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The Culture-Technology Dynamic: Creator-Destroyer

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Abstract: The article is an analysis of technology as a trickster archetype. This is particularly about the cultural functioning and perception of technology in America, and about the relationship between technology and corporate business. The article draws from the tradition of Lewis Mumford's cultural studies of technology, and includes a large variety of American examples of the archetype. Technology is identified as the Trickster archetype, that is as a character, not an attribute or prop. Thus, technology turns out to be an elusive, tricky character who eludes human attempts to define it or exploit it.

Keywords: technology, archetype, trickster, corporation

Goals and Definitions

The challenging culture-technology relationship is one of those subjects that are there but never quite *there*. But there nonetheless. You get to it by using various angles of approach, like Menelaus when he engaged with the shape-changing god Proteus. It is not an issue confined to one discipline. Substance and angles shift. It is not an issue confined to one time or country. Many components of the relation change over time because that is what culture and technology do. The relationship is a culture universal, like trade, education, family, medicine, engineering, government, or hospitality. It is a universal constant with particular differences.

Archimedes flourished in Greek culture around 250 BCE when libraries had “books” that you unwrapped like paper towels to read and it was considered bizarre if you didn’t read out loud. Doctors believed disease was spread by evil-smelling vapors, a miasma neither germs nor viruses. Night lighting was by spark-showering torches or greasy oil lamps. When most people used communal toilets like picnic benches in public spaces. And the technology of surveying was mostly done by virtue of knotted ropes, mathematics, and scientific principles probably borrowed or snatched from the Egyptians. Amid which engineering’s universal constants were there: measure, design, and build lasting structures for human use.

Hence this is a humble yet ambitious attempt to put a subject’s identity on trial under the hold of personal observation. This approach is a try—an *essai*—rather than one confined to a single, reassuring discipline. To try to observe in the sense, as melancholy Sherlock Holmes reprimanded the effervescent Dr. Watson: “You see, but you do not *observe*” (Conan Doyle 62). To take hold.

Next, to define. As Thomas Hobbes wrote in *Leviathan*, “The errors of Definitions multiply themselves” (24). And “[r]eason is nothing but reckoning of the Consequences of generall names agreed upon” (28). So secure the basic terms with which one understands whatever is under the curious eyeballs’ gaze. The goal is not, to paraphrase Montaigne in his *Essays*, to interpret the interpretations, to write glosses about glosses “There is more trouble in interpreting interpretations than in interpreting the things themselves, and there are more books on books than on any

other subject. We do nothing but writ comments on one another.” (Montaigne 349). But to focus on the thing.

These things being three. First, *culture*, a term that has been over-complicated by many. I like to think of the beginning of this modern *Alice in Wonderland* pursuit of this term’s meaning as the 247 page *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, edited by A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn in 1952. In which these two fathers of modern anthropology conclude that the temporary, long-winded formula they arrived at for *culture* “will be modified and enlarged in the future” (Kroeber and Kluckhorn 181). The present author will assume, *au contraire*, that culture is not that complicated. *Culture* is the process of growth and development by which people are shaped. It is a verb, not a noun. It is clear what it is. How it works varies immensely, and therein lies its labyrinthian variety.

Second, *technology*. Which is the transformation and application of science. Hence, at root, from the Greek “*tekhnologiā*,” *systematic treatment of an art or craft*: “*tekhnē*,” *skill*. *Science* from the Latin “*scientia*,” *to know; knowledge, learning*. Technology is an idea materialized (*American Heritage Dictionary*). In this essay I use the word “tool” as synonymous with technology; as one would use the word “plant” as synonymous with agriculture.

Third, the culture-technology relationship is a feedback loop. The culture-technology association must interact to exist. They are not two static neighbors. Men and women create tools, the tools in turn move back and effect people’s development; which rhythm continues like a multi-leveled perpetual motion machine.

Constant computer use and digital saturation in our own time has had a vast array of social, spiritual, and political effects. Along with the down-to-earth consequences of eyestrain, carpal tunnel syndrome, and posture-related injuries. In the ancient Native American Anasazi culture of the current American southwest, their essential diet was corn—which they probably considered existed by grace of a kachina-like, seed-geminating god like the Hopi’s Muyingwa. At the same time the Anasazi people used sandstone pestles to grind down their corn and subsequently chewed on sand along with their corn and ground down their teeth to nubbins at a young age.

The culture-technology relationship is a Möbius strip of sorts that affiliates both the tools created and the shaping effect of mankind’s technology. How and why do cultures nourish this? How is the tool shaped by the hand that uses it and vice versa? What is it about technology that so appeals to human nature?

Benjamin Franklin defined man as a “tool making animal” (Boswell 186). To what effect? We can’t interview the first monkey-man who threw his first tool-stick into the air in Stanley Kubrick’s movie *2001* (1968). But we do have the reports of history and legend, archeology and anthropology, civilization studies and myth to help us figure this out. Can technology be personified to be better understood and managed?

The Tool as an Attribute of the Trickster Archetype

A random rock, a deliberate hammerstone, a convenient stick, social cohesion, language? What is the Ur-tool? Whatever it was archaeologists and anthropologists

have long concluded that the evolutionary development of tools, body, and brains are intimately related in the human species. From the Age of Enlightenment to the present day, the generally agreed-upon hypothesis is that to hammer, jimmy, ply, sieve, lever or tool use words is essential to human identity. Men and women are the *makers*, creators, doers, powerful and influential tool users.

A lot of dexterity is involved. The tool is both utilitarian and non-utilitarian. It is a two-handed, equiposed thing. Tool application is hard-core practical *and* abstract. It cuts. It is conceived. This is true as far back as contraptions can be traced and understood—from the hominid Oldowan tool culture (Shea 2020, 45) that first appeared 2.5 million years ago, to the Mousterian hominids of 100,000 to 40,000 years ago (Nowell and Davidson 2010).

Tools caused the human line to go from latency to fulfillment of a more thumb-dominated hand, increased mental capacity, a more erect stature and reduced dentition, and put a premium on manual skill and foresight that favored the rapid growth of the forebrain—important for receiving and processing sensory information, thinking, perceiving, producing and understanding language, and controlling motor function (Stout and Chaminade 2012).

The tool was humanity's first muse.

Language is the guiding-hand tool. Some thing is created from no thing, as Julian Huxley observed: "Words are tools which automatically carve concepts out of experience" (J. Huxley 1948, 8). Human language is reason's instrument, semi-divine because it forms beings from the dust of the ground. Logos.

Human history becomes an accumulation of lessons learned, corrections acquired or overlooked, new truths enunciated, gained, lost and gained again. The rest of Earth's sentient beings have instincts. People have history. Humankind advanced as words, traditions, mental and physical *6hji*tools combined to give mankind their dominant place among earth's living organisms.

To make a tool is probably not a universal human ability or desire. It takes a certain kind of person. Again, to reference Franklin, along with Samuel Johnson and James Boswell, "'I think,' said Boswell, 'Dr. Franklin's definition of *Man* is a good one—'A tool-making animal.'" Replied Johnson: "But many a man never made a tool" (179).

The Maker and The Made

Good question. Dip into myth, legend, and religion. They pick up where science and history leave off. Filtered down through the ages by choice, chance, and apotropaic use. The great legends are cautionary warnings. The Judeo-Christian *Genesis* myth of the tool and the Greek Homeric legends offer us two complementary and contrasting takes on this issue.

In *Genesis* Cain kills Abel. The Bible nakedly states: "And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him." (*Genesis* 4:8; King James). But no tool is mentioned. It takes a while, but glosses on *Genesis* 4.8 by the seventh century, state the jawbone of an ass as Cain's murder weapon (Scheirer 2015).

The devil is in the details and in the family story. Cain's descendant was Tubal-cain, who lived and worked as a blacksmith in mankind's first city of Enoch. According to legend—*Genesis*, 4: 22—Tubal-cain was the first toolmaker, some interpret he made plows, some cutting instruments. One thing is clear, in Judeo-Christian pre-history this man of evil lineage is the primal Homo Faber.

The Greek Homeric tradition begins tools with the metallurgy god of fire and volcanoes, blacksmiths and artisans, Hephaestus. Like the Cains, he's unruly, a malcontent. He is marked from birth as a cripple, his wife the promiscuous Aphrodite. The unruly, quick-witted Prometheus who stole fire from the gods to give to mankind matches him in legend. Mankind derive the tools and energy that define them, that give them dominance over animals and help them contend with each other, from a divine malcontent and an outcast.

Men rather than women play a significant role in this primal development. (Leaving aside Eve and Pandora in a grey area between gullible and guilty). Nevertheless Lewis Mumford in his *The City in History* argued that technology was gendered from its inception with the pounding, aggressive "masculine weapons and tools of the hunter and miner—the spear, the bow, the hammer, the axe, the knife" (Mumford, *The City in History* 15). Then people moved into settlements or villages where women became more important and people developed enveloping, receptive kinds of tools "for holding and enclosing, whether it be a lover or a child"; what's important here are "the orifices and sacs, in mouth, vulva, vagina, breast, womb" that dominate in an "age of stone and pottery utensils, of vases, jars, vats, cisterns, bins, barns, granaries, houses" (16). In all cases, the value given to the tool in Western civilization by virtue of its legendary origins and historical traces is clearly problematic. Male or female, it is a creator-destroyer of dubious nature.

Toolmaking as a Symbolic Image and Archetype

Nations seek symbolic embodiments. Flags and animals are specially important, as are the nation's heraldic emblems, stirring anthems, and a nation's singular heroes, such as Lincoln or Bismarck, whose lives are related in narratives about decisive actions, so that their representations acquire symbolic power. Because these forces are real and unreal. They work because they are a coruscating bundle of values or are living people; because they are both ideal and real, glorious and gritty.

Consider the animal. Kenya and England have the lion as national symbol. England has the bull dog as well. USA has the soaring bald eagle and Mexico an eagle holding a snake in its beak perched on a nopal cactus plant. France has the cock rooster and India has the tiger and the peacock. The list goes on. But it is more than a list. It is more than public relations. The animal that represents the nation is the ideal of the nation made real, with all its strengths and weaknesses. In anthropological terms it is totemic, a spiritual embodiment as collective representation in Emile Durkheim's designation of that term (Durkheim 230).

The national animal symbol is also multiple. The juxtapositional amalgam of India's peacock is perhaps the most striking example. Follow the animal's behavior pattern to see better how it is like the nation. The French cock rooster loves his

barnyard and his food. The French also have a saying: “it is the only bird that tries to fly to heaven—with its feet in shit.” The British lion? Rolly-polly Boris Johnson was alternately mocked and admired by the British national press as a bumptious roaring lion. The American eagle is an exceptionally powerful and beautiful beast, but also a devious bird of prey, authoritarian and arrogant among others. As D. H. Lawrence wrote of the magnificent bird in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), it proclaims “‘We are the masterless.’ That is what the American Eagle shrieks. It’s a Hen-Eagle” (Lawrence 17).

Likewise the animal has a primal attraction; it is anthropomorphic. Consider Disney’s resilient Mickey Mouse figure who came of age during the Great Depression, interwar era. He personified the plucky resilience, good humor, and endearing clumsiness and misery of the ordinary man, who was totally capable—as in The Sorcerer’s Apprentice sequence in *Fantasia* (1940)—of making a catastrophic mess out of the most ordinary things.

I think the same process of explication by embodiment is appropriate for major institutions and branches of knowledge with the archetype. This offers a fresh facet with which to understand the multi-faceted culture-technology dynamic.

The Business of Archetypes

As far as the author has been able to determine, an appropriate use of the fuller psychological archetype for culture and technology studies has yet to be developed. In business, Marketing and Sales Studies use the term “archetype” in various ways. Essentially, the word is equal to brand identity. You buy and drive a Lexus automobile, drink a Coke or Bud Light and the product answers the question: “What do I belong to? Who am I?” You fit into that archetype. You are branded by the brand. Lexus says you are a major investment person, a major achiever, and reliable. Or “Give me a soda” and drink a Coke—you are a regular guy or gal. While with Bud Light, the target-customer definition could be more creepy, as the slogan says on the bottle’s label: “The perfect beer for removing ‘no’ from your vocabulary for the night.”

Business and Management Studies use “archetype” for the consistent set of rules and processes, the values, that dominate a company organization (Hinings and Greenwood 1052). It is the sound model or pattern by virtue of which the company prospers. I haven’t found that Business and Management Studies specially use the Jungian figurative pantheon system of archetypes. That’s there in Marketing and Sales Studies or Departments with the mother, explorer, lover, creator, seducer or everyman figure which the consumer is invited to—or flattered into—identifying with. This process often works with a current attractive celebrity, as with George Clooney’s Nespresso ads which began in 2014 and extend to the present day across the globe.

Tricky Business: Creating Typology

We work typological units, such as literary genres or biological species, building blocks, the vocabulary and grammar of critical argument. We need types as well in the

sociology of knowledge and critical inquiry of society's institutions. As Max Weber wrote, because typology is a "means of orientation. It does not teach a philosophy of its own... [rather, types] offer a rational consistency which is rarely found in reality. But they *can* appear thus in reality and in historically important ways, and they have. Such constructions make it possible to determine the typological locus of a historical phenomenon" (Weber 347). Like the animal symbols of nations, types are totemic and provide collective representation. They are value bundles. They offer multiple meanings. They are subliminal signs and offer much more than can be said, often powerfully visual and iconic. Types provide a bridge to shared, recognizable cultural values and thus reinforce community. They are sacred figures become secular and the secular become sacred (Durkheim 101-108).

Enter the trickster figure as both the embodiment of technology and an influential reinforcement of The Powers That Be. Enter the polymorphous. Which is motley—as the jester; multifarious—as commerce; sundry—as indiscriminate and anywhere as suits the trickster's fancy.

This idea, this figure, has been staring us in the face for ages in history and legend, fact and fiction. Mark Twain saw the identity of technology embodied in the trickster amid culture in the character of US engineer Hank Morgan in his tragic-comic novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). The United States, a social paragon of technology for the last two centuries, has produced an embarrassment of riches concerning the interplay of technology and culture due to the nation's principle of free speech that encourages criticism of government and big business technology in the trickster comic, the variety show, novel, and short story.

US literature, folklore, cinema, TV and popular entertainment at all levels is rife with the trickster figure. He or she is usually an all-American business man or woman, who may sell the latest technological wonder fresh from the oven or press the flesh and be a horse trader of wily means. He or she is sometimes a noble sad sack figure, like Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949). Sometimes the trickster figure is a flim-flam man or woman con man, extending from the small town banker and horse trader in *David Harum* (novel by Edward Noyes Westcott: 1898; film: 1934); to Professor Harold Hill in *The Music Man* (1962); to the Hollywood prostitute character of Vivian Ward in 1992's *Pretty Woman*; to the hate-him-or-love-him charismatic demagogue US President Donald J. Trump. As present in US literature, folklore, cinema, TV and popular entertainment, it is perhaps usually not required that the trickster is technologically adept, though technology can be the archetype's principal tool. Think of Trump and Twitter, for example.

US playful criticism of tricky business by means of fanciful entertainment functions as a safety valve, offers cathartic effect that distracts from politics, changes little, and is big on appeasement—as the deadly, amusing public arena games in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy (novel: 2008-2010; movies: 2012-2015) points out by satiric innuendo and "thought-models for the ordering of existence" (Mannheim 5). A twentieth and twenty-first century example here of persons and variety shown would be the brilliant humorist Will Rogers (1879-

1935), who said: "There is no credit to being a comedian, when you have the whole Government working for you. All you have to do is report the facts. I don't even have to exaggerate" (O'Brien 157). Plus Americans have had the weekly appearance of excoriating trickster teams with *Saturday Night Live's* on-going skits about the foibles of US politics, politicians, and big business, from 1975 to the present day. This has been a specially intensifying, pulsating dynamic since the 1960s-70s era. Specially since, as Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka ironically said of that pivot-pointe period of rapid, progressive social evolution: "We won the culture, they won the politics" (Baraka).

Enter Trickster: How and Why

Technology is the trickster of human civilization. As such, it has been and remains a great creator-destroyer force. How and why? *How?* Because with the culture-technology dynamic the "ultimate criterion of truth or falsity is to be found in the investigation of the object," as Karl Mannheim wrote in his sociology of knowledge study *Ideology and Utopia*. "The examination of the object is not an isolated act; it takes place in a context which is colored by values and collective-unconscious, volitional impulses... a matrix of collective activity, which provides not only the general questions, but the concrete hypothesis for research and the thought-models for the ordering of existence" (5).

Why? Well, turn to Carl Gustav Jung for clarification of the trickster archetype. As Jung argued, and as Thomas Mann explored to great depth in his epic *Joseph and His Brothers* novel (1933-1943), the archetype is always with us. It is derived from the human experience and ever present in human unconscious. The archetype comes in different forms—as mother, explorer, lover, creator, sage, seducer, everyman figure. And one form is the trickster, who embodies technology and its promotion, and takes the lead in the culture-technology relation.

Most of the world's folklore has an important trickster figure, a roguish, vital power player; not psychotic, but deceitful; the thief who's capable of loyalty or betrayal. For America's indigenous people it is the coyote or the raven who stole fire from the gods for man and taught them how to fish. In Celtic mythology, and Shakespeare, it is Puck. In English folklore, Robin Hood. In Slavic folklore it is Leshy, "a sportive spirit who enjoys playing tricks on people, though when angered he can be treacherous" ("Leshy"). In Greek mythology it is Prometheus, Hermes, Odysseus, Sisyphus and others. (Odysseus illustrates how cocky the trickster is. The man who invented the Trojan Horse typically wears a sailer's cap—yet his great enemy, who constantly tries to kill Odysseus, is Poseidon, god of the sea. To whom Odysseus cocks his hat.)

According to Jung's "On the Psychology of the Trickster-Figure," in Judeo-Christian myth it is Yaweh of the Old Testament and New who creates and destroys and creates again "with not a few reminders of the unpredictable behavior of the trickster" (Jung 161). Jung lists a range of picaresque characters from European folklore as examples: "Pulcinellas, Cucorognas, Chico Sgarras, and the like" (169), and the long list goes on (167-170), ambivalent and vital, including a variety of characters who combine contradictory tendencies in the unconscious (noble

criminals, clever fools, omnipotent scapegoats, servant kings, hermaphrodites). The figure is pre-eminently adaptable, ambivalent, unstable and future-oriented, in the sense that the trickster subverts the authority of the past:

Anyone who belongs to a sphere of culture that seeks the perfect state somewhere in the past must feel very queerly indeed when confronted by the figure of the trickster. He is a forerunner of the saviour, and, like him, God, man, and animal at once. He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness. (169)

Thus, while the trickster figure is capable of “orgies of destruction” (161), it remains ever playful, but not aimless, if for nothing more than pursuing the pleasures of power.

The Tool and the Trickster

The trickster tells us much about the nature of the tool. The tool like the trickster embodies a value. Material culture can be of heroic stature, associated with rightful sovereignty and near-magical powers, as the plow and the gun were among nineteenth century frontier Americans. But usually the ambiguous trickster is figurative. The trickster tool cuts both ways. Trickster gods are multifunctional, from Loki the mischief maker in the North to Hermes god of the roads among the ancient Greeks; “Hermes the messenger... [and] the god of those who use the roads—travelers, merchants and thieves, who are not always clearly distinguished” (Kramer et al. 254).

The trickster is powerful but by no means always successful. The plow breaks. The gun won’t shoot. The god goofs. As does Coyote among the tribes of the American Southwest who can be a clever deceiver or a numbskull, as one sees as well in his Wile E. Coyote presentation in the Warner Brothers Road Runner cartoons (1949-). The trickster figure often first delivers the tool to mankind, as Prometheus gave man fire, as Eve gave knowledge of good and evil. The tool is this force of change, a change figure and agent, a product like a Ford automobile or a classic Walt Disney cartoon that’s signatured by its giver or maker.

Like the trickster, the tool is a specially libidinous thing and once started can keep propagating without measure, like the children of arch-trickster Cain or the many nameless, nasty brooms of Mickey Mouse in Walt Disney’s marvelous and terrifying “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” segment in *Fantasia* (1940). The new tool, like the trickster, is a paradoxical device of stability and change. It brings a new order but alters the old.

As such, the trickster and the tool are necessary irritants to progress. Like the trickster, the tool is born and born again: “travels through the world, develops self, and creates for mankind haphazardly, by chance, by trial and error [and often] without advance planning, he reenacts the process that is central both to perception and creation, to the constant human activity of making guesses and modifying them in light of experience—the process of ‘schema and correction’” (Babcock-Abrahams 181). That is, if it doesn’t work this time, try again, make a new tool, try a new trick.

Toolmaking and Technology as Trickster Attributes: The Revenge, the Tool, the Trickster

The historian of technology and culture Edward Tenner argues convincingly that technology allows and encourages a revenge effect. That is, the “unintended consequence of mechanical, chemical, biological, and medical ingenuity” (T6). This revenge is “not what we do intentionally against one another. It is the tendency of the world around us to get even, to twist our cleverness against us. Or it is our own unconscious twisting against ourselves” (Tenner 5). Like the trickster, technology’s activities in the playing fields of culture exhibit great creative and ambiguously beneficial powers. It is more than a metaphor, more than an implied comparison; this is, I argue, the archetypal nature of the thing. The trickster, as technology with his great creative powers is “often bringing such defining features of culture as fire... yet he constantly behaves in the most anti-social manner we can imagine” (Babcock-Abrahams 147).

Technology, like most of the science it derives from, has generally been an in-between force. Civilization moves on from one to the next form of technology. It plays a dual socio-cultural role between past and future, loser and winner, good and evil, boundary-making and boundary-breaking, like the list of marginal figures, various social and literary trickster types like the outsider, Bohemian, wanderer, clown, expatriate, thief, rogue, “picaro,” bastard, Don Juan, Prometheus, Hermes figures.

As mentioned in the list by C.G. Jung, the trickster’s ambiguity is a necessary dualism. The trickster is a boundary force. Greeks used Hermes, the herm, a squared stone pillar with a carved head on top—typically of Hermes—in ancient Greece as a boundary marker or a signpost. Here lies intermediate power. Technology is where mankind’s body ends and its extension into machinery—from pocket knife to two hundred petaflops computer—happens.

The Setting of Trickster Stories as a Technological Product: Place, Space, and Meaning

Trickster technology needs two different kinds of places, peculiar places closed and open. On the one hand, enclosed. From the appropriately underground dwellings of the bestial engineers the Morlocks in Herbert George Wells’s *The Time Machine* (1895) to the hidey-hole work spaces of car mechanics or the dismal factory assembly lines of Detroit in the first half of the twentieth century. Dank and dark specially when technology is being invented and developed at its most dynamic rate. The implication being that technology needs to develop under the earth, it is a subterranean power; not birthed on the Earth but in nooks and crannies and “among those dark Satanic mills” (Blake 256).

On the other hand technology needs the marketplace, the open, public space of free enterprise at a crossroads of past and future; a place of old and young where its new goods can be hawked. In the marketplace social status is in flux. What’s costly goes to the highest bidder and signs that person wealthy and elite.

Technology as trickster is a force that needs must negate and violate custom as it develops. In Western Europe and the Americas of the 1980s: out with electric typewriters, in with desk computers. In England's 1811-1816 era out with hand looms and craft skills and the Luddites, in with the new, automated textile machinery.

Psychological Characteristics of a Sociocultural Function

The Canadian documentary *The Corporation* (2003) examines the nature of this entity by considering it as a person. Logically so since legally in the United States—due to the case of *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad* (1886)—the Supreme Court held that the Fourteenth Amendment applied to corporations (Bashkow 296). A corporation has “corporate personhood” (Hamilton, 32). The theory of legal person goes back to Roman law, and is a fixture in most civil-law systems (Adriano 101-105), allowing for the counterintuitive treatment of institutions as persons, with interaction between “natural persons” (people) and “juridical persons” (non-people). The treatment of corporations (American ones) as “moral persons” has been increasingly controversial (French; Iwai). There is even a “collective soul” theory of legal personhood, which argues that non-human legal entities can be treated as persons because they have “souls” that cannot be reduced to the sum of individual human souls of their workers, shareholders and managers (Musgrave 55-94). In view of such theories, if it was possible to “psychoanalyze” industrial corporations, they would display, like individual tool makers, the qualities of the trickster archetype (Bashkow 299-300).

The US Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship to all persons “born or naturalized in the United States,” including formerly enslaved people, and provided all citizens with “equal protection under the laws,” extending the provisions of the Bill of Rights to the states (United States Senate, *Landmark Legislation*). Corporations are legally persons (even if they are not human). This is due to the grace of the “artificial person theory.” Thus, as the US Senate Judiciary Committee explained in a public statement of 2011: “corporations are not people at all but rather they are the artificial creation of human beings and are given personhood status solely as a legal fiction to facilitate commerce” (United States Senate, Judiciary Committee, *Corporate Personhood* 3). From the perspective of cultural research, it seems like a masterful and audacious sleight of hand, truly worthy of the trickster.

As Roger Ebert concisely explained the factual, almost-fantastic situation which *The Corporation* makes clear, then:

If Monsanto and WorldCom and Enron are indeed people, what kind of people are they? The movie asks Robert Hare, a consultant who helps the FBI profile its suspects. His diagnosis: Corporations by definition have a personality disorder and can be categorized as psychopathic. That is because they single-mindedly pursue their own wills and desires without any consideration for other people (or corporations) and without reference to conventional morality. They don't act that way to be evil; it's just, as the scorpion explained to the frog, that it's in their nature. (Ebert 2004)

One can follow a similar line of reasoning for technology, which corporations champion and sell, even those that do not actually operate any manufacturing business. Not just by making, but also by selling, promoting, or investing indirectly, corporations can be technology's Sol Hurok and Bill Graham, its great impresarios.¹ If a technological corporation is a person, then it can be generally described by means of an archetype, as a trickster. Thus, technology fulfills its sociological functions through trickster-figures, and by extension technology itself can be described as a trickster; this is the archetypal role of technology in society. An archetype does not reduce the empirical complexity of technology; unless one sees archetypes themselves as a form of reduction. Archetypes do the opposite by connecting with a sacred-in-the-secular tradition that extends back millennia, includes an enormous range of civilizations. Enhanced as well by Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore's point about how all human artifacts "are extensions of some human faculty—psychic or physical" (26).

There are six basic interpretations of technology's socio-cultural role as trickster—herein based on one of the Jungian reading of this figure (Babcock-Abrahams 147-186).

1. First, technology presents itself as something inconsequential, a joke or something of little importance. Technology-related problems are sometimes presented as a passing phase. Thus, technology is frivolous and artificial, ever-changing form of trickery. Fire, steam, electricity, atomic power—they are all various and passing forms of energy. They die out because they are surpassed.
2. Second, on the other hand, lots of technology has an unthinkable, unmentionable conduct, but it tries to downplay its frightening quality, often by misrepresentation in terms of gadgetry and entertainment. Let it be; it is foolish. It is only a clown.
3. Third, it is a generational thing, a nexus of intergenerational difference and conflict. Concurrently with Jung's description of the trickster, quoted above, technology is important as a protest of new against old. People of a certain age saw that with video cassettes and VCR machines and have seen it since again with computers.
4. Fourth, the technology-trickster forces overall existing conditions in culture to be reevaluated, since new technology possibly leads to changes for the better. Thus one has the advances of bio-medicine, such as the extraordinarily rapid development of the Covid-19 vaccine.
5. Fifth, technology-trickster creates cognitive dissonance and forces people to distinguish between the different factors in society. It is an illuminating force. An example of this would be how penetrating investigative journalism has become because of the new digital technology at its disposal.
6. Sixth and last, the technology-trickster restructures community into "relatively undifferentiated comitatus" (Turner 96), about a new egalitarianism of status and roles—as seen in the promises of everyone-has-a-voice social media

1 Sol Hurok (1888-1974) greatest American impresario of his generation, for bringing European classical music and ballet to the USA; Bill Graham (1931-1991), along with Albert Grossman, the greatest rock music impresario of his generation.

platforms or in the spread of labor-saving home appliance gadgetry since the 1920s.

Technology as Trickery and as Trickster-Figure: Outcomes and Conclusions

There is a long list of what makes technology remarkable that scholars, artists, savants and the ordinary men and women who use the tools have explored and analyzed for centuries. The brooding American aristocrat Henry Adams brilliantly pinpointed this quality of technology when he argued that human history is a sequence—not the sequence of men, time, thought or society, but “the sequence of force”—its shaping, driving machinery (287). Later, in 1951, this thought was echoed optimistically by Gordon Childe in *Man Makes Himself*. Perturbed by the horrendous loss of life during the Civil War, Henry Adams included this dark prophecy in a letter to a friend. The letter was written a few days after the Battle of Shiloh in April 1862:

I firmly believe, that before many centuries more, science will be the master of man. The engines he will have invented will be beyond his strength to control. Someday, science shall have the existence of mankind in its power, and the human race commit suicide by blowing up the world. Not only shall we be able to cruise in space, but I'll be hanged if I see any reason why some future generation shouldn't walk off like a beetle with the world on its back, or give it another rotary motion so that every zone should receive in turn its due portion of heat and light. (Levenson et al. 290)

As the passage suggests, for Adams the sequence of force operated in a manner of a trickster: it was infinitely dynamic and ambiguous, capable of destroying, but also of improving, upturning, and redirecting the entire world.

At the same time, mankind defends itself using tools. Look to works that have continued to be referenced to try to unravel this problem from its start. Consider, as Gordon Childe argued in his classic *Man Makes Himself* (1951), how the various Industrial Revolutions were preceded by technological developments of various kinds (18-19, 27). Innovation was introduced by virtue of necessity, because people among all life forms must keep inventing new ways to thrive and survive, “of making artificial substitutes for bodily defenses... to make himself protections against climate and weather, arms and weapons of attack and defense that, because they can be adapted and adjusted, are really superior to furs, or teeth, or claws” (20). Progress is mankind's necessary social heritage, not part of the human body, that can be laid aside at will; soon as the next change is necessary, it comes along.

However, progress in modern civilization encourages the need for speed, a quickened pace of change. By 1931 Aldous Huxley insisted in his essay “Wanted, A New Pleasure” that “[s]peed provides the one genuinely modern pleasure” (9). Everything has got to be done *now*. The faster the better. The person, the machinery, the job. USA technology and media adoption rates tell a fascinating story. In America it took over one hundred years for the newspaper industry to get its goods into 50% of US households. It took the telephone, invented 1876, close

to seventy years. It took electricity 43 years. Color television 17 years. Black and white TV 8 years. Oddly, interestingly, and probably for reasons of cost and lack of Internet at first, it took the personal computer 17 years. Yet by March 2019, 89.4% of the USA was penetrated by Internet. Unquestionably over the 19th to 21st centuries technology's adoption, household penetration, and intrusion rates have become faster than a dog running away with a bone (Digital Adoption Team).

NASCAR car racing mirrors the social reality. Then there's our newer, faster, Moore's-Law-driven computers. Or, earlier, aerodynamic design. Or our mass society health crazes (from grapefruit and tiger's milk to the sexy pineapple diet and crystal healing). Or information that answers all your questions *now* on the Internet. Or: Why didn't you answer my email yesterday?. Or: "The president of the Microsoft computer software manufacturer, Bill Gates, is determined to enable 45 million Africans to gain access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) by 2010" (Ovia).

After progress and speed, another of the trickster's attribute of technology is the importance of time. "The clock... is the key machine of the modern industrial age.... [It] is both the outstanding fact and the typical symbol of the machine... no other machine is so ubiquitous" (Mumford 1956, 36). Compare Bruegel the Elder's painting "The Harvesters" of 1565 ("The Haymaking") from his "The Four Seasons" cycle to a mechanical clock. The painting probably depicts late June, early July. It is a bunch of peasants in mid-summer who have been harvesting a field of hay or wheat and are now sitting down to eat in the middle of a hard-working, fertile day. It is a vision of nature's generous time by virtue of the gracious fecundity of the season, not by the technological tick.

In "The Harvesters" Bruegel sees a foreground: the world of nature, reaping, a sumptuous, peasant noontime meal in summer's heat and shade; mankind nestled in nature's bountiful lap. And a distant background: civilization, city, village life; lying in wait, and almost concealed: the church steeple the bell, the clock. The clock and the church peak around a distant corner like a thief in waiting, as an alternative force.

There's something sacred and artificial about time in our Western tradition. As suggested by Bruegel's "The Harvesters," does not its limit, its precision, its machinery, each crank of the church tower clock or pixelated number in a digital timekeeper signal less, not more, an awareness of death, of life passing more than life existing? In the painting, the clock is contrasted with the fullness of the peasant's noontime meal amid summer's heat and shade.

Over time in Western Civilization the clock and time keeping have become progressively more intimate. In the European 1300s the clock was the face of God, making sure that people worked punctually in monastic life: according to Mumford, one had the immense monastery clocks that kept time for regular prayers and devotions. In mid-14th century, clocks commonly divided the hour into sixty minutes and minutes into sixty seconds. By the late 1300s mechanical clocks in bell towers became common. By the 1500s small domestic clocks among the wealthy (Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* 15-21). In the nineteenth century the pocket watch, in the twentieth the wristwatch, and nowadays the cell phone

timekeeper. Ever more possessive. Man is a tool-making animal for sure. And a time-keeping animal too. *Fugit irreparabile tempus* (a phrase from Virgil's *Georgics*, book 3, often abbreviated to *Tempus Fugit*). In passing, not in depth, don't forget: Taylorism time; mass production and the assembly line; the Amazon time clock scandals; technology's advantages and disadvantages of the new, post-pandemic work-from-home choice or obligation (Guendelsberger).

Another attribute of technology-as-trickster is the trick it plays on nature and culture. Technology and culture make an odd couple; there is, for example, an undecided question about the possibility of a culture-specific, national style in technology, or even an "emotional strain" in it (Ferguson 3). The demarcation lines are unclear, as culture is the process of growth and development by which people are shaped in their environment, which is both man-made and natural; your language and institutions, your geography and weather (Loughran 312). This "cultural enframing of nature" also projects on the understanding of subjectivity (human self-definition): is it man *and* nature, man *in* nature, man *with* nature, or man *against* nature when they meet (Steigerwald 452; Epstein)? Which preposition hits the spot?

The machine does not necessarily isolate man from nature. It allows entrance and belonging. Think of the dream of James Cameron's *Avatar* series, green and high tech machined at the same time. Think of Spielberg's film *ET* when the boy rides the bicycle with ET in his basket all silhouetted by the moon and facilitated by virtue of the technologically-advanced extra-terrestrial with his telekinetic powers. "The machine does not isolate man from the great problems of nature but plunges him more deeply into them" (Saint-Exupéry 3).

For another attribute of the technology-trickster, consider communications technology. It is like a syringe needle that has managed to plunge deeper and deeper into skin, vein, bone, marrow. In the USA it began with the godlike presence of commercial radio in the living room advertising everything from vulgar "Spitto" cigars to local church schedules and classical music. And advanced. TV did not get into the skin of events with the ferocious immediacy, intimacy and omnipresence of closed circuit television (CCTV), the cell phone camera, or digital screens voyeuristically displaying people in all sorts of public and private places. The communications technology is a joker capable of broadcasting almost any information, known to fifteen people throughout the world or to everyone for fifteen minutes. It runs the whole political gamut from radical to liberal to cosmopolitan to mainstream to silent majority to conservative to far-right fringe. It is been useful for everyone in any way they can use the joker. Or the joker can use them.

However, fakes abound in everything from literature to politics, news to music, professors to taxi cabs. Fraudulence isn't new. But give fraudulence the speed, range, and accuracy possible with the new social media technology and one has a horse of another color. Technology changes but human nature does not. The Internet highway, and particularly now with AI, have opened enormous new avenues of exploitation to organized and government-sponsored crimes. It is a speedway without laws, regulation, or proper defense systems in place for the common public, businesses and governments. The Internet highway can be

Rollerball and *Mad Max* combined for organized crime and deceitful governments. The joker has gone wild.

The world does not yet have a consistent, reliable way to deal with the wealth of cyber gangsterism; it is hard to trap the tricksters. “Every time they build a better mouse trap the mice get smarter too” (*The Fortune Cookie*). States, companies, individuals try to catch up with the bad guys. Or not. Cyber technology’s diffusion gave the largest boost to crime since criminalizing alcohol in the US prohibition era helped develop American criminals into syndicates. But one can’t put the toothpaste back in the tube or the genie back in the bottle. Law lags behind technological development. Organized crime and unregulated businesses can surge ahead at times. “Men are only as good as their technical development allows them to be” (Orwell 60).

When it first went public back in the 1990s, the Internet and cyberspace were robustly democratic. Perhaps to a fault, since there was little or no regulation. Move fast and break things. But “all the ills of democracy,” according to an adage that John Dewey quoted as an “old” saying, “can be cured by more democracy” (325). Likewise, perhaps the only way to deal with the abuse of our advanced communications technology is more technology that regulates the beast. Put Frankenstein in chains. He is not our friend. Up to the present most technological changes were visible. Railroad tracks cut through the bison, Indians, and the prairies. Smokestacks blurred the blue sky with black soot. Superhighways sliced the land. But it becomes trickier. With the spread of computers we have moved into the era and area of invisible changes concerning the whole world of information about us. We cannot see what is going on, and it is disquieting. And maybe the changes are worse than invisible. They are concealed.

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