Technological *a priori* and Communicative Action in Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano*

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Abstract

This article examines the state of extreme mechanization in modern industrial societies, which leads to a strict separation of the various spheres of life and ultimately to the exclusion of the human element. The philosophers of the Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas in particular, have rigorously analyzed the inherently ideological function of technology in late capitalist societies. In *Player Piano*, Kurt Vonnegut's critical depiction of the extremely technologized and automated social world in a near future America slightly predates and even heralds the above-mentioned critical theorists' analyses of the ideological nature of technology under corporate capitalism. This study scrutinizes how the technocratic state in Vonnegut's novel utilizes technology to pacify and disempower the masses, challenging the notion that technology is merely a value-free accumulation of know-how. The devalued human subject and dehumanized society depicted in Vonnegut's anti-utopian narrative are discussed with reference to Marcuse's notion of 'one-dimensional society' and Habermas's theory of 'communicative action' to provide the critical framework for the analysis of the impoverishing and colonizing effects of technological rationality on the lifeworld.

Keywords: Technological rationality, colonization of the lifeworld, purposive-rational action, communicative action, Vonnegut.

Kurt Vonnegut'un *Otomatik Piyano* Adlı Romanında Teknolojik *a priori* ve İletişimsel Eylem

Öz

Bu makale, modern endüstri toplumlarında yaşantı sahalarını birbirinden keskince ayırarak nihayetinde insan unsurunu tamamen oyun dışına iten aşırı mekanikleşme olgusunu soruşturmaktadır. Özellikle Herbert Marcuse ve Jürgen Habermas odakta olmak üzere Frankfurt Okulu filozofları, geç kapitalizmin egemen olduğu toplumlarda teknolojiye içkin ideolojik işlevleri titizce irdelemişlerdir. *Otomatik Piyano* adlı romanında Kurt Vonnegut'un yakın geleceğin Amerika'sına ait aşırı derecede teknolojikleşmiş ve otomatikleşmiş bir toplum imgesini eleştirel olarak yansıtması, yukarıda adı geçen eleştirel kuramcıların teknolojinin şirket kapitalizmi dönemindeki ideolojik doğasına ilişkin analizlerini tarihsel olarak az bir farkla önceler ve hatta bir bakımdan bu analizlerin gelişimini haber verir. Bu çalışma Vonnegut'un roman dünyasında baskın olan teknokratik devletin teknolojiden faydalanarak insan kitlelerini nasıl etkisiz ve işlevsiz kıldığını incelemekte, bu sayede teknolojinin yalnızca değerden bağımsız bir pratik beceriler toplamı olduğu görüşüne karşı bir

itiraz ortaya koymaktadır. Vonnegut'un anti-ütopyacı anlatısında betimlendiği üzere değer yitimine uğramış insan öznesi ve insansızlaşmış toplumsal dizge, Marcuse'nin 'tek boyutlu toplum' nosyonuna ve Habermas'ın 'iletişimsel eylem' kuramına göndermeler eşliğinde ele alınacak, böylece teknolojik aklın yaşam-dünyası üzerindeki yoksullaştırma ve sömürgeleştirme etkisinin çözümlenebilmesi için gerekli eleştirel çerçeve sağlanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Teknolojik rasyonalite, yaşam-dünyasının sömürgeleştirilmesi, amaçsal-rasyonel eylem, iletişimsel eylem, Vonnegut**.**

INTRODUCTION

The trajectory of modernization has engendered a profound metamorphosis in the established social frameworks of Western societies, instigating a comprehensive reconfiguration of collective existence across economic, moral, and political dimensions. Amidst the myriad facets of modernization in both Europe and America, the ascendance of industrial progress and technological mechanization assumes a singular potency. These elements, rather than merely assuming a peripheral role, emerge as omnipresent and foundational constituents, permeating diverse social subsystems and organizational structures. This ubiquity of influence extends beyond the dichotomy traditionally ascribed to the base and superstructure, prompting a paradigm shift that challenges and eclipses the orthodox contours of Marxist ideological critique. It is here that a conceptual rupture occurs, necessitating a recalibration of our analytical framework. In essence, the pervasive impact of technology transcends its conventional role, giving rise to a compelling argument that extends beyond its utilitarian functions. The contention posited is that technology, by virtue of its capacity to instigate coercive social practices that permeate multiple strata of societal existence, warrants classification as an ideology in its own right. This assertion hinges upon its totalizing tendencies, wherein it not only molds the fabric of collective decision-making but also undermines the very foundations of individual agency. Thus, a more nuanced understanding is imperative, one that delineates technology not merely as a tool but as a formidable ideological force shaping the contours of contemporary socio-economic and political landscapes.

Among the science-fiction writers who had heeded the inevitable outcomes of rising technology were the writers of dystopian novels that displayed an eschatological flow of history inherent in the genre. These writers wrote with ample awareness of the destruction wrought by World War II. They circumspectly witnessed the technicization process in Western societies, the misconduct of which was among the causes of social alienation in the post-war period. While George Orwell and Aldous Huxley stand on the British side of this dystopian-prophesying, Kurt Vonnegut is a representative of the American side with his science-fiction works bestowed with dark humor and biting social criticism of politics and technological progress. His earliest novel, *Player Piano* (1952), is regarded as one of the most dramatic examples of the American science-fiction novels. It might be appreciated almost as a historical document reflecting the threshold phase of the sharp rise of technological rationality in America overshadowing the democratic and liberating potential of technical instrumentality. According to Burnett and Rollin (1997), Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, as a satirical anti-utopia, has long been overshadowed by the critical interest in Orwell and Huxley's dystopian novels; however, *Player Piano*'s "concerns are more relevant to the American industrial and corporate world today than are the largely political visions of Huxley and Orwell" (p. 17). Freese (2002) claims that Vonnegut's novel is a peculiar combination of components from Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932*)*, Zamyatin's *We* (1924), and Norbert Wiener's study on cybernetics, namely *The Human Use of Human Beings* (1950). On the other hand, Schriber (1971) locates *Player Piano* within the American tradition of utopian novels and aligns Vonnegut's work particularly with *Babbitt* (1922) by Sinclair Lewis. She asserts that Vonnegut's satirical work had been foreshadowed by the social reality displayed in *Babbitt* and that Vonnegut's anti-utopian world is in fact Lewis's "American dream realized, and regretted, but destined to be rebuilt" (Schriber, 1971, p. 103).

This satirical trajectory gains further historical context when examining the chronological alignment of Vonnegut's inaugural novel, *Player Piano,* which predates the seminal critical work *One-Dimensional Man*. Authored by Herbert Marcuse in 1964, the latter stands as a groundbreaking examination of social repression within advanced industrial societies. Marcuse, a preeminent philosopher affiliated with the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, commonly known as the Frankfurt School, brings a distinctive lens to the critique of societal structures. *Player Piano* can be

considered a precursor to Marcuse's pioneering work, offering a glimpse into the historical juncture when technological rationality in America began to ascend. Vonnegut's novel clearly shares overlapping themes with Marcuse's analysis of the hegemonic techno-industrial complex in advanced capitalist societies and thus could almost be taken as a case study in the light of Marcuse's comments on 'one-dimensional society' arising from the heavy technologization of cultures and public spheres. Furthermore, Jürgen Habermas, a second-wave philosopher of the Frankfurt School, took Marcuse's remarks on the logic of technological rationality forward and developed a more systematic approach toward the analysis of the ideological hegemonizing of the modern societies concerning the behavioral, communicative, and linguistic patterns of modern subjects. He dwelled more rigorously on the speech situations whereby individuals are dehumanized in a culturally impoverished and technologically reified society. Therefore, acclaimed critical works by Marcuse and Habermas, *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) and *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981) respectively, are going to set the background in this paper for a critical analysis of the ideological roots of technological *a priori* in Vonnegut's *Player Piano*. Furthermore, this theoretical framework will further include an analysis of the American socio-political structure dominated by the instrumental rationality as reflected in the novel's fictional post-World War III setting.

Purposive-Rationality and the Techno-Capitalistic Colonization of the Lifeworld

The roots of Marcuse and Habermas's critical social theories go back as early as Karl Marx's critique of the transformation of productive labor into abstract measurable units in industrial societies and Max Weber's analysis of modernity and rationalization (Fuchs, 2020, pp. 354-355; Wolff, 2019, pp. 175, 177). Following this strain of social criticism, György Lukacs's focus on social class as a historical subject, his concern for the reification of human relations and the rise of teleological rationality in capitalist societies, as he comprehensively deals with in his book *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), find a match in Frankfurt School philosophers' set of theories about the concept of instrumental reason (Fuchs, 2020, pp. 357, 363; Wolff, 2019, p. 178). Particularly in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, as the first-generation Frankfurt School theorists, criticize over-rationalization in philosophy as the legacy of enlightenment and positivism, which would later serve as tools for technocratic states. Furthermore, in *Eclipse of Reason* – also published in 1947 – Horkheimer demarcates 'objective reason' and 'subjective reason', the latter referring to an industrialization or instrumentalization of thinking and thus synonymously being used as 'instrumental reason' (Horkheimer, 2004, pp. 4, 14, 21-22). In this sense, subjective/instrumental reason is the capacity to carry out pragmatic mental functions and underlies the main human capability to perform goal-oriented actions.

Segueing into the narrative realm, *Player Piano* unfolds as it chronicles the incremental awakening of Paul Proteus within the confines of Ilium Works, a realm characterized by mechanization and industrial excess, where the normative pulse is one of goal-oriented action. Paul, as a manager of top rank, acts as an essential agent by assisting the operation of a drastically bureaucratized system. His awakening is a kind of critical re-experiencing of the dynamics of an industrial city organized around the efficiency principle. Vonnegut's caricatured depiction of the aftermath of World War III in Ilium, New York, vividly illustrates the urban assimilation to the systemic devaluation of individual existence and exposes the capitalistic imposition of technologically mediated life practices on the masses. The city is divided into three parts: "In the northwest are the managers and engineers and civil servants and a few professional people; in the northeast are the machines; and in the south, across the Iroquois River, is the area known locally as Homestead, where almost all of the people live" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 9). From the very beginning of the novel, this tripartite urban structure separates the system tools, the

system controllers, and the laymen in a very strict manner, marginalizing the common people at the bottom of an inviolable caste.

As observed by a wide range of social theorists from Weber to Habermas, social modernization, with capitalism as its historical moment, essentially begins with the differentiation of public domains under such divisions as media, exchange, law, and administration. This differentiation of spheres aims at obtaining maximum social efficiency and the coordination of individual behavior in parallel with systemic expansion. As in the example of the technocratically hegemonized city of Ilium, the main strategy to have control over life domains is by the mediation of technology. Andrew Feenberg underlines that "the technical is always already cultural" since it can only enter the social world by addressing social demands (quoted in Wolff, 2019, p. 174) and further contends that "[t]echnologizing a domain of life opens it to economic and political control" (1996, p. 60). Vonnegut illustrates technological mediation's role in political control by positioning his fictional universe after two industrial revolutions. The first mirrors the 19th-century historical reality, while the second is a fictitious, colossal hi-tech event seamlessly woven into the narrative chronology. How "the First Industrial Revolution devalued muscle work, then the second one devalued routine mental work" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 20) exposes the colonization of the domains of life that almost completely displaces the human element. Vonnegut's narrator satirically asserts that "[d]emocracy owed its life to know-how," (2000, p. 9) referring to the instrumental rationality that essentially homogenizes the human masses and creates the illusions of social progress and equality.

The elimination of manual labor is highlighted in the novel as one of the primary outcomes of the institutionalization of the technocratic state. As the system deems it economically profitable, machines have replaced both mental and manual labor in the productive segments of the society, with just a few areas of exceptions. In Paul Proteus's world, "any man who cannot support himself by doing a job better than a machine is employed by the government, either in the Army or the Reconstruction and Reclamation Corps" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 25), the latter also locally named Reeks and Wrecks and stands for merely repair work. Various instances of efficient replacements of human work by machines, ranging from bulky secretarial work to lower-echelon jobs, are exemplified in the novel. Habermas (1984), quoting from Weber, states that "the 'separation' of the worker from the material means of operation" is the founding basis of both the modern state and the private capitalist economy, and it is followed by political and cultural consequences "in the hands of the rationally calculating entrepreneur or leader" (p. 218). In Habermas's terms, societal rationalization and institutionalization of technocratic administration depend on the *purposive rationality* of entrepreneurial activity. Purposive-rational action designates the performance of instrumental reason that pursues to control and employ the potentials and resources of nature with maximum efficiency. This institutionalized societal rationalization requires "purposive-rational action orientations" that anchor the labor force to the systematically organized production process, to a calculable economic environment, to a legal system that guarantees this calculability, and finally to a state apparatus to provide the sanctions for the law (Habermas, 1984, pp. 218–219). At this point, a shift of critical focus from the relations of production to the oligarchy of managers in Ilium could be helpful in portraying the function of the top levels of the rigid social stratification that possess the control of the state-apparatus in the novel.

The close relationship between the bureaucracy and the technical apparatus is pregnant with several consequences pertaining to the administrative strategies in the organization of the society and labor. Bureaucracy and technology belong to different regions of purposive-rational action. However, bureaucracy masterfully takes advantage of the technical apparatus, creating fragmentation and even atomization in the social world of fictional Ilium. Habermas remarks about the atomization of society by the group of industry leaders as follows:

To the degree that economic and administrative operations are bureaucratized, however, the purposive-rationality of actions has to be secured independently of the value-rational judgments and decisions of organization members. Organizations themselves take over the regulation of actions, [. . .] then it [administration] can only be via the organizational model of "leader with a machine". In the domain of economics, this signifies the voluntarism of authoritarian business leaders; in that of politics, a plebiscitary democracy with charismatic leaders [Führerdemokratie]; and in both domains, an optimal selection of leaders (Habermas, 1984, p. 352).

This cult of 'charismatic leaders' should be considered in the parallel of an organizational model that generates subjects as dominated followers in the rationalized domains of action. In a further step, aspired by Adorno and Horkheimer, Habermas formulizes a correlation between "the growing autonomy of the subsystems of purposive-rational action" and "the self-alienation of individuals who have to form themselves, body and soul, in relation to the technical apparatus" (Habermas, 1984, p. 353).

It is by this cult of industry leaders that the American state system in *Player Piano* is operated. When asked to distinguish the present state system from an abhorred communism, Doctor Ewing J. Halyard from the United States Department of State explains to the Shah of Bratpuhr – the spiritual leader of a fictional eastern country who is on an official visit to the U.S. – how the system supposedly maintains freedom and democracy. Halyard justifies the way the automated, machine-run industry is implemented as follows:

The government does not own the machines. They simply tax that part of industry's income that once went into labor and redistribute it. Industry is privately owned and managed, and co-ordinated – to prevent the waste of competition – by a committee of leaders from private industry, not politicians (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 26).

However, ironically, this committee of industrialists is not less authoritarian than the communist politburo because whoever holds the industrial machinery holds the power. In this respect, Canavan (2015) includes *Player Piano* in a series of other Cold War science-fiction texts, such as Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke and Philip K. Dick's novels and short stories (along with movies like *Star Trek* and *Terminator*) where artificial intelligence and automated cognitive systems crush human freedom. He further argues that autonomous decision-making agents such as mega-computers in science-fiction novels of the period, in fact, allegorize the global market economy as a form of supercomputational agency as well as reflect the ideological anxieties about the repression of Sovietic planned economies (Canavan, 2015, pp. 689-691). Both economic models evoke a sense of agential complex—as over-rationalized forms of deliberation—that are beyond human comprehensibility and control (Canavan, 2015, pp. 686-687, 698, 703). In the novel, the industry leaders represent the body that organizes the state, legislation, domains of social action, and even the required behavior patterns in the public sphere. Being the elders of this group of leaders, Baer and Kroner stand out as towering figures among the managers and the chief engineers of the entire Eastern Division, of which the Ilium Works is but one small part. In other words, they are the archangels of technocratic control, strongly defensive of the status quo. As for the autonomy of the entire system and its independence from individual leaders, Paul has his own insights:

Paul had thought often of the peculiar combination of Kroner and Baer, and wondered if, when they were gone, higher management could *possibly duplicate* it. *Baer embodied the knowledge and technique of industry; Kroner personified the faith, the near-holiness, the spirit of the complicated venture* (emphasis added, Vonnegut, 2000, p. 46).

The real point of focus here is the fact that the replaceable nature of the leader figures within the inner logic of the system corresponds to the growing autonomy of both the system in general and the subsystems of purposive-rational action.

The transfer of power from the agency of individual leaders to the technocratic/technological rationale can be realized by the expansion of autonomy in system-growth. Instrumental reason takes the form of an ideology as such concretely in the form of technological rationality. In other words, ideology is inherent in the use of technology. As Herbert Marcuse puts forward in *One-Dimensional Man*, "[t]he technological *a priori* is a political *a priori* inasmuch as the transformation of nature involves that of man" (2006, p. 157). In *Player Piano*, the level of industrialization and mechanization already exceeds the limits of mere quantification of nature. They strike back to colonize the individuals and their life domains. By such an extreme mode of mechanization, the *logos* of technicality reproduces the instrumentalization of man in Vonnegut's world. To put the case in Marcuse's words, "the techniques of industrialization are political techniques; as such, they prejudge the possibilities of Reason and Freedom" (2006, p. 20).

The symbolic use of the player piano in the novel signals the replacement of individual autonomy and decision-making capacity with the autonomy of the machines. The large number of people spared for the Reconstruction and Reclamation Corps clearly denotes the marginalization of ordinary humans from the system of production. The efficiency principle, technologized life domains, the omnipresence of machine superintelligence, and its inherent ideology are substantially solidified by the presence of EPICAC XIV, the super-computer which is the latest of the EPICAC series. The wide expansion of instrumental rationality is displayed by the functions this almost omniscient electronic computing machine achieves:

> *And it was EPICAC XIV who would decide for the coming years how many engineers and managers and research men and civil servants, and of what skills, would be needed in order to deliver the goods; and what I.Q. and aptitude levels would separate the useful men from the useless ones, and how many Reconstruction and Reclamation Corps men and how many soldiers could be supported at what pay level and where, and . . .* (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 112).

The above-quoted passage quite precisely exemplifies the state of 'one dimensional society' as Marcuse's remarks are clearly in point to depict Vonnegut's anti-utopian world, particularly because "technology provides the great rationalization of the unfreedom of man and demonstrates the 'technical' impossibility of being autonomous, of determining one's own life" (2006, p. 162). In the novel, the instances of such unfreedom vary within all reaches of practical life, ranging from the presence of EPICAC to the daily use of small household gadgets. Anita, Paul's wife, is almost an unconscious victim and a consumer of a variety of practical gadgets. She is almost alien to herself outside the boundaries of know-how. What simply looks like a simple utilization of tools in fact renders the family unit open to control through an arranged surplus of electronic supply. And thus, the human organism experiences a defamiliarization towards its own nature. Most sarcastically, Paul Proteus asks Bud Calhoun, the gadgeteer, to devise a signaling device so that his cat could more easily smell and spot a mouse. This extreme use of technical devices brings out a blinding of the instincts, both animal and human. Ironically, the same cat is caught under an electronic sweeping machine, and after being spat by the machine the next instant, she dies, hitting an electrically charged fence when she was running to escape. The scene ominously foreshadows what may possibly befall the whole people of Ilium as subjects of a nightmarish technological civilization.

The way technology penetrates the human sphere would also be clarified at this point with reference to a new terminological distinction, in Habermasian terms, drawn between the *system* and the

lifeworld (Lebenswelt). Feenberg (1996), defines this pair of concepts and summarizes their relation in modern societies as follows:

> *This is the basis for the contrast that runs through* The Theory of Communicative Action *between* system, *media regulated institutions, and* lifeworld, *the sphere of everyday communicative interactions. The central pathology of the modern societies is the colonization of lifeworld by system. The lifeworld contracts as the system expands into it and delinguistifies dimensions of social life which should be linguistically mediated. Habermas follows Luhmann in calling this the 'technicization of the lifeworld'* (p. 56).

Habermas (1987) also calls this the 'colonization of the lifeworld' (p. 325). According to sociologists from Durkheim to Weber, the life-contexts in modern societies are constituted by the division of labor. In the world of *Player Piano*, where human labor is abolished, technological rationality and its subsystems depoliticize the public sphere and colonize the lifeworld by completely taking over its organization. Furthermore, technological rationality and systemic mechanisms impose patterns of thinking and behavior onto the lifeworld, which reify human value in a rigid hierarchy of functionality and suppress "contexts of communicative socialization" (Kempf, 2023, p.10).

"Cultural impoverishment" (p. 327) is the alternative term that Habermas (1987) uses to refer to the colonization of the lifeworld. This sort of reification is realized under two major strategies in the novel. The first strategy is that the system imposes social behavior patterns on people, mainly mediated through the utilization of technology. This provides a total integration of the people into the system-rationality. To exemplify, one of the few places in Vonnegut's fictional topography, where some traces of social interaction can still be found, is the workers' bar in Homestead. The people in there never seem to be aware of the former state of Ilium when the state organization was not in such an extreme state of colonization. This is mentioned as follows: "The youngsters in the booth [. . .] were like Katharine Finch [Paul's secretary]. They couldn't remember when things had been different and could hardly make sense of what had been, though they didn't necessarily like what was" (Vonnegut, 2000, pp. 32–33). Put differently, most people are neutralized and depoliticized under the systemic imposition of codes of thought and behavior. To borrow Kempf's words, the colonization of the lifeworld brings forth "self-reification for the purpose of avoiding conflict" and avoidance of discourse in the public space for class interests (2023, pp. 3, 11)

The widespread consumption and use of gadgets can also be classified under the same set of systemically codified social behaviors. As Marcuse (2006) asserts, "the intensity, the satisfaction and even the character of human needs, beyond the biological level, have always been preconditioned" (pp. 6-7). Edgar and Wanda, the standard American family to whom the Shah of Bratpuhr pays a visit, are the most commonplace examples subject to this preconditioned mode of consumption. Shah, the alleged mouthpiece of a pre-modern civilization, visits them to observe the daily reality of an average American family. Wanda feels useless due to the clockwork operation of the domestic gadgets. She is absorbed by the appeal of mechanized use of gadgetry, and even her social identity, being a woman and a mother, has been modified and almost suspended by the routine of working with household electronic devices. The socio-historical construction of human needs, which in the long run justifies the human subjection to techno-administrative systems, is solidly displayed in the example of Wanda. As Marcuse (2006) posits, the system always replaces one false need with another one, but "the optimal goal is the replacement of false needs by true ones" (p. 9). However, this emancipatory replacement of false needs by true ones is always deferred by new products the cycle of production supplies and the failure in replacement irreversibly subjects individuals to the technologically oriented modern capitalism. In consequence, reward and punishment codes become the primary motivations for people's subordination to the system. For instance, smashing a traffic safety education box attached to a lamppost

apparently for no good reason can end up in imprisonment for petty sabotage (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 282). This symbolic act of iconoclasm, committed by Paul's cellmate called Harold, is an open expression of disapproval of system-rationality. In *Player Piano*, not only the legal system but also the public opinion labels everyone, who can potentially distrust the truth-value of the technological rationality, as a saboteur. Thus, the techno-capitalistic logic of reification substitutes 'the flaneur' (the idle subject of modernity) with 'the saboteur' as the tag for a suspected insurgent.

The second strategy of reification is achieved by indirect colonization of the cognitive systems of individuals. Unqualified common people are forced to make a living with basic skills that can merely enable them to survive both economically and morally. Katherine remarks to Paul about the situation: "It was so ridiculous to have people stuck in one place all day, just using their senses, then a reflex, using their senses, then a reflex, and not really thinking at all" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 20). Reification is the objectification of the commodity form, expanding over individuals' relations to objective, social, and subjective worlds. In Vonnegut's anti-utopia, however, reification exceeds far beyond this initial and naïve level and takes the form of a deformation of the lifeworld, which follows the initial hegemonization of individual cognition capacities.

Vonnegut integrates two strands of subplots into the novel that offer a sense of flight from the complexity of the technologically dominated organizational forms. They function to provide the reader with antithetical perspectives toward the current system. The first one accounts for the Shah of Bratpuhr, the leader of the Kolhouri sect, and his official visit to America. He is accompanied by Dr. Halyard and Khashdar Miasma, who is both the nephew and the interpreter of the Shah. The Shah's aim to visit Ilium, New York, is to see what he can learn "in the most powerful nation on earth for the good of his people" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 24). The Shah acts as a foil for all the industry leaders in Ilium, as he stands for a pre-modern society where there is no demarcation between the life spheres. In contrast to modern societies, where the people and social system are distinguished by the peculiar structuration of technology, the Shah's native world stands out as an undifferentiated whole. Although the level of civilization the Shah represents looks like a totalitarian one built around a 'one man' cult, the modern system in Ilium outweighs this primitive model in its authoritarian nature. The Shah's confusion about modern concepts in his encounter with the American system effectively discloses the basic dynamics of modern capitalistic social structure from a complete outsider's perspective. The Shah cannot tell between the average man and the soldier as two distinct groups of people and in his native language calls both *takaru*, which means slave. Though Halyard explains to him that soldiers and average men are not slaves, the real difference poses a sarcastic question. As he knows not much about the strictly separated boundaries of social roles and classes, the Shah wonders whether the president of the USA, Jonathan Lynn, is the spiritual leader of the American people: "Halyard explained the separation of Church and State, and met, as he had expected to meet, with the Shah's usual disbelief and intimations that he, Halyard, hadn't understood the question at all" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 113). As a stranger to the modern social organization, the Shah stands cynical about how a human being governs the whole people, without taking the legitimacy of his power from the sphere of religion. The same curiosity about the legitimacy of power is also valid in the case of the Shah's encounter with EPICAC XIV. He tries to speak to the all-knowing computer, a false god in contrast to the Shah's all-wise God. He tests the computer's wisdom by asking it a conundrum and this mock-ritualistic moment ends in Shah's disappointment:

> *'The crazy bastard's talking to the machine,' whispered Lynn.*
> *'Ssssh!' said Halyard, strangely moved by the scene.*
> *'Siki?' cried the Shah. He cocked his head, listening. 'Siki?' The word echoed and died - lonely, lost.*

> *'Mmmmmm,' said EPICAC softly. 'Dit, dit. Mmmmm. Dit.' The Shah sighed and stood, and shook*
> *his head sadly, terribly let down.*
> *'Nibo,' he murmured. 'Nibo.'*
> *'What's he say?' said the President.*
> *''Nibo' - 'nothing.' He asked the machine a question, and the machine didn't answer,' said Halyard.*
> *'Nibo'* (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 115).

The machine as the living symbol of the technological rationality is the source of legitimacy itself, and it has long replaced social mores and traditional sources of legitimacy. In other words, instrumental rationality and purposive-rational action have become dogmatic principles of almost religious import. Technology as a new source of dogma generates a colonized lifeworld, an impoverished culture, and a functional re-codification of the public sphere via mass media in contradistinction to the organic unity of a pre-modern world picture. Following a similar line of thought, Andrew Feenberg (2000), in "Philosophy of Technology at the Crossroads," focuses on Heidegger's comparison between the premodern craftsmanship and the modern technological rationality, and notes that "the modern technologist obliterates the inner potential of his materials, 'deworlds' them, and 'summons' nature to fit into the plan in contrast to the craftsman" (p. 296). Technology, in Feenberg's words, suspends authenticity, and turns things into an "'objectless' heap of functions," which in return generates inauthentic and hence disposable individuals (2000, p. 296).

The second strand of the subplot corresponds to the early phases of Paul's awakening and his naïve effort to reject subjection to any further oppression. This early phase is not based on a well-planned resistance but is merely a flight from the complexity of the efficiency-oriented everyday life-context. After intense conversations with Finnerty, the rebel, Paul's resentment against subjection rises. His indignation makes him look for ways to quit his position in Ilium and his life of contentment. Then, he decides to set up a new life in the country and to align his domestic life with the pastoral ideal, away from all the privileges of his rank. He

> *would subtly re-educate her [his wife Anita] to a new set of values, and then quit. Otherwise, the shock*
> *of being the wife of a nobody might do tragic things. The only grounds on which she met the world were*
> *those of her husband's rank. If he were to lose the rank it was frighteningly possible that she would lose*
> *touch with the world altogether, or, worse for Paul, leave him* (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 128).

Rejecting a complete integration to the system, Paul prefers to detach himself by a return to nature and buys a farmhouse. However, this is not simply a way of recreation, but an intention to return to an unspoiled state of natural existence.

Regarding nature as a quantifiable object, technology both usurps nature and transforms man's natural state. It makes man bound to his second nature that is society and culture. On the contrary, Paul "wanted to deal, not with society, but only with Earth as God had given it to man" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 129). A parallel approach is indicated as Finnerty preaches Thoreau and Emerson to Paul. Here, Finnerty's reference to the American transcendentalists implies a twofold protest: An escape from the hyper-controlled framework of technological society, and a preservation of the relationship between man and nature. Paul chooses to be involved in nature on the ground of mutuality. In Marcuse's model, man takes advantage of nature and in turn, protects it not as an object, but as a subject as such that shall provide man with the possibility of an intersubjective relationship between man and nature itself. This mindset requires the exemption of the mutual relationship between man and nature from the power of the technocratic state. However, the same mindset takes Paul back to the logic of craftsmanship. Paul realizes that he has forgotten to manage basic manual skills except for a limited set of minor deeds such as gripping a pen, pushing a button, holding a brush, etc. Without the medium of technology, he feels

helpless to cope with nature. This helplessness urges him more to comprehend nature as an "opposing partner in a possible interaction" just as in the logic of craftsmanship (Habermas, 1989, p. 241)**.** Paul is excited about facing the challenges of settling in a farmhouse, while Anita shows a kind of disgust for a primitive way of life. Encouraged for liberation, Paul believes that "[w]ith each new inconvenience, the place became more irresistible" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 141).

Paul's excitement results from a new way of comprehending freedom. This is a negative freedom because the traditional norms and conventions have already changed in contemporary industrial societies. Marcuse explains the conditions whereby the new modes of apprehending liberation emerge as follows:

> *Such new modes can be indicated only in negative terms because they would amount to the negation of the prevailing modes. Thus economic freedom would mean freedom from the economy–from being controlled by economic forces and relationships; freedom from the daily struggle for existence, from earning a living. Political freedom would mean liberation of the individuals from politics over which they have no effective control. Similarly, intellectual freedom would mean the restoration of individual thought now absorbed by mass communication and indoctrination, abolition of 'public opinion' together with its makers* (2006, p. 6).

Hence, Paul's early and almost instinctive search for liberation overlaps Marcuse's description of the negative mode of freedom. Paul's farmhouse, the cradle for this new mode of freedom, "was a completely isolated backwater, cut off from the boiling rapids of history, society, and the economy. Timeless" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 141).

However, Paul's task is abandoned halfway through the novel and almost never mentioned again as a model of transformation. This negative freedom is not capable of revolutionizing the logic of technology itself (Habermas, 1989, p. 242). Rather, Paul's naïve dissent only aims at a change in individual lifestyle that would leave the dominant productive apparatus unchanged. That is, if Paul's pastoral retreat is taken as a model, it cannot suggest a universal solution since it only aims to replace individual values without addressing the ideology and structures of technological progress. It may thus only lead to a romantic spiritualism of nature and offer an inconceivable alternative to modernity (Wolff, 2019, p. 174). At this point, Habermas's definition and treatment of communicative action in contradistinction to purposive-rational action suggests a more solid path to take. The analysis of these two distinct types of action could reveal alternative paths for subverting the ideology of institutionalized technology in the novel.

Communicative Action and the Emancipation of the Lifeworld

Instrumental reason subsumes communicative reason largely in capitalism (Fuchs, 2020, pp. 355-356). The distinction between the two types of rationality refers to the rift between the realization of pre-defined social aims and the consensual construction of social norms on an intersubjective ground. Hence Habermas underlines the fact that "[c]ommunicative action corresponds to a symbolic interaction between subjects" (Habermas, 1989, p. 242). The validity of social norms depends on the agreement on intentions provided by an intersubjective medium, whereas the validity of technical rules and strategies experimentally rely on the truth-value and analytical accuracy of the linked statements. In contrast to the systemic "action patterns" imposed on individuals, Habermas (1984) asserts that "there are communicative actions characterized by other relations to the world and connected with validity claims *different* from truth and effectiveness" (p. 16). Habermas (1987) contemplates the concept of communicative action through the concept of the 'lifeworld':

> *The lifeworld forms the indirect context of what is said, discussed, addressed in a situation [. . .] The lifeworld is the intuitively present, in this sense familiar and transparent, and at the same time vast and incalculable web of presuppositions that have to be satisfied if an actual utterance is to be at all meaningful, that is, valid or invalid* (p. 131).

The structure of the expanding subsystems of purposive-rational action in the lifeworld encounters the rationality of communicative action. The system aims at cutting the individuals off the social norms which are based on the grammar of language games. It integrates them into "self-regulated subsystems of the man-machine type" (Habermas, 1989, p. 262). The suppressive rationalization of the behavior patterns posited by the frame of systematization can only be suspended by liberating human communication (Fuchs, 2020, pp. 358-359).

According to Habermas, communicative action nourishes only in the cultural traditions and consensual agreements in the lifeworld, not in the systemic mechanisms, which are not inherent in the individual's intuitive knowledge (1987, p. 149). As "[t]he reproduction of society then appears to be the maintenance of the symbolic structures of the lifeworld" (Habermas, 1987, p. 151), the system antithetically tries to re-arrange these symbolic structures and the grammar of communication in a goal-directed manner. Thus, the main engagements between the system and the lifeworld are accumulated around the notion of communicative action. The system tends to re-organize the lifeworld to obliterate communicative action. The systemic strategies utilized for the instrumentalization of the lifeworld are grouped by Habermas (1987) under the categories of "structural violence" (p. 187) and "delinguistification" (p. 184), both of which are exercised by restricting human communicative behavior and consequently transferring such human features as intersubjective understanding and feeling of responsibility over to incomprehensible networks and media of money and power. This is what Habermas, borrowing from Luhmann, calls the "technicizing of the lifeworld" due to the devaluation of linguistic communication via dehumanized "media-steered interaction" (1987, p. 183).

These systemic strategies abound in countless instances in the lifeworld Vonnegut depicts for Paul and the people of Ilium. Ranging from intimate conversations in private life to the most common situations of everyday communication, delinguistification is widely spread as a means of colonization. The bars and pubs are almost the only places where people meet and have a chance to distance themselves from professional life. However, no instance of total emancipation from the talks about the projects, competitions, and job arrangements can be witnessed. Even if there seems to be no actual conversation about systemic interests, there certainly is the extension of the same systemic rationality in leisure time games, which exposes the institutional organization of the private sphere. In the club checker championship among the engineers of high rank, the system still lurks with its behavior codes. Concerning this championship, "Kroner and Baer seemed delighted. They were forever suggesting that teams be formed, and games be played as a method for building morale in the Eastern Division's family" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 48).

The barren relationship between Anita and Paul is the most typical example of this situation. Anita is too greedy for success and considers Paul an instrument for promotion in life. Paul is most dear to Anita only when she thinks of his high rank in the corporate world. He is a worthy husband for her only when she thinks of him through the mediation of money and power. She never ceases to remind Paul about the new position in Pittsburgh, which, Paul's late father George Proteus – The Industrial Commercial, Communications, Foodstuffs and Resources Director – left him as his will. Though Anita never had the chance to meet Paul's father alive, she almost mythologizes him as a symbol of success and power. She poses him as a role model for Paul by hanging his picture on the wall. The image of the father constantly lingers on as a reminder of goal-directedness. Thus, the penetration of the system to the lifeworld is conspicuously present in Paul and Anita's relationship: "Anita slept – utterly satisfied,

not so much by Paul as by the social orgasm of, after years of the system's love play, being offered Pittsburgh" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 127). In addition, the frequently repeated, mechanic exchange of love words — "I love you, Paul." "I love *you*, Anita." — between the couple throughout the novel hints at the ubiquity of such penetration into basic communicative habits as well.

The dominant jargon of the system also occupies the language of the common man by way of mass media and advertisements. Advertisements and the related corporate media shape people's compatibility with the societal organization. Reverend Lasher, a minister with an M.A. in anthropology, comments about the delinguistified state of such media and their function as the code-generator of the system:

> *'Strange business,' said Lasher. 'This crusading spirit of the managers and engineers, the idea of designing and manufacturing and distributing being sort of a holy war: all that folklore was cooked up by public relations and advertising men hired by managers and engineers to make big business popular in the old days, which it certainly wasn't in the beginning. Now, the engineers and managers believe with all their hearts the glorious things their forebears hired people to say about them. Yesterday's snow job becomes today's sermon'* (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 88).

Traditional folklore as the primary medium of consensual agreement and unconditioned speech acts has been replaced by 'corporate lore' and thus entirely robbed of its communicative and emancipatory potential.

Though it may not necessarily be in traditional forms, the concept of folklore corresponds to the concept of the 'public sphere'. The public sphere manifests itself in the form of collective (communicative) action and dialogue. It is also the cradle of what Habermas (1984) calls the "ideal speech situation," which is "immunized against repression and inequality in a special way; then [it is the ground of] the structures of a ritualized competition for the better arguments; finally, the structures that determine the construction of individual arguments and their interrelations" (p. 26). The main goal of communicative action is to reach an understanding and gain general assent by way of unconstrained argumentation. Arguments arranged on a rational basis are thus communicated in an interaction of communicative partners in the public sphere (Kempf, 2023, pp. 6, 12). The parade that proceeds along the streets of Ilium towards the end of the novel is the case when the public sphere gets closest to a communal understanding free from hierarchy with a high range of accessibility by local people. Marshall Soules (2007), summarizing Habermas, notes that the public sphere can be enlivened by voluntary organizations, such as churches, clubs, unions, and grassroots movements, to form public opinion and to arouse public debate with a vision to rework the directives of state authority (par. 8). The parade itself is an incarnation of the resentment against the system. Though the verbal level of rational argumentation is not emphasized on the surface in the parade scene, the silent and tacit assent among the members as to their common anti-authoritarian purpose is ubiquitous. This assent signals, in Saggers's interpretation, the celebration of a new form of communication that suspends the accepted social generalizations and hierarchies (2023, p. 11). In the diversity of masked impersonations and in the uncontrollable plurality of identities, the zone of the carnivalesque parade provides its members not only with the opportunity to escape from the system but also the collective power to subvert it (Saggers, 2023, pp. 10, 29). There certainly is the underlying consent for a collective cause among the participants. The carnival is the only democratic and autonomous space where people can experience themselves by acting as others and liberally enjoy an alternative game of identity-formation. Paul watches Luke get undressed for the parade, and he is shocked when Luke remains with his underwear:

Paul relaxed his vigil for an instant to glance at Luke, and he was shocked at the transformation. The man was in his underwear now, ragged and drab, and none too-clean. And Luke had somehow shrunk and saddened and was knobbed and scarred and scrawny. He was subdued now, talking not at all, and meeting no one's eyes (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 91).

This is Paul's impression of a man who is stripped down of determined social roles. Yet, the moment when Luke is redressed in his carnival costume, "Luke was growing again, getting his color back, and as he strapped on his saber he was talkative again - important and strong" (p. 91). This regaining of an alternative set of social roles and identity models other than industrial functions on the part of the revelers in the parade is the outcome of an integration with the public sphere free from colonization.

Habermas (1984) reminds us that "not every linguistically mediated interaction is an example of action oriented to reaching understanding" (p. 288). Manipulative employment of linguistic means will turn communicative interaction into hegemonic instrumentalization. Paul Grosswiler (2001) speaks about Habermas's concept of "re-feudalization of the public sphere" where he observes that media becomes a "quasi-feudal kind of public life in which politics becomes a managed show of leaders who exclude most people from discussion and decision making" (p. 24). Re-feudalization is the case where the illusion of a public sphere is instrumentalized to maintain the power of the leaders, specifically by controlling communicative action. The principle of instrumentalization underlying the exclusion of people from communicative interaction is summarized by Habermas as follows:

Without doubt, there are countless cases of indirect understanding, where one subject gives another something to understand through signals, indirectly gets him to form a certain opinion or to adopt certain intentions by way of inferentially working up perceptions of the situation; or where, on the basis of an already habitual communicative practice of everyday life, one subject inconspicuously harnesses another for his own purposes, that is, induces him to behave in a desired way by manipulatively employing linguistic means and thereby instrumentalizes him for his own success (1984, p. 288).

Such manipulation of the communicative sphere by the system exercises instrumentalization of the people in *Player Piano*. The system achieves it through re-arranging the means of communication in a non-reciprocal manner under the disguise of interaction. In the novel, the corporate culture organizes annual activities on an island called The Meadows for the managers and the engineers of Ilium to enhance corporate identity and create an opportunity for a free flow of energy through team games. However, the actual aim of these competitive sports activities is again to maintain the validity of the system rationality, to consecrate the spirit of national industrial organization, and to constrain people by strictly codified patterns of business-oriented pseudo-communication:

The Meadows was a flat, grassy island in the St. Lawrence, in Chippewa Bay, where the most important men, and the most promising men ('Those whose development within the organization is not yet complete,' said the Handbook*) in the Eastern and Middle-Western Divisions spent a week each summer in an orgy of morale building – through team athletics, group sings, bonfires and skyrockets, bawdy entertainment, free whisky and cigars; and through plays, put on by professional actors, which pleasantly but unmistakably made clear the nature of good deportment within the system, and the shape of firm resolves for the challenging year ahead* (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 42).

Paul is chosen as the captain of the blue team for the games in the Meadows. He shows great resentment for the idleness of the activities and the formal patterns of entertainment. Provided with all kinds of team divisions, tournament organizations, pep talks, team flags, t-shirts, and even team marches, the Meadows appears too formal to be an organization of leisure time activity. Rather, it looks like a ritualistic revitalization of systemic energies, a kind of pre-modeled socialization process for the

members of the industry to express themselves. The main function of the Meadows sessions is to abolish liberal interaction and free discussion. Thus, the communicative action is distorted to be merely a means of system-imposition and an instrument for the feudalization of the public sphere. Real human interaction is constantly parodied in the Meadows thanks to the directives dictated by the loudspeakers: "'Lunch!' said the loudspeakers. 'Lunch! Remember the rule: get to know somebody new at each meal. Have your buddy on one side, but a stranger on the other. Lunch! Lunch!'" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 180). These communicative strategies keep the public sphere comatose, and the system overtly manifests its intentions: "'The more contacts you make here at the Meadows,' said the loudspeaker, 'the smoothly industry will function, co-operationwise.'" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 182). The Meadows not only creates the ideal type of man compatible with the requirements of the industry but also makes its members internalize the necessary pseudo-communicative patterns. The island, hence, is the place where what Marcuse calls 'one-dimensional society' is perfectly staged with professional and industrial precision. With the motivation of mottos of integrity and perseverance, "the crowd had miraculously become a sort of homogenized pudding. It was impossible to tell where one ego left off and the next began" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 185).

The allegorical morality play staged for the participants of the festivities in the Meadows is another tool to ideologically justify the colonization of the sphere of communication and the technicization of the lifeworld. The dramatic performance is directly a session of brainwashing. The wise old man, who impersonates 'the caretaker of the heavens,' stands at the top of a ladder, where he arranges the stars in the sky. His mission is to climb up to the skies every hundred years, to arrange and restore the stars anew; and "when a star's glory is tarnished beyond restoration, must take it from the firmament" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 195). The old man lets a star drop, which represents Labour Unionism. Moreover, he hesitates whether to restore another star with the symbol of an Oak on it, representing the Organization. The old man condemns the Radical who hates the sight of the symbol and devalues his emotive arguments by so-called objective logic in favor of social and industrial progress. The main motive of this medieval morality play is to vindicate the technocratic social organization by gaining the consent of the audience about all the practical benefits of a highly systematized and technological society. In the context of this allegory, the Young Engineer, the spokesman of the system, and the Radical, an insurgent, clash with their views about system's rationality in front of the jury, the Average Man. In the end, it is the arguments of the Young Engineer that are victorious, as expected from the very beginning of the play.

The last chapters of the novel bring to the fore Paul's change of sides to join the fight for the anti-machine cause. Paul's close contact with treacherous Finnerty distresses Kroner. Consequently, Paul is offered a promotion as the Manager of Engineering in the Eastern Division on the condition that he becomes a double agent by infiltrating the revolutionary group called the Ghost Shirt Society based in Ilium. In a secret meeting on the island, Kroner and the committee of directors pretend to fire Paul to send him for his new mission as an informer. Upon being asked by the board of directors if he would adhere to the assigned plan, he announces with all his disgust for the system that he quits. Nevertheless, this serious statement by Paul is misjudged by the board as a humorous yet intentional acceptance of his part in the operation. Despicably expelled from the organization and his privileges revoked, Paul heads to Ilium on the mainland as "an unclassified human being" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 233) and a bait for the Ghost Shirters. Drinking with an old acquaintance at a bar in Homestead, he is all of a sudden abducted by the insurgents and is drugged for interrogation about his credibility for the revolutionary cause of replacing machines and restoring power to human beings. Confessing that his demotion was originally a pretense and yet he also willingly quit, he is admitted to the society of insurgents as a new member. Other than Finnerty, Paul finds some of his former friends and colleagues among the rebels, such as Bud Calhoun, Katherine Finch, Luke Lubbock, etc. On one of the preparatory meetings of the

Ghost Shirt Society before the revolution, the police raid their secret cell and capture Paul. He is put into prison to be tried as a conspirator and saboteur. Anita and Kroner visit Paul in his cell to free him and win him back to the organization. When Kroner questions him about who the head of the Ghost Shirts is, Paul without hesitation confesses that he himself is responsible for the organization of the group. And shortly afterward begins his trial in the Ilium Federal Courtroom.

Up until the point where the revolutionary upheaval takes place in the plot, the theme of return to nature has been contemplated many times by the major and minor members of the group of insurgents. However, this alternative is abandoned due to its inherent insufficiency for a better restoration of the system. Revolution has often been considered an inevitable way by the Ghost Shirters to attain freedom. Reverend Lasher defends the childish nature of the Luddite motive that stimulates the revolutionary reaction towards machinery against Paul's skepticism: "'Childish – like Hitler's Brown Shirts, like Mussolini's Black Shirts. Childish like any uniform,' said Lasher. 'We don't deny it's childish. At the same time, we admit that we've got to be a little childish, anyway, to get the big following we need'" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 268). In other words, Luddite frivolity seems to be too naïve an act to offer a consistent program of counter-systemic organization. In addition, a revolutionary program should be free of the imposed values of the web of colonized and technologized lifeworld as in the former system. Though Lasher's words defending the childishly revolutionary act of smashing machines indicate a frivolous act of liberation, they also cynically connote his cautiousness against the emergence of a vicious circle stemming from the nature of any revolutionary action: "'And there's hope of putting up a good fight. This business of one set of values being replaced by force by another set of values has come up often enough in history –'" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 268). He is also alert to the fact that nobody can guarantee that forcefully establishing a new set of democratic values will not result in a tyrannical rule much like the one dethroned.

While the trial is in progress, the revolutionary parade proceeds outside the courtroom, letting itself be heard by the ones inside. The marchers are dressed like Indians, Scotchmen, and Arabs. They represent the communities that have suffered from the extreme impacts of not only instrumental rationality but also imperialistic expansionism. They can easily be associated with a tribal army, not only equipped with various weapons but also with every type of symbolic group-forming tokens like war-paint, banners, and costumes. All kinds of hierarchies belonging to the system rationality are subverted among this mass of rebel marchers. The frenzied manner of the marchers exhibits an unmatched yet equally uncontrollable demand for freedom and honor. The acts committed during the scene of the revolution falls short of realizing a newly constructed set of values to replace the dehumanizing effects of technology. This time, the machinery fetishism of the system is replaced with aimless vandalism and looting, which are other narrow-minded forms of ritualistic performance. There are even people blasting the little traffic safety boxes with shotguns, which do not signify acts of iconoclasm this time as earlier in Harold's case but appear merely as acts of terrorism in this later scene. When violence and destruction reach a peak,

> 'Lord,' said Paul, 'I didn't think it'd be like this.'
> 'You mean losing?' said Lasher.
> 'Losing, winning - whatever this mess is.'
> 'It has all the characteristics of a lynching,' said the professor. 'It's on such a big scale, though, I suppose
> genocide is closer. The good die with the bad – the flush toilets with the automatic lathe controls'
> (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 305).

When the insurgence is over, embers and wrecks cover the city of Ilium. The machines are torn apart and scattered all around the city like corpses in the aftermath of a bloody war. Heaps of junk and rubble depict the remnants of the hegemony of the machine that the city is saved from. The city is filled

with colossal remains of electronic devices, alphabetically indexed by Vonnegut as "bits of air conditioners, amplidynes, analyzers, are welders, batteries, belts, billers, bookkeeping machines, bottlers, canners, capacitors, circuit-breakers, clocks, coin boxes, calorimeters, colorimeters, computers, condensers, conduits, controls, converters, conveyers, cryostats, counters, cutouts, densitometers, detectors, dust precipitators, dishwashers [. . .]" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 310). To some, this is the beginning of a utopia where man shall rule the machines; still to some others, this is the Renaissance where the two greatest wonders of the world, the human mind, and hand, will be rediscovered (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 311). However, there is always a certain extent of cynicism in Vonnegut's sentences heard from the mouth of Paul Proteus. When the tension is calmed down with the excitement for a new beginning, the Orange-O machines become the new centre of attraction for the rebels. This is a symbolic instance because it is the first machine that people try to fix up after the violent acts of destruction directed to the machines.

> *But now the excretor of the blended wood pulp, dye, water, and orange-type flavoring was as popular*
> *as a nymphomaniac at an American Legion convention.*
> *'O.K., now let's try anotha' nickel in her an' see how she does,' said a familiar voice from behind the*
> *machine – the voice of Bud Calhoun.*
> *'Clunkle' went the coin, and then a whir, and a gurgle.*
> *The crowd was overjoyed* (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 312).

The scene depicts the hysterical delight the vandals take from making the ruined device start operating again and hence implies an ominous appeal felt for re-building a machine-based civilization. Interpreting the great symbolic import of similar scenes in the novel, Freese (2002) argues that *Player Piano* slightly shifts the focus from "the anonymous power of totalitarian systems which enslaves people" to the fundamental human flaw that "makes human beings devise the very instruments of their suffering" (p. 146). The scene is an exposition of the lightheartedness of ordinary people when they are prone, in Finnerty's words, to get "tangled up in the machinery" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 307) even when they are aware of the impending trouble to follow. Therefore, Freese (2002) puts forward with good reason that Vonnegut's variation of a technological dystopia skeptically explores the human psyche and hence partly underlines "that it is not [merely] the machines that constitute the real enemy, but the built-in flaws of their human inventors" (p. 123).

CONCLUSION

Marcuse's critical analysis of technological rationality in industrial societies and Habermas's examination of speech situations in a culturally impoverished lifeworld have shown how the public sphere and acts of linguistic communication are determined and codified by technocratic and corporate capitalism. The way the system produces public consent and human participation in the mechanized production processes through the imposition of behavior and communication patterns is also laid bare by the philosophers of the Frankfurt School. Paul Proteus's obvious curiosity in *Player Piano* is about whether there may occur a revolutionary subversion of technological rationality and the relevant work patterns enjoined on the human masses so that the replacement of human dignity with the efficiency of industrial machinery could come to a halt. During the celebrations after the revolution, Vonnegut repeats the same curiosity through Paul's contemplation about Professor von Neumann. Paul has had the impression that the revolutionary uprising is a sort of experiment for the professor, creating an opportunity to see what would follow the introduction of the new set of political motivations. Similarly excited and simultaneously anxious about what will have been achieved under the new conditions following the revolution, Paul abruptly smashes the bottle he is drinking to the rocks, thinking of the Illiumites' inherent eagerness to recreate a system much like the former one. An anticipated rebirth of

the fascination with a more profound know-how and an even better industrial progress that may arise from the very point it is seemingly deflated by the revolution can help the reader speculate about a similar catastrophe in a probable future due to innate human flaws.

The symbolic and even anti-climactic ending of the novel can be associated with the mythological reference to the surname Proteus. In Greek mythology, Proteus is a sea deity, who can foretell the future and change his shape. He only answers to someone who can capture him. With the mutability and capacity to assume many forms connoted by his surname, Paul is both an exponent of individual change of mindsets into those advocating human worth and a champion of social change for more humane living conditions. At the very end of the novel, when the state authorities announce and ask the Iliumites to turn over their false leaders around the roadblock in the Griffin Boulevard, Lasher drives Paul along with the rest of the leaders of the revolt to the police precinct to eventually surrender. Given a protean capacity of adaptability, Paul has undertaken various roles in his relationship with the system. Being one of the chief engineers of the Ilium Works, he has changed his side to join the insurgents, become a leading figure within the group, and now his final station is the prison. Paul's story accounts for a picaresque journey into the deeper levels of the system, in which he contemplates and prophesies about the possible end of the human quest for social and industrial progress. His final prophecy about the beginnings of a new system that looks much like the former one points to a vicious circle. Professor von Neumann understandingly confirms Paul's pessimistic insight just before his submission to the authorities and implies that history runs along a cyclical course. However, Paul's role as a visionary and an agent of change is nothing less than substantial, as Finnerty assures him of his worthy contribution to the revolutionary cause.

To sum up, unless the technological and systemic rationalities are replaced with an alternative frame of productive human labor, human interaction and deliberating communicative acts in the context of a more democratic public sphere, the vicious circle of the history of man's submission to the authoritative systems and totalitarian technocracies would never be broken. Oppressive instrumental rationality cannot easily be reversed just by emphasizing man's innate value. Liberation is only possible with the democratization of the public sphere and consequently with the emancipation of man's decision-making capabilities in the lifeworld by a replacement of goal-oriented action patterns with communicative rationality. In *Player Piano*, Vonnegut not only reveals the colonizing impacts of technology over the public and private spheres but also implies the dated and false ways of coping with this systemic colonization. Thus, he fulfills his task of forewarning through dystopian prophesying from the cynical perspective of such an illustratively mutable character of Paul Proteus.

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