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Peter K. Fallon's Propaganda 2.1: Understanding Propaganda in the Digital Age

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A Review of Peter K. Fallon's *Propaganda 2.1: Understanding Propaganda in the Digital Age*

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The book *Propaganda 2.1: Understanding Propaganda in the Digital Age* by media professor Peter Fallon offers a unique perspective on one of the most ambiguous subjects in the world: the subject of propaganda. Fallon is Professor of Journalism and Media Studies at Roosevelt University in Chicago and active in the Media Ecology Association (MEA) as well as author of award-winning books and articles on media ecology. Media ecology is the study of media, technology, and communication and how they affect human environments. The theoretical concepts were proposed by Marshall McLuhan in his 1964 *Understanding Media* while the term media ecology was first introduced by famous media ecologist Neil Postman in 1968.

While there are many books about propaganda, few (if any) have been written from a media ecology perspective. In his short *Propaganda 2.1*, Fallon provides many key ideas for better understanding modern propaganda. Rather than focus on the current state of propaganda (Fallon calls Propaganda 2.1), he provides a brief evolution of it since its origin in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. In effect, he traces the evolution of the methods of persuasion or control through language over two thousand years.

This evolution is seen as three eras by Fallon. The first era lasted was almost two thousand years long from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in the 4th century BC to the beginning of the 20th century. The second era filled the 20th century, and the third era starts with the growth of the Internet and the Digital Age in the 21st century. These eras of propaganda have a close connection to the media and communication technologies of their times. In these eras, propaganda has evolved from the content of messages to the context of containing the messages. As McLuhan might say, from message to medium.

Propaganda 1.0 (400 BC to the 20th Century)

Fallon locates the beginning of propaganda and persuasion with Aristotle's *Rhetoric* of 400 BC. Through history ideas of rhetoric formed the basis for two-way communication where one tried to control the ideas and actions of others through the words and language of persuasion. Interactive two-

way communication changed with the invention of Gutenberg's printing press in 1440 resulting in the beginning of mass communication. The publication and distribution of Martin Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* in 1517 was the first important event of mass communication.

But propaganda was given a bad name two hundred years after the invention of the printing press with the Vatican's establishment of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in 1622. This is where Fallon locates the roots of modern propaganda. For nearly half a millennium he says, "we rarely recognized propaganda except when associated with religious controversy." And, during this time, the primary tool for understanding propaganda was rhetorical criticism.

The content of propaganda's messages had a context to exist in for the first time in the 19th century with the development of Max Weber's new discipline of sociology and movements like Karl Marx's Marxism.

Propaganda 2.0 (The 20th Century)

Fallon notes that propaganda at the beginning of the 20th century was still deeply rooted in Aristotle's in *Rhetoric* and methods of persuasion. For almost two thousand years, the technique was little known outside the small group of Greek scholars who could read Greek. But the ideas of *Rhetoric* were made available to English readers in 1909 when *Rhetoric* was first translated into English. Now, it was available to a general English populace. The persuasive techniques of the book found greatest influence in the new disciplines of advertising, sales and public relations. (Advertising was called salesmanship in print). And, it is more than coincidental that the early years of advertising were filled with books on sales methods of persuasion and advertising copy based on persuasion. Aristotle's methods found a rebirth in the growth of persuading society to become mass consumers of mass products.

During this early period of propaganda in the 20th century, propaganda grew with its use during WWI through the efforts of people like Edward Bernays (Freud's nephew), Harold Laswell, George Creel, Walter Lippmann and Edward Filene. "The aim of modern propaganda," Jacques Ellul would write in his famous *Propaganda* in 1962, almost 50 years after WWI, "is no longer to modify ideas, but to provoke action." Thus was born the Committee on Public Information (CPI) during WWI, whose aim was to influence U.S. public opinion and provoke

action in support of the war effort. Wilson's Executive Order 2594 set in motion an ever-broadening series of events.

When Ellul wrote in 1962 "The propagandist must utilize all of the technical means at his disposal — the press, radio, TV, movies, posters, meetings, door-to-door canvassing," he was simply describing what Woodrow Wilson did when he assigned George Creel to create and head the CPI. In just over 26 months, from April 14, 1917, to June 30, 1919, the CPI *used every medium available* to create enthusiasm for the war effort and to enlist public support against the foreign and perceived domestic attempts to stop America's participation in the war. This was the first intentional use of the U.S. government to covertly manipulate the minds of our own people.

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The first great change in propaganda that took it outside its roots in persuasion occurred in the middle of the 20th century with systems and information theory and the important book *Cybernetics* in 1948 by computer engineer Norbert Weiner. With systems theory and cybernetics, propaganda was no longer an isolated message but now part of a feed-back loop within a system containing inputs and outputs.

Systems and information theory saw a shift from messages to the movement and control of information within systems. Systems theory was concerned with structure and function of complex systems. Cybernetics relates to the interaction of the human and machine system. All properly functioning systems, no matter what their origin, share several characteristics including a purpose or goal, internal interdependence, self-regulation, and an internal tendency to both resist change (homeostasis) and to adapt to external demands to pursue its goals (adaptation). Norbert Weiner, Claude Shannon, and Warren Weaver.

Two important components of information and systems theory are those of entropy and redundancy. Entropy is the degree of randomness or disorder in a system and part of the natural tendency of all ordered systems to move toward disorder and chaos as the energy in the system dissipates. Redundancy is the opposite of entropy and is the rule-based part of a system that allows order and predictability. It is the part of a message not determined by free choice of the sender possessing several forms like repetition, amplification, parallel-channel reinforcement, and structural redundancy. Unlike entropy, redundancy is a human invention developed over the ages to bring greater clarity and

certainty to human communication. Entropy is a force of nature and therefore inevitable. In effect, redundancy is a set of techniques invented by human beings to fight the forces of entropy.

Jacques Ellul Persuasion Meets Systems Theory

In the evolution of propaganda, under the influence of systems theory, Fallon's book moves towards the flowering of Propaganda 2.0 in the ideas of French multi-disciplinary-thinker Jacques Ellul. In many ways, Fallon's book centers on the ideas of Ellul. As he says in the first sentence of his book, his goal in not to improve Ellul's work but rather "conform Ellul's analysis to the contours of our digital landscape." Ellul's model is based on the workings of a total propaganda in technological society. Ellul's model demands rethinking of the conception of propaganda after the influence of systems theory and cybernetics.

More than an analysis of Ellul's thought in this final phase of Propaganda 2.0, Fallon provides pretty much of a chapter outline to Ellul's famous 1962 book *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*. In effect, readers will find little analysis of Ellul's ideas on propaganda but instead a brief presentation of its key characteristics and categories, conditions and necessity for existence and its psychological and socio-political effects. A few key effects of propaganda on society is anxiety and alienation. In *Propaganda*, Ellul reverses a few widespread notions about propaganda. For example, one of the most important popular beliefs is that education is the best defense against propaganda. Ellul refutes this adamantly noting that propaganda cannot work without education. In effect, education is an absolute prerequisite for propaganda.

While *Propaganda* is a key book of Ellul, perhaps his most important book was written in 1954, in the middle of the ideas of systems theory and cybernetics. The title of the book is *The Technological Society* not released in English until 1964, around the time of Ellul's *Propaganda*. The focus of the book was on a condition of technological societies called technique. Ellul came to believe that *technique* had become the dominant factor in the Western world. He felt that all other factors depended on technique. Technique was no longer some uncertain and incomplete intermediary between humanity and the natural milieu. Nature is totally dominated and utilized in Western society. Technique now constitutes a fabric of its own, replacing nature. Technique is the complex and complete milieu in which human beings must live, and in relation to which they must define themselves.

In the "Notes to Reader" section of *The Technological Society*, Ellul defines what technique is as "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity." The term technique is not solely machines, technology, or a procedure used to attain an end. In the book, Ellul set forth seven characteristics of modern technology that make efficiency a necessity: rationality, artificiality, automatism of technical choice, self-augmentation, monism, universalism and autonomy.

It is apparent that by 1954, Ellul had become a believer in the systems thinking of Weiner. For Ellul, this new type of propaganda was systematic. The technological system (like all systems) strives to maintain balance, momentum, and structural integrity. Propaganda plays the integral part in the technological system making it consistent and predictable (redundant) in the human behavior elements of the system. By its very nature, human behavior is the most inconsistent and unpredictable (entropic).

A key component of the new systematic propaganda was the creation of what Ellul called a "total propaganda." In effect, mass society must always use all technological means at its disposal. Each individual technology can address a specific dimension of the propaganda message in its own way, thereby giving the illusion of diversity of messages. Movies can entertain us and appeal to our emotions by the symbolic evocation of mythic themes (e.g., bravery, patriotism, undying love, transformation through hardship, etc.), while televised sports provides credible support for the value of competition—a central, fundamental value of the technological society. News programming allows us to feel involved in the public life of society, to form opinions about those issues of which everyone is speaking. Entertainments divert our attention from the harsher realities of life in the technological society.

Propaganda 2.1 (The 21st Century)

Ellul died in 1994 before the real beginning of the Internet or Propaganda 2.1. While the model for propaganda 2.0 in the 20th century was the certainty of redundancy, the model for propaganda in the 21st century Digital Age is the uncertainty of entropy. It is the age of decentralized information, where we are exposed to diverse and often paradoxical points of view.

Fallon observes the major difference between Propaganda 2.0 and Propaganda 2.1 is the difference between the powerful conforming forces of virtually infinite redundancy of Propaganda 2.0 on the one hand, and the often frightening and confusing feeling of liberation through the virtually infinite

randomness and disorder of Propaganda 2.1. It is the difference between centralized control of information based on a one-to-many model, and a completely unregulated, multidirectional, free flow of information.

One of the conditions of the modern world is anxiety. A main factor creating anxiety is the breakdown of the uniform narrative (or information redundancy) that sustained Propaganda 2.0 in the 20th century. The model of systematic, total propaganda described by Jacques Ellul, is a system of maximum redundancy. It is a system based on the mass manufacture and distribution of uniform bits of information, a system embodying a one-to-many flow of information. All media in the propaganda system work together, reinforcing one another.

In the digital age, the age of decentralized information, people are exposed to diverse and often paradoxical points of view. As Fallon notes, Propaganda 2.1 is a model of competing propagandas, of uncertainty and doubt. It is a model of infinite information, and the extremely high randomness of entropy. It is a refreshing time for some yet an unnerving time for others raised in the environment of propaganda 2.0.

Perhaps more than anything else, Propaganda 2.1 is one of paradox. For example, this paradox is seen in the emergence of global society. McLuhan saw the beginning glimpses of this when he suggested the world was becoming a "global village" (coined by McLuhan in his books of the 1960s: *The Gutenberg Galaxy* in 1962 and U*nderstanding Media* in 1964) by the propagation of media technologies throughout the world. The electronic global surround of information tended to make humans both special in this new global village while at the same time reducing them to nobodies in the global village. Another example is that while there are far more opportunities for learning in such a connected, global environment, much of the new information encountered in the entropic system is questionable and much false. Yet much of this information will be useful because it is new to our sensibilities and non-redundant. Fallon says, "It becomes, then, our responsibility to sort through it, weigh it, evaluate it, and either accept it or reject it."

Propaganda 2.1 retrieves the interactivity of propaganda before its one-way broadcast redundancy in the 20th century. For the first time in history, individuals can become not only passive receivers of information, but active creators and distributors as well. If, as Marshall McLuhan insisted, media act as extensions of the senses, the internet represented the extinction of the senses across the globe. While the internet may be the global extension of mind, the mind is a complex and chaotic phenomenon. As Fallon observes, "Anyone who promised that the internet was going to release us from the oppressive

mass manipulation of the id and the superego that we've lived under since the days of Edward Bernays and extend only the balanced ego was, purely and simply, lying to us. The same genomic mutation that released creative expression, intellectual ferment, and serious debate also opened the door to reactionary close-mindedness, blatant ignorance and racism, flame wars, lies, and bullying."

Cyber Utopians & Dystopians

The paradox of Propaganda 2.1 in the Digital Age is represented by two views of the Internet in the cyber-utopians and the cyber-dystopians. Cyber-utopians have almost a religious zeal in the emerging cyber world. For them, the future will not only be different, but it will be better. It will be better because, unlike the futures we once imagined, we'll design and engineer the Digital Age future to be better. At the other end of the spectrum, are the cyber-dystopians, who don't celebrate the new future but rather fear it.

During the beginning years of the Internet, the cyber utopians were predominant. Perhaps the greatest of all cyber-utopians was Ray Kurzweil. No one was as influential in preaching the posthuman gospel than Kurzweil. It was Kurzweil who coined the term singularity to describe "a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed." The Singularity will represent the culmination of the merger of our biological thinking and existence with our technology, resulting in a world that is still human but that transcends our biological roots.

Other leading cyber-utopians were Nicholas Negroponte and Kevin Kelly, co-founder of *Wired* magazine. They were perhaps the most "wild-eyed optimist" of cyber-utopians writes Fallon. In his book *What Technology Wants*, Kelly not only champions machine intelligence, but anthropomorphizes the internet, referring to it as a sentient being, an "intelligent superorganism. Kelly's view echoes the ideas of the twentieth-century French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who believed evolution is a divinely directed process with a clear and unambiguous direction, of ever-increasing organization and complexity, whose fulfillment is the fulfillment of all creation - the Omega Point. You know these people. You might have been one of them at a time in your life.

While cyber-utopians were dominant during the early years of the Internet, it is cyber-dystopians who are now dominant. They are at the other end of the spectrum from the cyber utopians worried about what our digital age will bring us. One of these prophets of digital doom is Andrew Keen a Silicon Valley insider who rethought his early fascination with the internet and now calls it "the greatest seduction

since the dream of world communism." Keen's 2015 book, *The Internet Is Not the Answer,* is a scathing critique of a world created by utopian speculation about the (false) promises of the internet. Among his economic charges, he notes that rather than promote economic fairness, the Internet has become a central reason for the growing gulf between rich and poor with the hollowing out of the middle class. Rather than making us wealthier, the distributed capitalism of the new networked economy is making most of us poorer. Rather than generating more jobs, the digital disruption is a principal cause of our structural unemployment crisis. Rather than creating more competition, it has created immensely powerful new monopolists like Google and Amazon. Rather than creating transparency and openness, Keen says the Internet is creating a panopticon of information-gathering and surveillance services in which we, the users of big data networks like Facebook, have been packaged as their all-too-transparent product. Rather than creating more democracy, it is empowering the rule of the mob. Rather than fostering a renaissance, it has created a selfie-centered culture of voyeurism and narcissism.

Another leading cyber-dystopian is author and former academic Nicholas Carr. "The Net is, by design, an interruption system," he says in *The Shallows*. The Net is "a machine geared for dividing attention," he says. Referencing McLuhan's "medium is the message," Carr posts a warning about the dangers of attending too closely to the content of a medium at the expense of our awareness of the effects of the medium itself on our thought processes. "Media work their magic, or their mischief, on the nervous system itself."

Fallon notes that of all the recent cyber-utopian or dystopian literature *The Shallows* is perhaps the most trenchant and significant, and certainly the one most grounded in empirical science rather than personal anecdote and conjecture. Carr relies on recent studies in the neurosciences to support his argument that the internet is changing the very structure of our brains— changing them in a way that literate people in a (once) literate environment could only characterize as damaging them. This growing body of theoretical and empirical research supports the argument that the act of reading imposes upon the developing human brain a need to reorganize its functions, remapping neural pathways and allowing new types of thought previously impossible. The internet threatens to undo much or even most of that. The crux of Carr's argument might be summed up in this passage from chapter 7 in *The Shallows*, "The Juggler's Brain" where Carr writes

> Dozens of studies by psychologists, neurobiologists, educators, and Web designers point to the same conclusion: when we go online, we enter an environment that promotes cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning. It's possible to think deeply while

surfing the net, just as it's possible to think shallowly while reading a book, but that's not the type of thinking the technology encourages and rewards.

There are other cyber-dystopians that Fallon does not mention. This is not surprising since the growing number of critics is hard to keep up with. One of popular of these critics is Harvard Business School professor Shoshana Zuboff. Her 2019 book, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, offers an examination of the unprecedented new power called "surveillance capitalism," a global architecture of behavior modification. Vast wealth and power are accumulated in ominous new "behavioral futures markets," where predictions about behavior are bought and sold, and the production of goods and services is subordinated to a new "means of behavioral modification." Zuboff observes that the threat has shifted from a totalitarian Big Brother state to a ubiquitous digital architecture of a "Big Other" operating in the interests of surveillance capital. Zuboff lays bare the threats to twenty-first century society as a controlled "hive" of total connection that seduces with promises of total certainty for maximum profit at the expense of democracy, freedom, and our human future.

Events of the Digital Landscape

Besides the paradoxical views of Propaganda 2.1, Fallon provides a quick tour of some of the events and phenomena of this new landscape. He discusses subjects like privacy and social media, the freeing of information, the growth of WikiLeaks and players such as Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowdon. He discusses the net neutrality movement and the movement to nationalize the Internet and the electromagnetic spectrum. He feels the FCC's Pre-1984 Definition of "Public Interest" needs to be restored. The proliferation of fake news in our corporate mass media following the passage of the Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984 needs to be checked. To do so we must demand that, in exchange for the free use of the public airwaves, microwaves, and other portions of the electromagnetic spectrum, corporations provide some significant number of nonprofit, commercial-free hours of public service broadcasting or cablecasting each day.

Towards the end of his chapter on Propaganda 2.1, Fallon notes the need to read more and read deeply. If we are to be responsible citizens (citizen journalists) in the era of propaganda 2.1, we need to know more. We need to think more and think more critically. Information is important in the construction of knowledge, but it does not in and of itself constitute knowledge. Paraphrasing the French polymath Henri Poincar "Knowledge is built of information in the same way a house is built of bricks; but an accumulation of bits of information is no more knowledge than a pile of bricks is a house." In effect, there has to be a specific structure or organization of information, as well as a context within which to fit

those pieces of information before one has knowledge. Without these, all we have is profoundly entropic noise.

Fallon ends the chapter by saying that we can be better than we are. Not only better informed, but more knowledgeable. We can make the internet work for us instead of against us. The choice is ours. The door is open.

Minerva's Owl

In the concluding chapter of *Propaganda 2.1*, Fallon notes a profound ambivalence about the internet and other digital technologies of Propganda 2.1. On the whole, he finds himself more skeptical than enthusiastic about the digital revolution. He places himself in the camp of cyber dystopians like Andrew Keen, Jaron Lanier and Nicholas Carr. Like these dystopians, he worries the Internet is a type of corporate "Trojan horse" ransacking

> our most precious and secret belongings when we welcome it into the privacy of our homes; or that we're becoming gadgets, mere appendages of the technologies that ought to be serving us; or that the easy retrieval of concise snippets of decontextualized information is hurting our ability to think deeply and critically); or that, rather than liberating us, the internet is morphing into a tool of government surveillance and oppression; or that the chaotic and constantly changing nature of digital information is destroying whatever remnants of a unifying and coherent narrative our culture ever had.

The digital age brings us many new visible things but it takes away many invisible critical things, like the ability to read, think and reflect. The information explosion comes with a lot of "baggage" like surveillance and oppression rather than freedom. It makes an increasing number of decisions for us with techniques like AI so we stop using parts of our brains. Another media ecologist - Eva Berger - makes this point in *Context Blindness* noting we are becoming blind to context and entering a general condition like autism.

Towards the conclusion of the book, Fallon interjects something Harold Innis said, referencing a statement of the philosopher Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel that "Minerva's owl begins its flight only in the gathering dusk." Innis interprets this to mean that we don't understand a culture until that moment when its dominant monopoly of knowledge begins its collapse. The quote of Innis is similarity to McLuhan's belief we couldn't see the context or media environments of our times, our ecologies, that surrounded

us 24/4 like water surrounded a fish. The fish quote is attributed to McLuhan who (paraphrasing it) said "Although we're not sure who discovered water, we're sure it wasn't a fish." In effect, McLuhan suggested the same thing that Innis (and Hegel) suggests on the flight of Minerva's owl.

Perhaps two grand things are happening at one time, Fallon suggests. "We're witnessing not only the collapse of a once stable system, but of a destructive global ideology as well." Again, he has mixed emotions here that a loss of something old is perhaps necessary to bring about something new and needed.

McLuhan & Ellul

Fallon notes at the beginning of *Propaganda 2.1*, the book was written as an "addendum" to Ellul's *Propaganda* to "update and adjust the ideas found in that book for the twenty-first century." Fallon adds, that he labored under "no delusion" he could improve on Ellul's work. In fact, Fallon says, he takes the principles contained in *Propaganda* as the foundation of his investigations.

Knowing Fallon is a well-known media ecologist influenced greatly by the ideas of McLuhan, one can see that the foundation of his investigations is to find commonalities and a synthesis in the ideas of McLuhan and Ellul. In effect, a type of merger of the philosophy of Ellul with that of McLuhan or the study of Medica Ecology. Particularly the ideas of McLuhan's invisible environment of medium and Ellul's all-encompassing technique. An important question Fallon asks that's not directly asked in his book is whether Propaganda 2.1 of the 20th century Digital Age might best be understood through the lens of media ecology and principles in Ellul's important books.

Fallon is not the first to feel there's a connection between the two. The reader with basic knowledge of McLuhan's ideas can see a connection from the information Fallon presents about Ellul. Also seeing a connection are leading Ellul scholars from the International Jacques Ellul Society (https://ellul.org) is similar to the Media Ecology Association in carrying on the work of visionary thinkers. For example, the relationship between McLuhan and Ellul is explored in a twenty-page article titled "Marshall McLuhan and Jacques Ellul in Dialog" by leading Ellul scholars Geraldine Fosberg and Stephanie Bennett in the Winter 2020 issue of the *The Journal of Communication and Religion*. Even though McLuhan and Ellul never met in person, the article shows a long "dialogue" with each other in the sense they read, responded to, and influenced each other's work.

Interestingly, the year 1964 *Understanding Media* was published was also the year Ellul's *The Technological Society* was published in English for the first time. (Although published in France in 1954). This close connection between the two important books seems more than coincidental. Especially when one compares the contents of McLuhan's *Understanding Media* to Ellul's *The Technological Society* and *Propaganda*.

There was also another important commonality between the two men in that they were exact contemporaries of each other with McLuhan born in 1911 and Ellul in 1912 at the beginning of the grand movement from propaganda as persuasion to propaganda as system. In effect, they lived through the same propaganda, mediums of communication, systems theory, and the evolution to Ellul's "total propaganda." They lived through the growth of propaganda in the 20th century. This closeness of living within the media and communications of an age is important but often overlooked.

Distraction of the Burglar

In spite of many similarities in their ideas and theories, the perception and legacy of the two men are different. McLuhan became a pop culture celebrity of his time, the subject of an interview in Playboy magazine and an appearance in the 1977 Woody Allen film *Annie Hall* (as himself of course). His books and theories were widely read and discussed. Such was not the case with Ellul's darker idea about *technique*. Ellul's philosophy was known in the ranks of sociology and religion but never escaped into general culture like McLuhan's idea that "Medium is the message." While McLuhan certainly felt technology played an important part in the way we perceived the world, it was not the focus of his investigations as it was for Ellul.

Yet Ellul – like McLuhan – felt the greatest power over perception, thought and behavior was in the hidden context of culture rather than the content of culture. In this sense, Ellul's context was his idea of technique and McLuhan's idea of context was medium. Neither saw the villain or enemy in the content (messages) of people, parties or political ideologies. This made them both threats to the propaganda of the cultural gatekeepers who attempted to distract them from focusing on these grand contexts of the world rather

than the bright and noisy content of everyday entertainments, amusements, information and images.

There is a quote of T.S. Eliot from "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism" (Harvard University Press, 1933) that relates to this distraction

> The chief use of the 'meaning' of a poem, in the ordinary sense, may be (for here again I am speaking of some kinds of poetry and not all) to satisfy one habit of the reader, to keep his mind diverted and quiet, while the poem does its work upon him: much as the imaginary burglar is always provided with a nice piece of meat for the housedog.

McLuhan appropriated and repurposed this statement in the 1964 *Understanding Media* to read the "content of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind."

Both McLuhan and Ellul realized they lived in the final years of the dominance of the word and rise of the image. Ellul saw this as the great challenge in 1948 when he wrote his book *Presence in the World* (updated to *Presence in the Modern World* in 2016). Certainly, the shift from word to image is one of the greatest events of effecting modern propaganda. Words persuade yet images distract, like that piece of meat carried by the burglar. With the rise in automatic reactions of the technological society and the decline in reflection or "deep reading" it is hard to see the image will not win out opening a new period of history. We have lived through the final years of print culture and embark on image culture.

The cases for important battles to be fought today are placed in front of us by many. Yes, like messages of persuasion or propaganda. McLuhan sees the power of images to distract from words (like the burglar's meat) held to distract the watchdog of our minds. Yet it is difficult to see distraction as working within Ellul's trance of technique where there seems no way out.

For Ellul, the escape route was through his ideas about theology. Yet Ellul's ideas of religion and sociology are difficult to put into fortune cookie adages and axioms like those of McLuhan. One of the reasons for this difficulty was his vast knowledge of leading thinkers in many disciplines such as Carl Jung, Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, Martin Luther, Max Weber, Guy Debord, CK Chesterton, Bernard Charbonneau, Lewis Mumford, Thomas Kuhn, Dietrich Bonnhoeffer, John Kenneth Galbraith, Daniel

Bell and Paul Ricoeur.

While Ellul was influenced by Karl Marx at an early age, he ultimately used Marx in creating his own view of the world. He attempted to replace Marx's economic and class dynamics with the power of his technique. In effect, Ellul was far too much of an interdisciplinary thinker to attach himself to the economic and class dynamics of Marx. His two great areas of interest and research were sociology and religion. Marx had no religion but Ellul had created an entire theology.

In the Forward to the 2016 update of the 1946 *Presence in the World* is written by leading Ellul scholar Ted Lewis. As Ellul explained in 1989, the chapters grew out of four presentations he gave to a Christian audience in 1946. "I established the very broad plan for a work that would consist in studying the modern world and the Christian requirement in parallel." Lewis notes Ellul never intended *The Technological Society* to be understood in isolation from his other writings.

The same claim can be made for most of Ellul's vast production during his lifetime. As Lewis notes in Ellul's 1981 essay "On Dialectic," Ellul bemoaned the fact, "No one is using my studies in correlation with one another." Lewis continues that this might have been the result of the underlying duality of Ellul's grand themes of technology and theology observing

> On the one hand, he was unveiling a dark vision of technological totalitarianism that pulls every facet of Western culture (and every person) into its vortex; on the other hand, he was presenting a theological vision where human freedom and responsibility could lead to a hopeful future. What all readers need to see, however, is how Ellul's social analysis was always answered by his biblical commentary … divine revelation presents the opposite dialectical pole to technocracy.

As Lewis notes, Ellul consistently worked within a framework where opposites did not synthesize but remained in a mid-zone of creative tension where awareness and social change could be stimulated. This intellectual twilight zone is one of the main reasons Ellul is so little understood or understood in the wrong way.

One of the interesting and hopeful things is that the perpetually hidden subject like propaganda is being viewed from the perspectives of Media Ecology and the International Jacques Ellul Society. In many ways, propaganda has always served as that "juicy piece of meat" McLuhan said was used to distract from reflex leading to reflections about the context of life. Fallon feels a new understanding of this grand

historical control device called propaganda might be better understood from the ideas of Ellul and McLuhan.

But propaganda is an ancient trickster with a thousand faces who has avoided definition throughout history by meaning many things to many people which is not definition at all. Perhaps the combination of Ellul and McLuhan's ideas and theories might finally throw some light onto the old trickster. Fallon seems optimistic that we have a choice in the entropic, randomness of today's world. I would like to be positive but have my doubts. Image precludes the thought of words and one wonders if we are not already been overtaken with the trance of images.