Chapter 23
Technology and Terror

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ABSTRACT

The chapter discusses to what extent rationality plays a leading role not only in forming a culture of fear in Western societies, but it also paves the way for undemocratic attitudes and reactions. Our founding parents envisaged a world where progress, rationality, and technology played a vital role in building a better place to live. They never imagined the effects of 9/11 nor the financial market and stock crisis in 2008. The rise of uncertainty as a main cultural value of contemporary society raised the question of how much technology facilitated the evolution towards a more pacific, fairer, and safer world. We have witnessed how 9/11 strengthened a process of securitization where high technology was used to surveille citizens, accompanied by ethical dilemmas as illustrated by the Edward Snowden case. Securitization has reinforced authorities' trust in technology while terrorist attacks continue across the globe.

INTRODUCTION

Our founding parents envisaged a world where progress, rationality, and technology played a vital role in building a better place to live. They never imagined the effects of 9/11 nor the financial market and stock crisis in 2008. The rise of uncertainty as a main cultural value of contemporary society raised the question of how much technology facilitated the evolution towards a more pacific, fairer, and safer world. We have witnessed how 9/11 strengthened a process of securitization where high technology was used to surveille citizens, accompanied by ethical dilemmas as illustrated by the Edward Snowden case. David Lyon (2003) points to the public spaces of airports, city squares, and restaurants which are monitored by digital cameras and biometric technology. Securitization has reinforced authorities' trust in technology while terrorist attacks continue across the globe. Maximiliano Korstanje (2014) has argued that English-speaking cultures and technology were inevitably entwined. Technology facilitates prediction of events in the future, and thereby encouraged an excess of trust in technological solutions to social conflicts and problems. This is why the concept of risk is an essential element of Anglo culture

(Korstanje 2014; 2015): namely its association with capitalism and the desire to predict outcomes to assure profitability. Much of the connection between technology and English society goes back to the creation of modern science by Issac Newton (1643-1727), which coincided with Britain's leadership in capitalist development and global imperialism.

The advent of terrorism as justification of states' social control and growth of repressive apparatuses has led to ethical dilemmas in purported democracies. After Edward Snowden´s revelations, citizens understood the limits of democracy as well as the darkest side of state terrorism. The rational nation state, far from enhancing the well-being of its citizens, manipulates the fear instilled by terrorism to increase social control and subordinate private life to the government. This chapter explores ethical issues of electronic surveillance, which is ostensibly applied to thwart terrorism, but which has the effect of undermining democracy in the United States and the developed world. The main thesis is that the apparent conflict of security versus surveillance is what keeps terrorism alive. In the first section, we discuss how the use of electronic cybernetics produces a dissociation between morality and action. This leads to question to what extent digital technology can prevent disasters. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, if not before, science has been instrumentalized to protect the interests of the status quo and to try to control the market. Instead of understanding facts as they are or save lives, science became employed and deployed to reducing risks and losses of wealth. The excess of information produced by capitalism obscures reality for decision makers, and contributes to a permanent state of emergency (Mueller and Stewart 2016).

Robert Boguslaw (1965) noted rise of a new utopian class, composed of aficionados of technology and high-tech design. This technophilia fed the maximization of profits over ethics. Today's alienation, he said, derives from the powerlessness to accept probability as a mainstream cultural value for society. He opined that reliance on technology increasingly promotes a moral indifference so long as their behavior coincides with profitability. Decades later, Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio made similar arguments.

For Baudrillard, technology plays a crucial role in configuring a hypothetical scenario rooted in the future, but with disciplinary practices. He argued that this state of affairs was accelerated by 9/11, which promoted a parallel reality where pseudo-events prevail. Baudrillard referred to Steven Spielberg's movie, *Minority Report,* as depicting his thesis about the convergence of the future with the present. In the movie certain people are clairvoyant about future crimes, thereby allowing for neutralizing criminals before they can commit offenses. The movie raises the question of how a crime can be punished before its commission. Baudrillard points to the War on Terror and US counter-terrorism strategies as using similar methods, but which in reality legitimate US geopolitical control of the World. As Baudrillard construes current policies, fear paves the way toward increasing paranoia which is a product of the multiplication of information and the hegemony of object-sign (Baudrillard, 2006).

In Baudrillard´s view, the 9/11 attacks represented the clash of triumphant globalization at war with itself and unfolded a fourth world war: the first put and end to European Supremacy and to the era of colonialism; the second put an end to Nazism; and the third to Communism. Each one brought us progressively closer to the single world order of today, which is now nearing its end, everywhere opposed, everywhere grappling with hostile forces. This is a war of fractal complexity, waged worldwide against rebellious singularities that, in the manner of antibodies, mount a resistance in every cell. (Kellner, 2005: 3)

For his part, Paul Virilio warned about the dictatorship of virtuality as a new mechanism of generating commitment and exclusion. He agrees that by means of the imposition of stereotypes mass media

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