Jesus taught that the highest good is God and His Kingdom” (288). Because of this, we must place our trust and hope in God and His kingdom, rather than in technological gadgets, devices and infrastructures. Swearingen then presents eight guiding principles for technological development guided by Scripture. Technology should: bring praise to the Creator; stimulate humanity's thirst for God's kingdom; serve and promote justice; serve God, fellow humans and nature; enhance life without dominating it; respect, preserve, care for and utilize nature while meeting human needs; be culturally appropriate and protect cultural traditions that are not unbiblical; and be trustworthy (reliable and repairable) and transparent (full disclosure of impacts) (294). These guiding principles, Swearingen maintains, will help Christians deal effectively with their relationships to technology, whether they are developing new technologies or simply living with them.

In the work's final chapter, titled “What Then Should We Be Doing?”, a practical and concrete methodology for “steering technology” is proposed. The concluding suggestions are quite persuasive and encouraging.

In the prologue of *Beyond Paradise: Technology and the Kingdom of God*, Jack Clayton Swearingen states that the book was written for the Church and its leaders. However, this work clearly goes well beyond that audience. It is a clearly written, passionately sustained argument for the limiting and redirecting of technology, using Scripture as a guide. Like Jacques Ellul, Swearingen's work will appeal to anyone who has thought critically and analytically about technology and its impacts.

News & Notes

✍ VERNARD ELLER (1927-2007)

Vernard Ellul died on June 18, 2007, after suffering from Alzheimer's disease in recent years. Vernard was a lifelong member of the Church of the Brethren, an Anabaptist, peace church tradition. He earned his B.A. at LaVerne College, a Brethren school (later "university") where he was professor of philosophy and religion for 34 years until his retirement. He also earned the M.Div at Bethany Seminary (IL), M.A. at Northwestern University, and the Th.D. at Pacific School of Religion.

Eller's dissertation evolved into his book *Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship: A New Perspective* (Princeton, 1968). From his undergraduate studies onward, SK had a profound influence on Eller's thought (he even named one of his sons "Enten"; *enten/eller* is Danish for *Either/Or*, one of SK's most important works).

Eller was drawn to Jacques Ellul's writings beginning in the late Sixties, not least because of Ellul's own deep appreciation of Kierkegaard. Eller wrote more than twenty articles on, and reviews of, Ellul's work in the *Ellul Forum*, *Christian Century*, *Katallagete*, and other publications. Perhaps his most explicitly Ellulian book (he wrote more than twenty) was *Christian Anarchy: Jesus' Primacy over the Powers* (Eerdmans, 1987) which he dedicated as follows: "In appreciation of Jacques Ellul who has led me not only into Christian Anarchy but into much more of God's truth as well. Merci mon ami!"

As a writer Eller sometimes came across in a more "prophetic" critical mode that "stirred the pot" (not unlike SK and JE) but in person he was always a great friend, classroom teacher, pastor, and community builder. He had a terrific wit and sense of humor. We will miss him and be grateful for his legacy. Our condolences to Phyllis Eller, his wife of 52 years.

✍ ELLUL CONFERENCE NEWS

As many of you know, the international conference on Ellul's thought planned for September of this year in Ottawa had to be cancelled. The major funding source did not come through, despite the encouragement we initially received.

On a smaller scale, 18 people gathered in Berkeley on August 20 to hear Daniel Cérézuelle describe (en français) the growth of the environmental movement in

southwestern France, and the roles played by Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau.

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org

The IJES web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (5) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The French AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org is also a superb resource.

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Cahiers Jacques Ellul

Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne

An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenet, published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France. Send orders to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

Volume 1: "L'Années personnalistes" (15 euros)

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Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works

by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. \$87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the

most valuable. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.

Librairie Mollat---new books in French

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux (www.mollat.com) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

Alibris---used books in English

The Alibris web site (www.alibris.com) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

Used books in French: two web resources

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Ellul on Video

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site www.meromedia.com. Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired

