

# MAN IN THE AGE OF TECHNICS

That which is truly disconcerting is not that the world trans- 127  
forms itself into a total dominion of technique.

Far more disconcerting is that man is not at all prepared for  
this radical alteration of the world.

Far more disconcerting is that we are still not capable of  
reaching, by means of a pondered thought, a proper com-  
parison with that which is truly emerging in our era.

M. Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* (1959), Italian translation  
*L'abbandono*, Il Melnagolo, Genoa, 1983, p.36.

## 1. Man and Technique

We are all convinced that we live in the technical age of which we enjoy its benefits in terms of goods and spaces of freedom. We are freer than primitive men because we have more playgrounds to choose from. Any regret, any disaffection in our times seems pathetic. But the habit with which we utilise instruments and services which reduce space, speed up time, soothe pain, make vain the standards on which all morals have been carved, we risk not asking ourselves if our way of being men is not too antiquated for living in the technical age which not we, but the abstraction of our mind has created, obliging us, with an obligation stronger than the one sanctioned by all of the morals which have been written in history, to enter and take part.

---

In this rapid and relentless pursuit we still carry in ourselves the traits of pre-technological man who acted in view of purposes inscribed on a horizon of meaning, with a baggage of his own ideas and a wealth of feelings in which he recognized himself. The technical age abolished this "humanistic" scenario, and the questions of meaning which arise remain outstanding, not because technique is not yet sufficiently perfected, but because finding answers to similar questions is not a part of his plans.

In fact technique does not tend toward a purpose, does not promote a meaning, does not open scenarios of salvation, does not redeem, does not reveal the truth. Technique *works*, and since its functioning becomes planetary, it is necessary to look again at the concepts of the individual, of identity, freedom, salvation, truth, meaning and purpose, but also those of nature, ethics, politics, religion and history, of which the pre-technological age nourished itself and that now, in the technical age, will have to be reconsidered, cast off or re-established at their roots.

128

## 2. Technique is our world

These are a few of the themes which are born from thinking of the shape that man is taking on in the technical age. The reflections carried out here are only a beginning. There is still much to think about. But first of all it remains to be considered whether the categories which we have inherited from the pre-technological age and which we still employ to describe man are still suitable for this absolutely new event in which humanity, as we have historically known him, learns from his going beyond.

In order to orient ourselves we must above all cut out the false innocence, with the fable of *neutral* technique which offers only the *means*, which then man decides to use either for good or for evil. Technique is not neutral, because it creates a world with specific characteristics which we cannot avoid inhabiting and, inhabiting it, acquire habits which relentlessly transform us. We are not, in fact, immaculate and extraneous beings, people who sometimes use technique and sometimes leave it aside. Due to the fact that we live in a world in which every detail is organized technically, technique is no longer something which we choose, but it is our environment, where ends and means, purposes and ideations, conduct, actions and passions, even dreams and desires are articulated technically and need technique to be expressed.

For this reason we irremediably and without a choice dwell in technique. As advanced westerners this is our destiny and those who, although living it, still

think that they can trace an essence of man beyond technical conditioning, as we sometimes hear, are simply unaware those who live the mythology of man free for all choices, that he does not exist if not in the delirium of omnipotence of those who continue to see man beyond the real and concrete conditions of his existence.

### 3. Technique is the essence of man

With the term “technique” we intend both the *universe of mind* (the technologies), which together make up the technical apparatus, and *rationality*, which presides over use in terms of functionality and efficiency. With these characteristics technique was born not as an expression of the human “spirit”, but as a “remedy” for his biological insufficiency.

In fact, as opposed to the animal which lives in the world established by his instinct, man, due to his lack of instinctual endowment, can only live thanks to his actions, and he immediately lands in those technical procedures which cut out, in the enigma of the world, a world for man. The anticipation, the ideation, the planning, the freedom of movement and of action, in a word, history as a succession of self-creations, have in their biological lack their roots and their expression in technical workings.

129

In this sense it is possible to say that *technique is the essence of man*, not only because, due to his insufficient instinctual endowments, man, without technique, would not have survived, but also because, exploiting that plasticity of adaptation which he derives from the vagueness and non-rigidity of his instincts, was able, by means of the technical procedures of selection and stabilization, to “culturally” reach that selectivity and stability which the animal “naturally” possesses. This thesis, which A. Gehlen has extensively documented in our times, was anticipated by Plato, Thomas of Aquinas, Kant, Herder, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, by the great exponents of western thought, independent of the direction of their philosophical orientation.

### 4. Technique and the radical refounding of psychology

If these premises are accepted, psychology must make some radical calculations with itself and begin to think of the different figures, the object of its knowledge, beginning with technique, which is that original pact between man and the world which has remained “unthought of” both by *scientific-naturalistic* psychology, which attempts to “explain” man beginning with experiments on animals, and by *phenomenological-hermeneutic* psychology which, in all its

---

variations: psychodynamic, behavioral, cognitivist, systemic and sociological, attempts to “comprehend” man beginning with the typical conditionings of western culture which speak of “body”, “soul” or “conscience”.

Without an adequate reflection on technique, thought of as the essence of man, scientific-naturalistic psychology can't help but arrive at ethology, while phenomenological-hermeneutic psychology can't help but stop at the naivety of subjectivism, since from the former it escapes that man is abysmally distant from the animal because he is devoid of that feature typical of the animal which is instinct, and to the latter that the “soul” or “conscience” are the residual of his action and of his technical extension, therefore that which remains after action has already permitted man to be of the world and, in it, to carve out *his* world.

At this point it is necessary to establish a *psychology of action* in order to avoid both a *simplistic* look at man, as occurs in scientific-naturalistic psychology which thinks of man as starting from the animal, and a *reactive* look at man, as occurs in phenomenological-hermeneutic psychology which does not approach man beginning from his immediate experience of reality through action, but from his second experience, and therefore *re-active*, which is the reflection on his action.

It will then be discovered that, starting from his lack of instinct compensated by the plasticity of action, it will be possible to explain his capacity for movement, perception, memory, imagination, conscience, language, thought, in their genesis and in their development, following an absolutely linear path which, in order to justify its path, does not need to resort to that *body and soul dualism* which all psychology declares to want to overcome without knowing how.

In fact, there is no science which, born from a false presupposition, could remove it without denying itself. And this is precisely the case of psychology which, even if it doesn't know it, is the most “platonic” of sciences, because it has not yet emancipated itself from that anthropological dualism which, inaugurated by Plato and made more rigorous by Cartesius, prevents psychology from reaching its object, if first this science does not detach itself from the dualistic presupposition from which it was born. It has to do with a detachment which can take place only through a radical refounding of psychology, which must take as its starting point not the “psychological subject” and much less the “psychic object”, but *action*.

## 5. The “instrumental” origin of technique

If we share the thesis that technique is the essence of man, then the first criteria of legibility to be modified in the technical age is the traditional one

which foresees man as *subject* and technique as an *instrument* at his disposition. This could have been true for the ancient world, where technique was practiced within the city walls, which was an *enclave* inside nature, whose undisputed law entirely ruled the life of man. For this reason, Prometheus, the inventor of technique, could say: "Technique is far weaker than necessity."

But today it is the city, which has extended itself to the ends of the earth and nature has been reduced to its *enclave*, fenced in within the walls of the city. Then technique, from an *instrument* in the hands of man in order to dominate nature, becomes the *environment* of man, that which surrounds him and constitutes him according to the rules of that rationality which, measuring itself against the criteria of functionality and efficiency, doesn't hesitate to subordinate the demands of man to the demands of the technical apparatus.

Technique, in fact, is totally inscribed in the constellation of *dominion*, from which it was born and inside which was able to develop itself only through rigorous *control* procedures which, in order to be truly such, cannot avoid being *planetary*. This rapid sequence was already clearly glimpsed and announced by modern science at its first dawn when, without delay and with illustrious foresight, F. Bacon removed every misunderstanding and proclaimed: "*scientia est potentia*".

131

## 6. The transformation of technique from "mean" into "end"

But in the era of Bacon the technical means were still insufficient and man could still claim his subjectiveness and his dominion over technical instrumentation. Instead today the technical "means" has grown so large in terms of power and extension as to determine the *overturning of quantity into quality* which Hegel describes in his "*Logic*" and which, applied to our topic, forms the difference between ancient technique and the present state of technique.

In fact, as long as the technical instrumentation available was barely sufficient to reach those ends by which the satisfaction of human needs was expressed, technique was a simple *mean* whose meaning was entirely absorbed by the *end*, but when technique *increases quantitatively* to the point that it makes itself available for the achievement of any end, then it *qualitatively changes* the scenario, because it is no longer the end to condition the representation, the research, the acquisition of technical means, but it will be the increased availability of technical means to show all the possibilities of any end which through them can be reached. Thus *technique from means becomes an end*, not because technique proposes something to itself, but because all the purposes and ends that men propose themselves cannot be reached if not through technical mediation.

---

Marx had already described this transformation of means into ends regarding money. If as a *means* it serves to produce goods and satisfy needs, when goods and needs are mediated entirely by money, then the attainment of money becomes the *end*, where even the production of goods and the satisfaction of needs are sacrificed in order to reach it, if necessary. From another perspective and with the background of another scenario, E. Severino observes that if the technical mean is the condition necessary for achieving any end that cannot be reached leaving out the technical mean, *the attainment of the mean becomes the true end*, which subordinates everything to itself. This entails the collapse of numerous categorical systems with which man had until now defined himself and his place in the world.

## 7. Technique and the revision of historical scenarios

132 If technique becomes that last horizon starting from which all fields of experience are revealed, if it is no longer the experience which, reiterated, represents the beginning of technical procedure, but it is technique which places itself as a condition which decides the way to have experiences, then we are witnessing that overturning where the subject of history is no longer *man*, but *technique* which, having emancipated itself from the condition of mere “instrument”, disposes of nature as its background and of man as its official. This entails a radical revision of the traditional ways of intending reason, truth, ideology, politics, ethics, nature, religion and history itself.

REASON is no longer the immutable order of the cosmos in which first mythology, then philosophy and in the end science were reflected creating their respective cosmo-logies, but it becomes the *instrumental procedure* which guarantees the most economical calculation between the means available and the objectives which one intends to reach.

TRUTH no longer conforms to the order of the cosmos or of God because, if more horizon is not given which is capable of guaranteeing the eternal picture of the immutable order, if the order of the world no longer dwells in its being, but depends on “being technical”, *efficiency* explicitly becomes the one and only criteria of truth.

IDEOLOGIES, whose force rested on the immutability of their doctrinal body, in the technical age do not hold up to the hard simplification of all ideas to simple *working hypotheses*. In fact technique, unlike ideology, which dies at the moment in which its theoretical nucleus is no longer “representative of the world” and much less “explains” it, thinks of its own hypotheses as surmountable “on principle”, and therefore it is not extinguished when one of its

theoretical nuclei turns out to be ineffective because, not having tied its truth to that nucleus, can change and correct itself without contradicting itself. Its errors don't cause it to collapse, but immediately convert themselves into opportunities for self-correction.

POLITICS which Plato had defined as "technique pre-eminent" because it assigned to all techniques their respective finalities, today can decide only subordinate to the financial apparatus, in turn subordinate to the assets guaranteed by the technical apparatus. In this way politics finds itself in that situation of *passive adaptation*, conditioned as it is by technical development, which it cannot control and much less direct, but only guarantee. Reducing itself ever more to pure technical administration, politics maintains an active role and therefore only decisional there where technique is not yet leader, or where in its supremacy it still presents gaps or insufficiencies with respect to the restraint of its instrumental rationality.

ETHICS, as a form of *acting* in view of ends, celebrates its impotence in the world of technique regulated by *doing* as a pure production of results, where the effects are added up in such a way that the final results can no longer be lead back to the intentions of the initial agents. This means that it is no longer ethics to choose the ends and to charge technique to find the means, but it is technique which, assuming as ends the results of its procedures, conditions ethics obliging it to take a position on a reality, no longer natural but artificial, which technique does not cease to build and to make possible, whatever the position assumed by ethics. In fact, once "acting" is subordinated to "doing", how can one prevent he who can do from not doing that which he can? Not with the *moral of intention* inaugurated by Christianity and re-proposed in terms of "pure reason" by Kant, because this moral of intention, basing itself on the subjective principle of self-determination and not on the one of objective responsibility, does not take into consideration the objective consequences of actions and, precisely because it limits itself to safeguard the "good intention", cannot be up to the task of being technical. But not even the *ethics of responsibility* is up to the task which Max Weber introduced and H. Jonas re-proposed because, if the ethics of responsibility limits itself to demanding, as Weber writes, that "one can respond to the foreseeable consequences of one's own actions", then it is technique itself to reveal the scenario of unforeseeable-ness, attributable, not like that ancient one to a defect of knowledge, but to an excess of our power to *do*, enormously greater than our power to *foresee*.

NATURE. The relationship man-nature was regulated for us westerners by two visions of the world: the Greek one, which conceives of nature as the *abode*



of men and of gods, and the Judaeo-Christian one, later taken up by modern science, which conceives of it as a field of *dominion* of man. Although they are different, these two concepts come together in excluding that nature form part of the sphere of competence of ethics, whose ambit has until now been limited to the regulating of relationships among men, with no extension to the beings of nature. But today that nature shows all of its vulnerability as a consequence of technique, a scenario opens up before which traditional ethics is mute, because it does not have the instruments to welcome nature in the ambit of human responsibility.

RELIGION has as its presupposition that dimension of time where in the end (*éschaton*) there is realized that which was announced at the beginning. Only in this “eschatological” dimension, which inscribes time in a design, all that happens in time acquires its meaning. But technique, substituting the *eschatological* dimension of time with the *projected* one, contained, as S. Natoli writes, between the recent past in which the means available are found and the immediate future in which these means find their use, subtract from religion, as a result of this contraction of time, the possibility of reading a design in time, a meaning, a final end to which to be able to refer in order to pronounce words of salvation and truth.

134

HISTORY establishes itself in the act of its narration, which orders the happening of events in a plot of *meaning*. The finding of a meaning translates *time* into *history*, in the same way that its loss dissolves history into the insignificant flow of time. The a-final character of technique, which does not move in view of *ends* but only of *results* which spring forth from its procedures, abolishes any horizon of meaning, thus determining the end of history as time provided with meaning. With respect to historical memory, the memory of technique, being only *procedural*, translates the past into the insignificance of the “surpassed” and grants to the future the simple meaning of “perfecting” procedures. Man, at this point, in his total dependence on the technical apparatus, becomes *a-historical*, because he has no other memory if not the one mediated by technique, which consists in the rapid cancellation of the present and past for a future thought of only in view of the strengthening of his own memory.

## 8. Technique and the suppression of all ends in the universe of means

Among the categories which we usually employ to orient us in the world, the only one which places us up to the task of the scenario revealed by tech-



nique is the category of *absolutes*. “Absolute” means freed from every bond (*solutus* ab), therefore from every horizon of ends, from every production of meaning, from every limit and conditioning. This prerogative, which man first attributed to nature and then to God, now finds himself to refer it not to himself, as the Promethean promise and the biblical promise foretold when they alluded to the progressive dominion of man over nature, but to the *world of his machines*, with respect to whose power, in addition inscribed in the automatism of their strengthening, man, as G. Anders writes, is decidedly inferior and unaware of his inferiority.

As a consequence of this lack of awareness, he who operates the technical apparatus or he who is simply included, without being able to distinguish anymore if he is active or if he in turn is operated, doesn’t ask himself anymore if the purpose for which the technical apparatus is placed in operation is justifiable or if it simply has a meaning, because this would mean to doubt technique, without which no meaning or no purpose would be attainable, and then “responsibility” is entrusted to the technical “response”, where the imperative is understood that *one “must” do everything that one “can” do*.

135

But when the positive is totally inscribed in the exercise of technical power and the *negative* is circumscribed to technical error, to the technically repairable breakdown, technique gains that level of self-reference which, subtracting it from all conditioning, poses it as an absolute. An absolute which presents itself as a *universe of means*, which, since it doesn’t have true *means* in view but only *effects*, translates the presumed ends in further means for the infinite increase of its functionality and efficiency. In this “evil infinity” as Hegel would call it, something has value only if it is “good for something else”, therefore precisely the final objectives, the purposes, which in the pre-technological age regulated the actions of men and conferred “meaning” to them, in the technical age seem absolutely “nonsensical”.

In this regard one must not be deceived by the need for meaning, by the hectic search, by the unceasing demand to which the religions try to give an answer with their promotions of faith, and therapeutic practices with their promotions of health, because all of this reveals only that the figure of “meaning” was not saved from the universe of means. If in fact, the finding of meaning favors existence, if, as Nietzsche writes, it represents a biological advantage for the human condition, there where meaning is not *found* it must be *devised*, and then the “meaning” is justified because, as a *means for living*, it is capable of rising in turn to the rank of “means”.

---

## 9. From technological alienation to technological identification

What is the destiny of man in a universe of means that has nothing else in sight if not the perfecting and strengthening of its own instrumentation? There where the world of life is entirely generated and made possible by the technical apparatus, man becomes an *official* of said apparatus and his identity becomes entirely reduced to his functionality, therefore it is possible to say that in the technical age man is *present-to-himself* only inasmuch as he is functional to that *other-than-himself* which is technique.

Technique, in fact, is not man. Born as a condition of the human existence and therefore as an expression of his essence, today, for the dimensions reached and for the autonomy gained, technique expresses abstraction and the combination of human ideations and actions to a level of artificiality such that no man or human group, although specialized, and perhaps precisely due to his specialization, is able to control it in its entirety. In a similar context, to be reduced to an official of technique then means for man to be “elsewhere” with respect to the abode that he has historically known, it means being *far from himself*.

Marx called this condition “alienation”, and coherent with the conditions of his time, he circumscribed alienation to the capitalistic manner of production. But both capitalism (the cause of alienation) and communism (which Marx planned as a remedy for alienation) are figures still inscribed in *humanism*, or rather still in that horizon of meaning, typical of the pre-technological age, where man is foreseen as subject and technique as instrument. But, in the technical age, which begins when the universe of means has no finality in view, (not even profit), the relationship is overturned, in the sense that man is no longer a *subject* which capitalistic production alienates and makes a thing, but is a *product* of the technological alienation which establishes itself as subject and man as its predicate.

It follows that the theoretical instrumentation made available by Marx, who was even among the first to foresee the scenarios of the technical age which he called the “civilization of machines”, is no longer entirely suitable for reading the time of technique, not because capitalism historically won over communism, but because Marx still moves in a *humanistic horizon*, with reference to the *pre-technological man*, where, as Hegel’s lesson states, the servant has in his lord his antagonist, and the lord in his servant, while, in the technical age, there are no longer either servants or lords, but only the requirements of that rigid rationality to which both servants and lords must be subordinated.

At this point even the Marxist concept of “alienation” appears insufficient, because it is possible to speak of alienation only when, in a humanistic scenario, there is an anthropology which wants to salvage itself from its extraneousness in production, in a context characterized by the conflict between two wills, of two subjects who still consider themselves owners of their actions, not when there is a single subject, the technical apparatus, with respect to which the single subjects are simply its predicates.

Existing exclusively as predicate to the technical apparatus which places itself as absolute, man is no longer able to perceive of himself as “alienated”, because alienation foresees, at least in prospective, an alternative scenario which absolute technique does not concede, and therefore, as R. Madera writes in another context, man translates his *alienation* to the apparatus to *identification* with the apparatus. As a result of this identification, the individual subject does not find in himself another identity outside of the one conferred on him by the apparatus, and therefore an identification of individuals takes place with the function assigned by the apparatus, and when he performs the identification of the individuals with the function assigned by the apparatus this functionality, having become autonomous, reabsorbs within itself every residual meaning of identity.

137

## 10. Technique and the revision of the humanistic categories

Since he is an official of the technical apparatus, man is no longer legible according to the categorized systems elaborated and ripened in the pre-technological age. A radical revision of the humanistic categories is necessary, beginning with the notions of the individual, of identity, freedom, communication, until the concept of soul, whose psychic backwardness still does not permit the man of today an adequate comprehension of the technical age.

THE INDIVIDUAL. This typically western notion, which was born in the platonic notion of “soul”, seen again in Christianity, has in the technical age its foreseeable act of death. Certainly that indivisible (from Latin: *in-dividuum*) entity does not die which at a natural level is a part of the species, and at a cultural level is a part of a society of which it repeats, for its characteristics, the general type, but that subject dies which, beginning from the *awareness* of his own individuality, thinks himself autonomous, independent, free until the boundaries of freedom of the other, and because of this recognition, equal to the others. In other words, the empirical individual, the social atom, does not die, but the *system of values* which, starting with this singularity, decided our history.

---

IDENTITY. This notion which, like that of the individual, was born within western anthropology because, before the West and alongside the West, the individual does not recognize his identity but only his *belonging* to the group with which he identifies, depends, as Hegel reminds us, on *recognition*. Only that, while in the pre-technological age it was possible to recognize the identity of an individual by his actions, because these were read as manifestations of his soul, in turn understood as a decisional subject, today the actions of the individual are no longer legible as expressions of his identity, but as possibilities calculated by the technical apparatus, which not only foresees (predicts) them, but even describes them in the form of their execution. Carrying them out, the subject does not reveal his identity, but that of the apparatus, inside of which personal identity is reduced to pure and simple *functionality*. (Cfr. Chapter 49: "Functionality as a Form of Identity").

138

FREEDOM. If with this word we intend the exercising of free choice beginning with the existing conditions, we must say that the technologically advanced society offers a space of freedom decidedly superior to that conceded in slightly differentiated societies, where the personal and not objective quality of bonds, let alone social homogeneity, reduce the margin of freedom to that basic one of obedience or disobedience. Technique, having as its imperative the promotion of all that can be promoted, creates an open system which continually generates an ever wider spread of options, which become little by little practicable on the basis of the levels of competence which the single individuals are able to acquire. But *freedom as competence*, having as expressive space that *impersonal* one of professional relationships, creates that radical schism between "public" and "private" which, even if by many is acclaimed as a mainstay of freedom, involves that schizophrenic conduction of the individual life (functional schizophrenia), which manifests every time that the function, which is up to the individual as an impersonal member of the technical organization, collides with that which the individual aspires to be as a global subject. There is determined, in fact, for the first time in history the possibility for the individual to enter into relationship with the other individuals, and therefore to "make society", without this involving any personal bond. And then, deprived of a common experience of action, which is ever more the exclusive prerogative of technique, individuals react to the sense of impotence they experience withdrawing within themselves and with the impossibility of recognizing themselves communally, end up considering society itself in purely instrumental terms.

MASS CULTURE. The displacement between "public" and "private", between "social" and "individual" operated by technical rationality, modifies even the

traditional concept of “mass”, introducing that variant which is its *atomisation* and *displacement* in individual singularities which, fashioned as mass products, mass consumption, mass information, render obsolete the concept of *mass as the concentration of many*, and current the concept of *massification as a quality of millions of individuals*, each of which produces, consumes, receives the same things as everyone, but as a soloist. In this way to each one is delivered his own massification, but with the illusion of privacy and the apparent recognition of his own individuality, in such a way that no one is able to perceive an “outsider” with respect to an “insider”, because that which each one encounters in public is exactly that which he was provided in private. From here those processes of *de-individualization* and *de-privatisation* were born which are at the base of mass conduct typical of approved and conformist societies.

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION. The means of communication which technique has strengthened contribute exponentially to social approval modifying our *way of having experiences*: no longer in contact with the world, but with the indirect representation of the world which makes what is far, near, who is absent, present, available he who would otherwise be unavailable. Exonerating us from direct experience and placing us in relationship not with the events, but with their staging, the means of communication have no need to falsify or obscure reality, because they codify precisely that which they inform, and the code effect becomes not only an interpretive criteria of reality, but also a leading model of our judgements, which in turn generate behavior in the real world which conforms to what was learned from the leading model. In this *tautological communication* where he who listens hears the same things that he himself could calmly say, and he who speaks says the same things that he could listen to from anyone, in this *collective monologue* the experience of communication collapses, because the specific differences among the personal experiences of the world which are at the basis of every communicative need are abolished. In fact, with their pursuit, the thousand voices and the thousand images, which fill the air progressively, abolish the differences, which still exist among men, and perfecting their approval, make it superfluous if not impossible to speak “in the first person”. At this point the means of communication no longer appear as simple “means” at the disposition of man because, if they intervene on the way of having an experience, they modify man independently of the use that they make of him and of the purposes that he proposes to himself when he employs them.

THE PSYCHE. When in the pre-technological era the world was not available in its totality, every soul constructed itself as a resonance of the world with

which it was having experiences. For every man this resonance was his *interior life*. Today, exonerated from the personal experience of the world, the soul of each one becomes *coextensive with the world*. In this way he is suppressed: the difference between *interior life and exterior life*, because the content of the psychic life of each one ends up with coinciding with the common representation of the world, or at least with that which the means of communication assign to it as the “world”; the difference between *depth and surface* because, with the consent of depth psychology, the depth finishes with being nothing else than the individual reflection of the rules of the game common to all spread out on the surface; the difference between *activity and passivity* because, if the tendency of the technological society is that of functioning at a regime of maximum rationality, therefore Leibnizly as a pre-established harmonic system, no “activity” is procured which is not for the system itself “adaptation” to the technical procedures which, alone, make it possible. In this way the soul is progressively *de-psychologized* and made incapable of comprehending what it really means to live in the technical age, where that which is asked is a strengthening of the intellectual faculties over the emotive ones, to be able to be up the task of *objectivized culture in things* which technique demands to the detriment of and at the expense of that *subjective culture of individuals*.

140

## 11. The Technical age and the Inadequateness of Human Comprehension

The de-psychologization of the soul maintains discussions on the technical age at that inessential level which is unconditioned exaltation or a-critical demonization. This paper would like to promote that further step which is the opening of the *horizon of comprehension*, persuaded as we are that today horizon of comprehension is no longer *nature* in its stability and inviolability, and not even the *history* that we have lived and narrated as progressive dominion of man over nature, but *technique*, which reveals an interpretive space which it has definitively left behind, the horizons of both nature and history.

This is the epochal passage in which we find ourselves, epochal given by the fact that the history that we have lived knew technique as that manipulative doing which, not being capable of engraving on the great cycles of nature and of the species, was circumscribed to a horizon which remained stable and inviolable. Today even this horizon enters into the possibilities of technical manipulation, whose power of experimentation is limitless because, unlike what was happening at the dawn of the modern era, where scientific experimenta-



tion took place in the “laboratory”, therefore in an *artificial* world distinct from the *natural* one, today the laboratory has become coextensive with the world, and it is difficult to continue to call “experimentation” that which irreversibly modifies our geographical reality and therefore history.

When the conditions laid down “by hypothesis” leave irreversible effects, it is no longer possible to continue to inscribe technique in the *hypothetical-conjectural judgement* which has as its characteristics problematical ness, revision ability, provisional ness, perfectibility, falsifiable ness, but it is necessary to inscribe it in the *historical-epochal judgement*, which among the judgements, is the most severe, because that which happens once has happened forever irrevocably.

At this point the question: if man does not exist apart from what he does, what does man become in the horizon of unlimited experimentation and infinite manipulation revealed by technique? In order to respond it is necessary to overcome the naive persuasion according to which human nature is something stable, which remains uncontaminated and intact whatever man does. If in fact man, as the expression of Nietzsche states, is that “animal not yet stabilized” which since his origins cannot live if not operating technically, his nature is modified on the basis of the modalities of this “doing”, which therefore becomes the horizon of his self-comprehension. Not therefore man who can use technique as something *neutral* with respect to his nature, but man whose nature is modified on the basis of the methods with which he defines himself technically. Today technique places man before a world which presents itself as *unlimited manipulability*, and therefore human nature cannot be thought of as the same which related to a world, which is the world which history has until now described to us at its limits, inviolable and fundamentally unmodifiable.

But yet even today humanity is not up to the task of the technical event produced by itself and, perhaps for the first time in history, its sensation, its perception, its imagination, its feelings reveal themselves inadequate with respect to what is happening. In fact, the capacity for *production* which is unlimited has exceeded the capacity for *imagination* which is limited and such as to not allow us to comprehend any more, and at the most to consider “ours” the effects that irreversible technical development is able to produce.

The more complicated the technical apparatus becomes, the more dense the intertwining of the sotto-apparatus becomes, the more its effects are magnified, the more our capacity of *perception* regarding the processes, the results, the outcomes, is reduced, to say nothing of the purposes of which we are part and condition. And since in front of this it is not possible either to perceive or



to imagine, our *feeling* becomes incapable of reacting. To the “active nihilism” of technique inscribed in its “doing without a purpose” it is placed alongside “passive nihilism”, denounced by Nietzsche, which leaves us “cold”, because our feeling of reaction stops at the threshold of a certain grandeur. And thus as “emotional illiterates” we witness the irrationality which springs forth from the perfect rationality (instrumental) of the technical organization which grows on itself outside of any horizon of meaning.

The Nazi experiment, not for its cruelty, but precisely for its *irrationality*, which springs forth from the perfect rationality of an organization, for which “exterminate” had the same simple meaning as “work”, it can be taken as that event which marks the *act of birth of the technical age*. Then it wasn’t a question of, as it could seem today, of an erratic or a-typical event for our era and for our way of feeling, but of a *paradigmatic event*, still able today to point out that we will not be capable of bringing ourselves to be up to the task of generalized technical operating on a global scale and without gaps, each of us will remain entrapped in that individual irresponsibility which will allow the totalitarianism of technique to proceed undisturbed, without even the need anymore to rely on waning ideologies.

Differently, in fact, from the nihilism described by philosophy which interrogates itself on the meaning of being and not being, the nihilism of technique does not only call into play the *meaning* of being and therefore of man, but also the *being itself* of man and of the world in its totality. And if the nihilism described by philosophy was anticipator, prophetic, but *impotent*, because it wasn’t able to determine the nihilism which it foreshadowed, the nihilism which underlies the a-final character of technique has not only *nothingness* in its power, but separate from the quality of the technical imperatives and the morality of the instruments which are derived from it, it is within the possibility to exercise this power. The fact that philosophy, and with it literature and art, still hold back on the problem of the meaning of being and therefore of man, without protruding into the problem of the *possibility which man and the world have of continuing to be*, contributes to that “passive nihilism” which Nietzsche denounced as the nihilism of resignation.

Born under the sign of *anticipation*, of which Prometheus, “he who thinks in advance”, is the symbol, technique ends in this way with subtracting from man any anticipatory possibility, and with it that responsibility and mastery which derives from the capacity to foresee. In this incapacity, by now having become *psychic inadequacy*, for man the greatest danger is hidden, as in the enlarging of his capacity of comprehension, his feeble hope.

This *psychic amplification*, to whose advancement this lecture entrusts its meaning, if on one hand is not sufficient to dominate technique, it at least avoids that technique happens to man unknowing and, from essential *condition* to the human existence, becomes the cause of the *insignificance* of his very existence.