Sham Universe: Field Notes on the Disappearance of Reality in a World of Hallucinations

by Doug Hill

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Let me begin by stating clearly where I'm coming from regarding Jacques Ellul: I'm among those who consider him a genius. I suppose that's a safer statement to make here than it might be in some other venues.

I'd like to recall today some of the things Ellul said more than fifty years ago about technology and propaganda in order to assess how his observations on those subjects might apply today. I think Ellul would be saddened by the degree to which technology and propaganda have come to dominate politics and culture in these early decades of the 21st century. I don't think he would be surprised.

My observations will concern what's happening in the United States because that's the only locality I feel qualified to assess. Obviously much of what is happening in the States is happening at the same time and in roughly the same fashion in other countries.

Allow me to set the table, so to speak, with two comments of Ellul's, one from *The Technological Society*, the other from *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*.

In *The Technological Society* he wrote that the distortion of news represents the first step toward "a sham universe," a step that leads progressively and inevitably to "the disappearance of reality in a world of hallucinations." In *Propaganda* he wrote that "Nothing is worse in times of danger than to live in a dream world."

I think it's clear that we've moved significantly closer to the realization of a "sham universe" today than we were when Ellul published *The Technological Society* in 1954. I think it's also clear that it's become very easy today to live in a dream world, and that many people do. Both developments have been brought to you courtesy of the inexorable expansion of technology.

This is decidedly *not* the view shared by many technological enthusiasts. They believe that the access we have today to virtually unlimited amounts of information has made it easier than it ever has been for the average citizen to ascertain the truth while at the same time making it more difficult for politicians and

others in positions of power to obscure it.

In some circumstances it's true that the Internet and other media can expose us to enlightening, empowering information. However, it's also true that the Internet and other media can expose us to vast amounts of *mis*information, thereby encouraging us to base our opinions and behaviors on distorted perceptions of reality. This has profound implications for the future of governance and society.

Ellul stressed repeatedly that the pejorative connotation attached to the word "propaganda" obscures how we really feel about it. We think we don't like propaganda --- that we don't want to be subjected to it. To the contrary, Ellul said, propaganda has achieved the power it has precisely because we so desperately need it.

Why do we need it? Simply put, because propaganda helps us survive. Another thing Ellul stressed repeatedly is that human beings are not cut out for the pressures imposed by life in the technological society. Technique helpfully offers us various means of coping with those stressful conditions. It does so because, at this point at least, human beings are still needed to help keep the gears of the machines turning, and we can't do that if we crack under the strain. Propaganda is a prop deployed to keep us at our stations.

"There is not just a wicked propagandist at work who sets up means to ensnare the innocent citizen," Ellul wrote. "Rather, there is a citizen who craves propaganda from the bottom of his being and a propagandist who responds to this craving."

What exactly does propaganda offer the harried citizen of the technological society? Many things.

Most practically, it provides a sorting tool. Propaganda tells us what's worth paying attention to. This is a key reason why propaganda has become steadily more important in the era of the Internet. Information is power, we're told, but for most of us wading through the volume of information available today is an overwhelming challenge, one that at some point we simply decline to take on.

"It is a fact," Ellul wrote in 1962, "that excessive data do not enlighten the reader or the listener; they drown him. He cannot remember them all, or coordinate them, or understand them; if he does not want to risk losing his mind, he will merely draw a general picture from them. And the more facts supplied, the more simplistic the image."

Propaganda takes advantage of this situation by giving us pre-digested packages of pre-selected information. It may not be comprehensive or balanced information, but it's all we have time for. What matters is that it's manageable. It's a life raft to cling to in an information tsunami.

As pressing as our need for information manageability might be, there's a far deeper need that propaganda satisfies: the need of individuals living in the technological society for reassurance of their value as human beings.

The technological society is a society of depersonalization, an ongoing assault on individual identity. Our daily experience is corrosive. In a thousand ways we're made to feel anxious, lonely, ignored. We become, Ellul said, "diminished."

Propaganda offers us an antidote to our diminishment. It tells us that we know things and that what we

know matters. That we matter. As Ellul put it, propaganda "justifies" us. Bolstered by propaganda, he said, the individual can look down from the heights upon daily trifles, secure in the knowledge that his opinion, once ignored or actively scorned, has become "important and decisive."

The implications of this for democracy are profound. If what we seek from the news is existential reassurance rather than accurate information on which to base our opinions and decisions, we have a problem.

Obviously human beings have always been prone to confirmation bias—as Paul Simon put it, a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest. But even though we have access in contemporary culture to a far more diverse range of influences and experiences than ever before, technology allows us to shut much of that diversity out, immersing ourselves in an all-encompassing confirmatory environment much as we immerse ourselves in a warm bath. It also gives us the motivation to immerse ourselves as often and as thoroughly as possible.

At the same time propaganda offers opportunities to find others who feel the same way we do, and opportunities to join with them in mutually-reinforcing groups. In a technological environment of alienation and isolation, propaganda can bind us to a community. But these are highly selective rather than diverse communities. They are actively, aggressively disinterested in sharing discussion and views with members of other communities. The point is affirmation, not an exchange of ideas. This leads, Ellul said (again, in 1962), to "an increasingly stringent partitioning of our society." The more propaganda there is, he added, "the more partitioning there is."

So it is that we live in a time when, despite the availability of unprecedented amounts of information, massive public delusions—climate change denial, the missing Obama birth certificate, the fear that vaccinations can promote autism in children, the belief that Saddam Hussein of Iraq was involved in the 9/11 terrorists attacks, to name a few examples—can flourish and successfully resist any attempt at refutation, no matter how well documented.

"Effective propaganda needs to give man an all-embracing view of the world," Ellul said. "The point is to show that one travels in the direction of history and progress." This all-embracing view of the world, he added, "allows the individual to give the proper classification to all the news items he receives; to exercise a critical judgment, to sharply accentuate certain facts and suppress others, depending on how well they fit into the framework."

In my day job as a journalist, I had the opportunity last year to interview a political scientist who studies deception and distortion in public affairs. His name is Brendan Nyhan and he's an assistant professor at Dartmouth College. One case he examined was the "death panels" controversy that arose in connection with the Obama Administration's Affordable Care Act in 2009.

The controversy stemmed from claims made repeatedly by former Alaska Governor and former Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin that under the Affordable Care Act, bureaucrats would decide which senior citizens are "worthy" of receiving medical care. Her remarks to that effect received extensive news coverage despite being widely debunked.

To determine if more aggressive media fact-checking could correct the death panels myth, Nyhan and two

colleagues conducted an experiment in which two groups were asked to read fictitious but realistic-looking news articles about the death panel claims. The article read by one group contained a paragraph at the end that explained why “nonpartisan health care experts" had concluded that the death panel story was wrong. The corrective paragraph was omitted from the article read by the control group.

Reading the version of the article with the correction successfully reduced belief in the death panel myth among two types of reader: Those who already held an unfavorable opinion of Palin, and those who viewed her favorably but had relatively little knowledge of politics. Opposition to the Affordable Care Act also declined among those readers.

Among readers who were both Palin supporters and relatively knowledgeable about political affairs, the opposite occurred. After reading the corrected article they were *more* likely to believe the death panel myth and more likely to oppose the Affordable Care Act.

Nyhan calls this tendency to cling more tightly to beliefs when they're challenged "the backfire effect."

"We have an intuition,” he said, “that political knowledge should be good, that people who know more have more accurate beliefs. In some cases that's true, but in other cases, when we have a motive to preserve an existing belief or attitude, political knowledge can actually equip us to better defend that attitude or belief. It gives us more tools to fend off information we don't like and convince ourselves that we're right."

In the age of the Internet, the tools we have at our disposal for fending off information are as plentiful as the tools we have at our disposal for gathering information. Often as not they’re the same tools.

Observing how readily our hunger for reinforcement trumps our hunger for truth caused Ellul to issue one of those statements that has earned him his reputation for pessimism.

“Democracy is based on the concept that man is rational and capable of seeing clearly what is in his own interest,” he wrote in *Propaganda*, “but the study of public opinion suggests this is a highly doubtful proposition.”

There is one more of Ellul’s points on propaganda I’d like to discuss today, and that is what he called “sociological propaganda.”

In contrast to propaganda aimed at convincing people on a specific issue, sociological propaganda articulates a much more general collection of beliefs and assumptions that define for an entire society what is considered normal, acceptable, desirable, and beyond question.

Sociological propaganda is promulgated by television and radio programs, newspapers and magazines (the advertising as well as the articles), by Sunday sermons, by bumper stickers on cars, and by the kinds of cars that carry the bumper stickers. It speaks out from the products on the shelves of supermarkets and department stores and from the mouths of the people we pass on the street as well as from the style of their clothes and the style of their haircuts.

Ellul called sociological propaganda “propaganda as integration” and “a propaganda of conformity.” It seeks to stabilize, unify and reinforce the status quo, and to provide a plausible rationale for the status quo. It helps create, he said, “a general climate, an atmosphere that influences people imperceptibly without

having the appearance of propaganda; it gets to man through his customs, through his most unconscious habits…it is a sort of persuasion from within."

This description reminds me of one of my favorite Ellul-isms from *The Technological Society*: "Technique doesn't terrorize. It acclimates."

Sociological propaganda in our current state of hyper-capitalism is where we see the power of technology come fully into its own. Technology enables an unprecedented degree of immersion in the fundamental message that everything that matters is defined by what you own and what you consume. Indeed, the entire technological society can be viewed as a form of propaganda promoting the absolute normalcy of— you guessed it—the technological society. Thus anyone who doesn't own a car, a television set, a computer, or a smartphone is viewed as an oddball and a loser. A Luddite.

When I first sent [conference organizer] Randal Marlin a summary of what I intended to talk about today, he suggested I might want to include some "prescriptive" remarks, some suggestions on how the deleterious trends the paper as a whole describes might be countered. Those who have read *The Technological Society* are aware that Ellul specifically declined in that book to offer remedies for the deleterious trends he so powerfully described. Those who have read Ellul's theological works know that he looked to miracle for hope and the possibility of redemption.

I no longer consider myself a religious person, and among those who know me I've earned my own reputation as a pessimist. Thus I'll limit my prescriptive remarks to a couple of very simple, very obvious suggestions.

Tell the truth to power, as often and as convincingly as you can. Don't buy the myth that there isn't any truth, and don't be afraid to decline propaganda's invitations to integration and passivity.

One contemporary myth I find especially annoying is the self-congratulatory mantra of aspiring tech billionaires in Silicon Valley who vow that the new platform or new app they're developing will be truly "disruptive." All they're really setting out to disrupt, of course, is a business model whose profits they hope to appropriate for themselves. They're bravely disrupting one product—one form of self-indulgent consumerism, usually—with another. That's not what I call a revolution.

So, my prescriptive advice is this: Be truly disruptive. Make some noise. Cause some trouble. Do whatever you can to free yourself and those around you from the web of dreams and lies the technological society so relentlessly spins.

As I said, I'm no longer religious, but I'll close with a story from the Bible. Jesus has gone to pray in the garden of Gethsemane. The disciples are supposed to keep watch, but they can't keep their eyes open. They fall asleep. Soldiers enter the garden, arrest Jesus, and take him away.

The message is clear. This is no time to be caught napping.

"Nothing is worse in times of danger than to live in a dream world."

A Being *On* Facebook but not *Of* Facebook: Using New Social Media Technologies to Promote the Virtues of Jacques Ellul

by Brian Lightbody

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In this paper, I wish to show how new technologies come to alter one's initial enjoyment and comportment towards a hobby. What I show is that new technologies serve to transform leisurely activities into a technique, in the Ellulian sense of the term. I begin from the outside in, as it were, by first articulating what I take a hobby to be. Secondly, I then examine the time-honoured pastime of fishing to show that new technologies, if utilized, either cause the hobby to take on aspects of traditional work or in other cases, causes the hobbyist to quit the activity because the hobby is now deemed undesirable; the technological advancement makes the hobby too easy. Thirdly and finally, I turn my attention to another kind of hobby or leisurely activity, which some have called "Facebooking." Looking at Facebook through an Ellulian lens, there are, to be sure, some rather unsettling aspects of the activity, but despite this, all is not lost; Facebook may be used as a tool to practice the Ellulian virtue of non-selectivity.

Ellul uses the term "Technicality" to refer to the increasing encroachment of technologies on all aspects of life.[1] New technologies are developed with one purpose in mind: to make work, in all forms, more efficient. More production, more efficiency, less time seems to be the battle cry of both technocrats and the average person on the street. Efficiency is no longer attached to some goal, but indeed becomes a goal in itself.

At times, Ellul thinks of "Technicality" as an autonomous yet dynamic entity. It is self-propelled and self-regulating as it is always geared towards maximal efficiency. Human beings cannot help but get caught up in this system as a technical improvement in one area leads to an improvement in another and so on. As a result, all members within modern societies are increasingly controlled and limited by a web-like system of interconnected technologies, practices and policies.

Ellul was not the first thinker to have noted the progression and detrimental effects of what the Frankfurt school called "instrumental rationality" in all sectors of society. But what I think is most interesting about Ellul's work, is that technicality doesn't simply dominate work life, but indeed comes to exercise control over every aspect of leisure time. The traditional contrary form of activity to that of work, as affirmed by most scholars in the Leftist tradition, has been that of leisure, but not idleness. It is fair to say that a traditional conception of leisurely pursuits is where one is free to pursue a hobby. Indeed some Frankfurt philosophers, such as Marcuse, believed that technology was a god-send as it allowed us to further control nature so that we could pursue activities that were enjoyable in themselves.[2] A hobby provides one with the means to while away time without being bored; one derives pleasure from engaging in one's chosen hobby and as one's skill level increases, more pleasure is derived. Fishing is a perfect example of such an activity. It is an activity that is pleasurable, requires skill and has a definite aim—progress may be tracked

by the number and size of fish caught, but one usually is not required to catch anything. The time spent engaged in the activity is pleasurable in itself.

Minimally construed here, a hobby is an activity that one enjoys doing, but where one is not reduced to or identified with the activity itself. In *The German Ideology*, Marx confirms this idea, namely that a hobby is very different from work provided that it is freely engaged in for its own sake, and that the one who engages in the hobby is not identified with it. Marx writes: "In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity... society regulates production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic."[3] What is key here is that one does not become a fisherman: one is not identified with his or her job. One is free to pursue other activities as he or she sees fit. Secondly, it is important that fishing does not become work. In other words, in order for a hobby to remain a hobby, it is crucial that a hobbyist is not expected to produce x number of fish in a given day; for such requirements turn one's hobby into work: one's production output is measured over time.[4]

However, there is something missing in Marx's analysis so Ellul would argue. What Marx perhaps only implicitly realized, but was fully demonstrated and understood by Ellul is the following: technological advancements turn such traditional leisurely activities into productive practices and what's more, these practices, when enframed in terms of production output, are shot through with measures of efficiency. What turns such hobbies into technical activities? New advances in technology. Again look at fishing as an example. Gone are the days of loading up a rowboat with fishing gear, rowing to one's favourite fishing hole and hoping for the best. Now one uses sonar. Sonar provides anglers with a simulated underwater representation of the water they are fishing – one can determine the depth of the body of water and indeed know both the number and size of fish in one's fishing hole. And, when sonar is combined with GPS, anglers are at a further advantage: one can mark the most productive spots in a lake, for example, and navigate to the exact location in the future. Indeed the very notion of a finding a good fishing hole is exploded with these new technologies. A hole denotes both presence and absence: one cannot measure the precise circumference of a hole as the very boundaries that mark the hole are themselves not strictly part of 'it,' whatever this 'it' may be.[5] Likewise, a fishing hole is by its nature inexact; it is its very approximation that makes it a magical, sacred place. Indeed, a fishing hole is often passed on from father to son or mother to daughter as sacred knowledge.

This idea of passing on sacred knowledge to those deemed worthy, however, is completely undermined with the advent of GPS technology. The device does all the work: all one has to do is link up with another person's unit, receive the precise coordinates and the gates of the kingdom as it were, are opened. Ellul's insight is that these so-called 'technological advancements' turn what was once a hobby or a skill into a technique. The hobby is increasingly desacralized: the hobby is now caught up in a productive circle. In spending money on these devices, an angler expects them to work and this work is measured in terms of production. What's more, new devices are measured against the only metric the angler has available, namely, the size and number of fish caught. The technological advancements themselves force one to take a technical approach to the hobby he or she once loved and, in so doing, the freedom one experienced from practicing the craft now feels more like an exercise in production.

Peter Ludlow, a philosopher of technology and cyberspace, explores the desacralization of leisure activity in a recent article in *The Atlantic* magazine. Using Ellulian insights, he produces some rather disturbing if interesting conclusions from his analysis regarding how the internet has made some hobbies too efficient such that the joy that once was found in the hobby simply vanishes. He shows that the idea of producing, what economists call "frictionless areas of consumption," has infiltrated all aspects of modern living from stamp collecting to dating. The Internet has, single handily, radically transformed these areas of activity.

In the article "The Many Problems of Online Dating's Radical Efficiency" Ludlow persuasively argues that all aspects of human behaviour are continually and consistently viewed from the standpoint of economics where the goal is to decrease "friction" that is, to bring consumers and producers together as efficiently as possible.[6] The goal of this frictionless model of consumer interaction is to remove pesky middlemen who stand in the way of consumers and the items they wish to consume. MOOCS or Massive Open Online Courses, for example, are another technological godsend according to such economists because universities, as physical institutions, are nothing more than an obstacle to learning or so it is argued. One may agree or disagree with this assessment, but in any case, Ludlow demonstrates how the application of this type of thinking to other areas has some rather surprising and depressing results. He shows that when this penchant for "radical efficiency" is applied to hobbies like stamp collecting and more interestingly to dating, that the frictionless method breaks down—the best means to the end, leads to the dissolution of the end itself. The end, in other words, is no longer deemed worth pursuing. He writes:

> Let me illustrate this point with an example that has nothing to do with dating. It is a deep dark secret of mine that I used to be a philatelist—yes, you can denigrate that fine hobby by calling it stamp collecting if you wish. I collected certain kinds of 19th-century postal history (mailed envelopes) and I used to enjoy travelling from dealer to dealer digging through bins of musty postal history looking for the items that I collected. And then the Internet happened.
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> Collecting postal history has gone from a labor of seeking out interesting shops and sales and digging through musty boxes to one of logging on to eBay, typing in a search request (19th-century postal history), and clicking on whatever envelope covers catch my eye. The search process has for all practical purposes become frictionless, and the net result is that it just isn't fun anymore. My collection has been placed in a storage locker. I'm done with it.[7]

Why is Ludlow "done" with stamp-collecting or more accurately, envelope collecting? The answer is that radical efficiency has snuffed out the flame of desire. In a perplexing move, the technology used to make stamp collecting more efficient eventually foreclosed on the hobby itself. The internet rendered the entire hobby undesirable because the aims of the hobby were too efficiently arrived at. I suppose the same result would occur if any activity was made too easy: no adult, after all, wants to play the fish pond game at a carnival because the end result is "a winner every time."

Ludlow then applies this lesson to another fishing hole as it were: online dating. Frictionless methods of maximal efficiency, Ludlow argues, are taking all the fun out of this sphere, too. E-harmony, for example, virtually guarantees match-making success by subjecting users to a thorough and intimate questionnaire developed by a stable of psychologists. Another popular dating website, aptly called Plenty of Fish, allows users to input a wide array of filters to ensure that one is connected with the perfect person or, at least, the perfect 'hookup.' But again what Ludlow shows is that the fun of dating has evaporated with

these more efficient means of meeting like-minded individuals. In a sense, Ludlow complains that the entire activity has become all too easy: the service finds 20, 30 or maybe 40 perfect matches each of whom have the same interests and hobbies as I do. What's more, introductions are already made by the program—a ranked list of the newest and most compatible profiles is emailed to your account on a daily basis.[8]

The most intriguing and illuminating content in the article in my opinion, however, was found in the comment section. The comment section to this article overwhelmingly substantiates Ellul's insight that technology not only desacralizes in the name of efficiency, but that once the activity has been viewed in terms of maximal efficiency, there is in some sense no going back: new technologies will be developed that will make the hobby even more efficient until, I suppose, there is some kind of "efficiency death" a la stamp collecting. Some commentators pointed out that that they would go on two or three dates a night, all with individuals who shared common interests and hobbies. One user remarked that he would give a date 45 minutes to entertain him; if after 45 minutes he found he was bored, he would end the date, go back online and arrange for another date within a few hours. What I find interesting, (although deeply disturbing) is that the above commentator's reasoning is perfectly sound if unforgiving: 'Why waste any more time with an individual who does not interest you?' 'Surely it is easier to find someone new who is more attractive, more entertaining, and who shares more of my interests and hobbies?'

I now want to turn to a final source of leisurely activity, namely, that of "Facebooking." Facebook is interesting from an Ellulian analysis for two reasons: first, a user is responsible for enframing herself. What is interesting about this phenomenon, is that it is usually the Other (with a capital O) who is enframed—I view the stranger as a means to my end. Sartre, for example, discusses this tendency in terms of his notion of the "instrumental complex"—I cannot help but view the world, including the people within it, as objects of use for me.[9] I absorb them as part of my totality of narrative as Levinas might say. Of course there is a dialectical dimension to this relationship between self and Other as Sartre well-understood: "Hell is Other people", Sartre wrote because they enframe us as well.[10]

Ellul, too, is of course interested in establishing communities whereby we treat each other as neighbours and not as useful strangers who simply do things for us within the system. Facebook, I think Ellul would argue, does nothing in removing my perceived strangeness to others. If anything it acts as a powerful reductive agent in that I am become best known according to the pictures and comments I have made online. And certainly many corporations agree: scanning a job candidate's Facebook profile has become a better interview tool than the interview itself.

A second interesting aspect of Facebook and the hobby of "Facebooking" itself, is that text is clearly subordinate to the images contained within a person's profile. Most profiles simply consist of pictures with brief comments. Facebook, I would argue, is carving out new and mostly icon driven forms of subjectivity for 21st century persons. One presents one's totality as it were as an avatar---an artificial character created through uploaded images, comments, as well as 'likes' and 'dislikes' which is then interpreted and judged by others, namely, 'friends.' But the consequence of this technology, I am sure Ellul would argue, violates the sacredness of the word. Pictures are substituted for description. And acronyms like lol, omg etc. are nothing more than canned expressions that are substitutes for real dialogue. Facebook, as a technology, would appear to be a form of social media that Ellul would abhor.

So what is to be done? Should one simply turn off and tune out from all forms of social media? Are we to retreat into some Luddian silent utopia?

I would suggest that "Facebooking" does have one advantage: it accelerates Ellul's call to practice non-selectivity. Non-selectivity is the act of seeking out others, very different from oneself and engaging these others in dialogue. In *The Ethics of Freedom*, Ellul writes: "We always meet those who resemble us, but the commandment…to love even enemies deconditions us. If we become capable of encountering and receiving all sorts and conditions of men, if we become capable of taking the initiative with all sorts and conditions of men, this can happen only if we are free enough not to select whom we will meet, not to pass prior judgment on whom we can meet and not to decide in advance whom we cannot meet.[11]

Depending on the security settings for a profile, Facebook may be used to peer into very different worldviews. Indeed such behaviour, of looking at some stranger's profile has its own name. It is called "creeping." I think it is fair to say that most creeping is simply an exercise in idle curiosity. The intention, in most cases I would suspect, is to peer into the 'world' of some other being. To have in a sense a God's eye view of a fellow person. We turn such a person into the Other. And the word, "creeping" corroborates this sense of otherness: I can see what you are up to, but you cannot see my profile and you do not know that I am spying on you. But notice the following phenomenon: the term reinforces the behaviour. If I am viewing someone's else's profile then I am aware I am "creeping" this person and therefore whatever pleasure I derive is derived once again from this taboo pleasure I receive from seeing while remaining unseen. I objectify the Other, just as I objectify the other by staring at someone getting dressed from the Sartrean keyhole.[12]

With all that said, an important question remains: is it not possible to creep without engaging in creepy behaviour? If I am using Facebook to peer into life-worlds very different from my own, not for the sake of puerile entertainment, but for the sake of really trying to understand someone I normally would not associate with, then am I not, in some minimal way, practicing non-selectivity? Furthermore does not this activity allow me to establish a closer tie with this person? Is it not the case that I am seeing that this person too has his or her ups and downs, her personal struggles, her triumphs? And while this idea, namely that others are like me, they too are struggling in this world and have the same fears as I do, is known, it is known very often in an abstract way. Viewing someone's profile in the above manner, however, somehow concretizes their identity and mine as well. I am drawn closer to my fellow human being. Such creepy behaviour allows me to bond with others whether they be friends or strangers insofar as I can see myself in their struggles and triumphs. The anonymous mass of individuals that Ellul greatly and rightly feared can be disassembled by "Facebooking" in this way, or so I suggest. And although this practice does not transform this mass into a community, still the world becomes a little less Other a little less strange for it is slowly transformed into a world of known strangers who are just like me.

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[1] For a succinct analysis of Ellul's view on technology, see Darrel Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981) chapter 2.
[2] For a succinct overview of Marcuse's position on technology, see Brian Lightbody, "Can We Truly Love That Which Is Fleeting? The Problem of Time in Marcuse's Eros and Civilization" in *The Florida Philosophical Review*, Summer Vol. X Issue 1, 2010 25-42.
[3] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, in *Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Collected Works* (Vol .5) (New York: International Publishers, 1976,) 47.

[4] For a more detailed analysis of the activity of fishing as a hobby, see William James Booth, "Gone Fishing with Marx: Making Sense of Marx's Communism", *Political Theory*, Vol. 17, 2 May 1989. 205-222.
[5] For more on the ontology of holes, see David Lewis and Stephanie Lewis, 'Holes' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 48, 2, 1970, 206-212.
[6] Peter Ludlow, "The Many Problems with Online Dating's Radical Efficiency", *The Atlantic*, Jan. 2013 http://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/01/the-many-problems-with-online-datings-radical-efficiency/266796/
[7] Peter Ludlow, "The Many Problems with Online Dating's Radical Efficiency"
[8] Peter Ludlow, "The Many Problems with Online Dating's Radical Efficiency"
[9] Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. trans. Hazel Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956
[10] See Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*
[11] Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, Translated and Edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976, 326.
[12] See Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 259.

Notes on Recent Books by and about Jacques Ellul

The Ellul Forum welcomes critical reviews of these and other books addressing issues of the interplay of technology, culture, politics, theology, communication and other topics. Feel free to submit your proposals, essays, and reviews to IJES@ellul.org

Jacques Ellul, *The Empire of Non-Sense: Art in the Technological Society*

(Papadakis Publisher, 2014) 168 pp. www.papadakis.net
Translated by Michael Johnson & David Lovekin from *L'Empir du non-sens* (Presses universitaires de France, 1980)

At long last (34 years after its original publication in French!) we have an English translation of Ellul's study of art in the technological society. Introductory essays by Samir Younés (Professor of Architecture, Notre Dame) and David Lovekin (Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Hastings College in Nebraska and author of *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul*, 1991) add greatly to the value of this major work. The work begs for serious reading and discussion.

Jacques Ellul, *If You Are the Son of God: The Suffering and Temptations of Jesus*

(Eugene OR: Cascade Books, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2014) 95 pp. www.wipfandstock.com
Translated by Anne-Marie Andreasson-Hogg from *Si tu es le fils de Dieu: souffrances et tentations de Jésus* (Editions Centurion, 1991)

This is a remarkable little book. Ellul begins by reflecting on the meaning of temptation and on the biblical ideas of Jesus' simultaneous divinity and humanity. In the first half of the book he explores many different aspects of the "suffering servant." In the second half he focuses on many aspects of the temptations of Jesus, exploring especially the famous threefold temptation at the beginning of his public career. This (like all of Ellul's work) will not be your usual seminary or religious professional study! Great, provocative, illuminating insights.

Jacques Ellul, *On Being Rich & Poor: Christianity in a Time of Economic Globalization*

(University of Toronto Press, 2014) xxii, 273 pp. www.utppublishing.com
Compiled, edited, and translated by Willem Vanderburg.

As he did in *Jacques Ellul: On Freedom, Love, and Power* (2010) with tape recordings of Ellul's studies of parts of Genesis, Job, Matthew, and John, Bill Vanderburg (Emeritus Professor and Director of the Centre for Technology and Social Development at the University of Toronto) does now in *On Being Rich and Poor* with tape recordings of Ellul's studies of the biblical books of Amos and James. Both of these volumes are major contributions to lovers of Ellul's brilliant if idiosyncratic (that is a compliment!) engagements with the biblical text. We are continually amazed and challenged by his unusual but well-grounded interpretations. Yes, it is too bad there was not first created a French text from these recordings but for those interested it is possible to listen to the original French recordings which are catalogued in the special Jacques Ellul Collection at Wheaton College (IL). Any who have ever worked from a recording of a live interview or event to a publishable manuscript know that a wise and sometimes strong editorial hand is essential and certainly Bill Vanderburg provides that. Bill was present at many of these studies 1973 - 1978 in Bordeaux. (I was privileged to sit in on Ellul's studies of Ecclesiastes in 1984-85 in Bordeaux which Ellul himself turned into his book *Reason for Being* (1987; ET 1990) so I can well imagine the profound experience to which he refers). Both of these volumes are major contributions for which we are indebted to Bill Vanderburg --- and which deserve a wide reading and a deep review.

Jeffrey M. Shaw, *Illusions of Freedom: Thomas Merton & Jacques Ellul on Technology and the Human Condition*
(Eugene OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014). 193 pp. www.wipfandstock.com

Jeff Shaw recently completed his doctorate with a thesis that is now edited and presented in this book. Sometimes one of the best ways to understand better a thinker or author is to do a side-by-side comparison with another thinker, distinctive but with several touch points that invite comparison. Shaw puts the American Catholic monk alongside the French Protestant sociologist to helpful effect in terms of their views of technology, theology, sociology, and politics. Brothers for sure, reinforcing many of the same perspectives, but with interesting distinctives. To receive a fuller critical review in a future *Ellul Forum.*