Speech*

Technical Reason and Political Reason: Spaces/Times Not Considered

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Introduction
The subject of this reflection is the contradictory relationships between the symbolic development of technology in the last century and the symbolic emptying that politics has suffered over the past 50 years. I would like to consider the process that technology has undergone to go from being a mere instrument to becoming a cause, as a constitutive dimension of our cultures and societies, while politics suffered the inverse process, leading to disfiguration and reconfiguration of political beliefs.

Hannah Arendt, when thinking about times similar to ours, referred to them as dark times (Arendt, 1992) in a book of the same name in which she shows us how poorly Christianity and Marxism have prepared us to live with uncertainty. This gives rise to how ill prepared we are for the change that we are now experiencing as well as to the intellectual trend towards a nostalgia that is markedly apocalyptic, defeatist, and fatalist. In light of this trend, which today is the majority in the intellectual world, especially in Europe, I think that we Latin Americans are perhaps better positioned to expound on the array of changes we are seeing, since our hybrid historic memory allows us to call on the processes to the contradictory set of those who brought them about and also to the other memory that, as Walter Benjamin said, destabilizes the present (Benjamin, 1982), removes us from the synergy of the present. This is where we can encourage the future. But to do this, we need not only memory, but also the analytical capacity to work with the complexity that breaks in on the present, opening up to futures that, as they are unclear and uncertain, do not demand that we throw ourselves in as actors or resign ourselves to be their victims.

The other rationality of technology
What I would like to consider in this first part is what philosophy, from Greece and well into the nineteenth century, refused to consider, since technology was to philosophy, from Plato on, the opposite of knowledge: if episteme was the home of truth, techne was itself associated with the tricks of the sophists, with an instrument that al-
owed deceit. With this imprint, philosophy, throughout twenty-some centuries, has refused, as Heidegger (1997) would say, to think that in technology there was some kind of truth, there was something to be considered. In technology, there was nothing more than the means with which to do things, instruments, and not questions to be formulated. This is the long history which has identified technology with the instrument, and in which, therefore, there is no causality of any kind, neither efficient nor final, as it requires a subject who would use the means towards some end, and thus neither the subject nor the intended end would have anything to do with the means. With some scarce and very ambiguous exceptions, this opposition guided philosophy all the way up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Lamarck formalized the abysmal difference between the organic world, which has its own dynamic, and the mechanical world, which, as a product of technology, does not. It was not until Marx and Engels considered the dialectical materialism of technology that it would appear to be endowed with some kind causality/activity, and thereby as an enclave of inquiry. It was Engels (1980) especially who had the pioneering vision that, through its relationship with technology, the hand was transformed; the hand of Roman farmers was not the same as that of the man who operated a plow during the Neolithic Age, as the type of plow had changed. Engels would introduce a dialectic relationship between the eye and the mediums through which we see, affirming that the microscope and the telescope have changed the ways of seeing and looking.

Based on this first proposal, which breaks with the purely instrumental, passive conception of technology, pertinent spaces for investigation have opened. Thus, the history of the Industrial Revolution is no longer based on the analysis of elements belonging to the eighteenth century proper, but on a broader perspective, such as that proposed by Jacques Le Goff, suggesting that modernity began in the Middle Ages, for example with the appearance of the “fork,” a utensil that changed the way of eating, introducing a strategic distance between animal eating and human gratification. The history of the technologies that would bring about the Industrial Revolution will thus be the object of study of anthropology, especially in the ethnographic vein opened by Marcel Mauss and André Leroi-Gourhan; Mauss was the first to use the word technicity to bring technology to the same phonetic level as rationality, sociability, or identity, since each culture, as small as it may be in number of members, has a technical system that is based on a certain “technical tendency” (Leroi-Gourhan, 1989), which is what gives the name to the word technicity, thus making the leap to thinking in terms of the structuring character that technology has in society. In contemporary society, technicity is a system whose globalized and globalizing dynamics produce still different tendencies.

The first professional philosopher to deal with technology was Husserl. In his reflections on the crisis of the European sciences, Husserl (1976) proposes the rationality of technology, as thinking is part of technology. For him, the technology par excellence is that of calculus. By means of the rationality of calculus, science becomes technical in a double move. One, which gives rise to modern logic, starting with Leibniz and following the line of Frege, et cetera, makes it possible to overcome the limits that language places on the development of scientific knowledge. This first movement is, in
the words of Husserl, the birth of a new kind of ideality, that of geometric thought made of pure numeric forms. In this way, Husserl admits that there is a new type of geometric reasoning brought about by a logic based on pure numeric forms. But, in movement two, Husserl observes that the prestige and development that this way of logico-numerical thought is enjoying implies a shift in the way of thinking that leads to “eidetic blindness,” to the omission of the other original truth, which preceded this logico-numerical truth. This is how Husserl perceives the internal contradiction of technical knowledge, of a technical truth distinct from philosophical truth; of a technical truth that is transforming science, but that, at the same time, threatens to take the place of the original philosophical thought. However, what Husserl has no doubt about is that the new type of technical knowledge is a new abstraction of the symbolic, and that this abstraction of the symbolic is what characterizes modernity. Modernity has, therefore, one of its axes in calculus, in this technification of science, which in turn brings about a new abstraction of the symbolic.

Heidegger, a disciple of Husserl, would consider technology throughout the body of his works, from Being and Time to The Question Concerning Technology. Even in Discourse on Thinking (original title Gelassenheit), one of his last books, technology is an obsession for Heidegger. In Being and Time (1964), Heidegger’s conception of technology is based upon its connection with the structure of the temporality of humankind, the Dasein. Technology can only be conceived in relation to time. But at the beginning, Heidegger conceptualized an unauthentic temporality given that it is dominated by facticity, and that the synergies of action, and thus technology, will be at the service of the way of relating to the future, which Heidegger characterizes as preoccupation. This is the means of relating to the future in which the future cannot be conceived as open, as something that allows change or innovation; rather, it is something that determines us, that dominates us from that which already is. Thus, Heidegger views technology as linking itself to that inauthenticity of the life of humans, who, in their preoccupation for the future, are unable to experience the most precious aspect of their existence: the tension between that which already is and that which is not yet. Technology blurs this tension by preventing the human being from being, given that the Dasein is prevented from exercising its capacity to foresee, to think of death as the limit by viewing it as the key to human finiteness, and thus, being responsible for its finiteness. A man who is dominated by the preoccupation with the secondary, worried about instruments and utensils, is not capable of breaking that framework of inauthenticity from which he can only escape by partaking in a future where death is not the defeat, but rather the triumph of his being that, made for death, takes it on as a means of creating his own existence.

Given the inauthentic temporality of utensils, and of preoccupation, there exists another temporality, the original, that man can experience when he takes on the finiteness of his existence. However, in the second period, at a 1953 conference entitled The Question Concerning Technology, Heidegger (1997) changes the course of his reflection when he conceives technology as a space for inquiry. The place from which technology is conceived is what radically changes, which is its transformation into a proposition that questions the human way of relating to the temporality that is regarded as authen-
tic: the temporality of technology does not have to be exclusively conceived as confrontation with the temporality of the principle. That confrontation in some way harkens back to the circle in which the “correct vision” of technology encloses us, which is the current vision in which individuals adapt technology to the medium, to the instrument. It is thus impossible to understand the essence of technology.

For Heidegger, the true question posed by technology is that of its very essence, given that the essence of technology is not technical; meaning that it does not belong to the order of instruments. The correct vision is one thing, and the true vision is another, a proposition that causes the spirit to tremble upon questioning its understanding of essence. This question is posed, valid and understandable, based exclusively on modern technology, which differs significantly from what was made by hand. Continuing the line started by Husserl, Heidegger admits that there is a reason in technology, a unique rationality that lies in the supposition that, “as for production, technology is a means of unveiling, a means of uncovering” (1997, pp. 119-124). Those who have, in some way, been associated with philosophy know that for the purposes of this category of unveiling, uncovering, Heidegger makes use of the Greek aletheia, the unveiling of the truth. Affirming that the essence of technology lies in unveiling what its production entails will require Heidegger to provide a detailed critique of the Aristotelian notion of final and efficient cause, from which it will be understandable that the essence of technology does not lie in making or manipulating, because it is a production rather than a mere fabrication. This production entails the questioning of a certain sense of existence that pertains to the being-there, and the path toward death. Production consists of a process of development and turning points, since it is the context in which the human dimension of innovation is uncovered, in which novelty is made to exist. It is also host to the greatest danger, forgetting. Forget what? That the truth of human existence does not dry up in knowledge that is linked to technology. There is another knowledge, the knowledge of being.

The essence of technology thus poses us with the question of unveiling but also of hiding and forgetting. The danger that lies in technology is no demon in particular, but the very “mystery of its essence.” If anything appeared to be the denial of mystery, it would be technology. Nevertheless, Heidegger asserts that technology is a realm of mystery in that production ties uncovering to hiding, innovation to the inertia of forgetting. Heidegger confronts this mysterious area of technology through a poem by Hölderlin that states that “where danger threatens, in danger, salvation also grows.” The translation to the idea that a technology that threatens to run out in sheltering and trusting at the same time requires us to assume the task of thinking, of seeking to understand the essence of what makes us men.

Is it thus not particularly strange that the great thinkers of the School of Frankfurt would not understand the essence of Heidegger’s proposal and would lock themselves, from Adorno to Habermas, in their endeavour to reduce technology to its dimension as an instrument of control? Adorno and Horkheimer’s (1977) splendid work dating from 1944, Dialectic of Enlightenment, is the first text to perform a self-criticism of modern reason. It presents technology as being defined by its relation to the very domain of capital. But it is one thing for the development of technology to be linked to capital
and another for it to be no more than an instrument for the accumulation and control of capital. Likewise, in Habermas’ (1986) work Technology and Science as Ideology, if both science and technology perform strongly ideological functions in our society, this cannot mean that their essence and their value are used up in the realm of the ideological. Moreover, it cannot justify the fact that Habermas (1987) dedicated two copious volumes to his Theory of Communicative Action, in which not one single page touches upon the technological dimension of communication. How can there be an attempt to conceptualize the density, complexity, and magnitude of communication today without acknowledging its structural link to changes in the arena of technology?

Given the legacy of Husserl and Heidegger, a philosophy of communication in which technology is not the object of philosophical thought seems intellectually scandalous. This is the case since it is precisely the new relationship between science and technology that represents a radical challenge to enlightened rationalism, that rationalism that remains stuck to Platonism, which opposes any image coming from the world of the visible to the truth of the world of the intelligible, or from an idealized and random order of language, when what technological change faces us with today is a type of knowledge in which the construction of truth passes through the digitalization of the tangible and visible, the basis of the scientific experimentation that allows for computer simulation. This has no relation to the Baudrillardian simulacrum theory, given that I am addressing scientific experimentation in biology, physics, and medicine, which is now carried out by computerized simulation. This refers to a simulation that is separated from the tricks of the sophists or the simulacrum, but rather, with a different episteme: that which does not demand the radical separation established by Platonism. In this way, it extended Cartesian rationalism and thus it now is possible to construct logical mediations that, through a series of interfaces, allow for fertile forms of interaction between individuals. It would be remiss not to point out that with respect to the computer, we are not faced with the traditional relationship of a body and a machine, a relationship whose function is to conserve physical force or render the infinite repetition of the same task unnecessary, but a bonding of brain and information that is incomprehensible outside the context of the radical innovation introduced by new figures of reason that have made technological reason possible.

I will close the first part of this conference speech by linking the end of Heidegger’s reflection on technology with that of Paul Virilio, who has advanced Heidegger’s reflection on the relationship between technicity and temporality by highlighting in it the relationship of technological changes to new living, working, and knowledge conditions and their influence on working and professional situations. The category created by Virilio is known as acceleration (1988, 1989), and with it speed, which concerns the temporality of society as a whole in the vein of what Marcelo Mauss refers to as “total social fact.” This acceleration is not just in transportation or travel, but also the ever-increasing speed in which commonplace items are rendered obsolete when, for centuries, they were made to last. We are facing an obsolescence that is accelerated and planned by the system of production in such a way that if we do not replace our shoes, watch, refrigerator, or automobile at the right time, the system will collapse. Today, the acceleration in the change of objects also extends to ideas and customs,
tastes, and styles. The acceleration is so great that the speed at which technology is currently developed is breaking the time barrier (Virilio, 1993). Just as there are already airplanes that break the sound barrier, technology is breaking the time barrier, which can only be done by producing a brutal shock to both the material from which the airplane is made as well as to the human body. In his previous work, Virilio (1993) thus comes to speak of a technocultural acceleration that is exposing humanity to a radical accident (Virilio, 1997), which is planetary.

The desymbolization of politics
In his genealogy of the relationships between secularization and power, G. Marramao (1983, 1994) has based his reflection on the works of Weber on the idea, shared by F. Tonnies, that the constitutive rationalization of modern society implies the rupture with any organic-community form of the social and its reorganization as an “administered world.” In this world, politics cannot be understood outside of the context of bureaucracy, a means that is “formally the most rational exercise of power.” This would imply the loss of traditional values due to the “rupture of the monopoly of interpretation” that has been forged since the Protestant Reformation. This rupture/loss makes up part of the long process of configuring a secular jurisdiction of state sovereignty, and, thus, of the constitution of the modern State. Only at the end of the eighteenth century would the idea of secularization become the category that makes the unitary conception of historical time explicit: of the global time of the history of the world. Hegel had already used mundanization to refer to the formative process of the global mundane sphere, which we witness today as a result of the crossing of the secularization process with the globalization process. Is the world-system of globalization the arrival of disenchantment of the world itself along with technological development and administrative rationality?

In the process of rationalization/abstraction that, according to Weber, is at the base of modernity (and capitalism), society becomes an “iron cage” in which instrumental reason reigns. Upon implementing man’s Faustian, cognitive, and technological power, this process renders the world predictable and conquerable, and thus, lacking a sense in and of itself. For Weber, secular implies a society in which the disappearance of traditional certainties splits the bonds that wove together the integration of the city. Thus, the absence of sense, the dearth of symbolic density in politics, recalls “the disappearance of the symbolic connection that is capable of constructing alterity and identity” (Augé, 1995). This disappearance is palpable in the accentuation of the abstract, disembodied nature of social relationships. It is demonstrable in the difference between the activist who defines himself in terms of his convictions and that abstraction, audiences, to which televised political discourse is directed in its search not for supporters, but for statistical measurements of potential voters. This difference is less akin to the action of television than to the abstraction of social relations dictated by the process of rationalization which, as Weber predicted, has been progressively degrading the expressive-mystery dimensions of human existence and transforming the whole world of life into something administrable, but also cold, insignificant, and insipid. The atomization of the audience of politics and its transformation into surveyable multitudes cannot be separated from the crisis that befalls representation when the
deterioration of cohesive links, a product of neoliberal politics, is permeated by the straining of the symbolic dimensions produced by technological mediation in this day and age.

Changes in the labour arena, which has become a focal point for the disintegration of social links, are also brought to the forefront and strongly tied to techno-economic changes. Giuseppe Richeri has clearly referred to the disintegration that politics has undergone in Italy and the secret connections between the constitutive fragmentation of public discourse produced by television and the disintegration of the fabric of traditions and interactions that gave consistency to unions and to the political party of the masses (Richeri, 1989): factories are decentralized, professions are diversified and hybridized, places and occasions for interaction are reduced while there is a simultaneous dissolution of the summation of political interests and objectives. As for the parties, the loss of places for interacting with society and the blurring of the parties’ methods of linkage and communication with society lead to the progressive distancing of the parties from the world of social life until they become mere electoral machines controlled by the bureaucracies of power. The election of Italian television magnate Berlusconi as prime minister, and the influence that his coalition has attained, cease to be a mere coincidence and become a symptom of the new discursive fabric of which political representation is made.

Television brings about the dissolution of the social linkage from what connects the atomized and socially disintegrated experience of the political. But in this experience there is not just a withdrawal from the private realm, but also a profound reconfiguration of the relationships between the private and the public, the overlapping of their spaces and the blurring of their borders. What identifies the public space with what happens on television is not just the lack of safety and violence on the street, but also the complicity of the sensorium mobilized by television, along with that of the city—no place. From the masses that periodically took to the streets to the public that went to the theatre or the cinema every week, the transition conserved the collective character of experience; but from moviegoers to television viewers the shift marks a decisive transformation: social plurality subjected to the logic of disintegration radicalizes the experience of abstraction, which cannot be represented in politics. The fragmentation of citizenship is thus assumed by the market, which, through ratings, offers itself up to politics as its intermediary.

In Latin America this sociopolitical experience of late modernity is imbued with a special and profound unease. The demythification of traditions and customs from which our societies, until recently, synthesized their “contexts of trust” breaks down ethics and blurs the cultural habitat. Therein lie the roots of some of our most secret and bitter acts of violence. With some degree of ease, people can assimilate the technological instruments and images of modernization, but only very slowly and painfully can they reconfigure their value systems, ethical norms, and civic virtues. The change of an era is part of our sensibilities, but in addition to the crisis of ideological maps, there is a major erosion of cognitive maps that strips us of categories of interpretation that are capable of capturing the path of the vertiginous transformations we are experiencing. This has been a common theme in the work of Chilean political scientist Nor-
bert Lechner, one of the most brilliant analysts of the disenchantment of the Left, which is expressed in the “cooling of politics” (Lechner, 1988a, 1988b, 1990, 2002): the arrival of a new sensibility characterized by the abandonment of generalized ideological synthesizes, the desacralization of political principles, and the redefinition of utopia in terms of negotiation as a means of collective construction of order.

This implies the predominance of the contractual dimension and the prevalence, in political conceptualization and even political action, of instrumental rationality and its professionalization. In addition, the knowledge a politician needs is just two fields, judicial-administrative and advertising. The disenchantment of politics thus transforms public space into advertising space, turning the party into an apparatus-medium specialized in communication, and delegitimizing any attempt to reintroduce the issue of ends into politics. Why, if the “ethics of power” legitimize twofold truth, twofold accountability, and twofold morality, can charisma be fabricated by media engineering? After the fall of the Wall, does it make sense to continue discussing democracy? Agnostic thinker Vazquez Montalbán has courageously and explicitly broached the subject of sense in politics: “We need a concept of finality, one that appears to be a transcendental proposition without actually being one. [And to that end] it is necessary to consider the knowledge of what the negative of these concepts of finality has given us, by way of religion or ideologies” (Vazquez Montalbán, 1995, pp. 55, 92).

Seen from this perspective, what we are experiencing is not the dissolution of politics, but rather the reconfiguration of the mediations that make up its methods of interpellation of subjects and the representation of the bonds that hold a society together. Although influenced by the logic of the market, media today make up decisive spaces of social recognition. Rather than substituting, television or radio mediation has come to constitute, to be part of the web of discourse and of political action itself, given that this mediation produces the densification of the symbolic, ritual, and theatrical dimensions that politics has always displayed. The specificity of this production has yet to be fully acknowledged; and to some degree, it cannot be acknowledged, for the instrumental conception of communication that permeates criticism to a significant extent. This is because the medium is not limited to transmitting or translating existing representations, nor can it substitute these representations. Rather, it has come to make up a fundamental aspect of public life (Sunkel, 1989). In the media, politics is not just spoken, it is made. The presence of these affective and ritual dimensions, which is empowered by the media, does not de-politicize action. It reintroduces the mediations of sensibility, which the rationalism of the “social contract” thought it could (in a Hegelian sense) overcome, into formal rationality. This brings us back to the question regarding changes in sensibility that are mediated by transformations of sociality, which is perhaps the only means for politics to overcome its distancing and to re-establish contact with society.

I will emphasize three changes that, by the behaviour of their contradictions, are indicative of the complexity of the stage that politics is going through. With respect to the (according to Baudrillard) inevitable “implosion of the social in the masses” (Baudrillard, 1978), which empties society of its sense, reducing it to an existence, and a representability that is purely statistical, other sociologists perceive a new organization of sociality in the diffraction of the masses. A network sociality (Castells, 1997), made
up of knots that redefine the network when the major institutions of modernity, politics, work, and school have entered into crisis. We are facing new ways to be together whose connection comes from neither a fixed territory nor from a rational and lasting consensus, but instead from cultural, racial and religious, gender and age identities, from aesthetic considerations and sexual preferences, from lifestyles and social exclusion. In the context of long periods of time and the rigidity of traditional identities, these factors fuse local points of reference with de-territorialized vestimentary or linguistic symbols in a re-conceptualization of political and cultural borders that highlight the arbitrary construction of demarcations that have progressively lost the capability to make us feel together. This is causing sociology to take up the Weberian concept of “emotional community,” which recalls a certain return to the community abolished by modern society, addressed by Tonnies, to account for the major transformations that the we is undergoing, and thus the need to reintroduce the sensible, and not just the measurable, into the analysis, to “study what happens at the carnal level and at the level that is palpable in social life” (Sansot, 1986, p. 31). If television requires politics to negotiate its methods of mediation, it is because that medium provides it, for the first time, with access to the viewing axis (Veron, 1987), from which politics cannot only enter into domestic space, but also reintroduce corporality, body language, and theatrics into its discourse. This is the major materiality, according to E. Goffman, from which “common social interaction” is made.

“Can politics, as a partial aspect of social life, ‘represent’ society as a whole” (Lechner, 1988a, p. 25)? Through this proposition, Norbert Lechner opens up a universe of understanding of political disenchantment that has proved to be particularly significant. Linking mistrust of any kind of all-encompassing discourse, which derives from the differentiation/separation of various rationalities, with the simultaneously stimulating and threatening “praise of heterogeneity,” Lechner at first focuses postmodern disenchantment on the loss of faith in the State, which is reduced from an image of the collective to its administrative function, thus losing its symbolic dimension, and on the loss of faith in progress, which translates to the “praise of the present.” This is a project in crisis stemming from the blurring of the desired order. An erosion of cognitive maps is added to the crisis of ideological maps, provoked by the collapse of existing socialism. We do not have the interpretive codes to comprehend the vertiginous transformations in progress.... We cannot create an image of the nation that we want and thus politics cannot plot the course of the changes underway” (Lechner, 1995, p. 124). Later, Lechner links postmodern disenchantment to the decentring of politics, the indeterminate nature of its space, intensified by the re-evaluation of culture and morality, and to the cooling of politics stemming from the desacralization of its principles, the introduction of negotiation as a means of collective construction of order, and the predominance of the contractual dimension over that of the community. This has led politics to find its model of communication in mass media and technology.

But the relationship between politics and technology must be placed in the context of another dimension and a movement of the social. Norbert Lechner has also been one of the first of us to touch upon this: the relationship between politics and temporality. If the groundbreaking brilliance of Heidegger, linking the understanding of tech-
nology to the understanding of temporality, has found its best perpetuation in Virilio’s reflection on acceleration, Lechner performs one of the most vigorous political interpretations of these changes. Just as “escape velocity,” which allows the sound barrier to be broken, produces a loud explosion of sound, “the velocity of vertigo” to which societies and cultures are being subjected is also producing an explosion that is causing us to lose the notion of time, suspending us in a continuous present, in a “sequence of events, whose duration cannot be brought to fruition, and without which experiences cannot be created, beyond the rhetoric of that instant, a horizon of future” (Lechner, 1995, p. 128). And without the slightest horizon of future, society languishes in a sense of entrapment. We are thus witnessing a type of regression that removes us from history and returns us to the time of myth, that of perpetual returns, in which the only possible future is the one that comes from “beyond.” This is not a future to be constructed by men in history, but a future that is to be awaited, that shall arrive from somewhere else. This is what is brought up in the return of religions, new-age orientalisms, and fundamentalisms of all stripes. A century that appeared to be forged by revolutions, social and cultural, ended up being dominated by religions, messiahs, and saviours, thus showing the face of messianism: it is nothing more than the other side of the self-isolation and absorption of this age, concludes Lechner; therein lies the faded but rampant spectre of strongmen and pseudo-populism.

One singular historical experience can help us to understand the depth and relevance of this proposition. In the mid-1980s, Argentina witnessed hyperinflation of 2,000%, which disrupted the daily life of the Argentine people, driving them to extreme situations such as those described by the novelist Oswaldo Soriano: “In 1985, in Buenos Aires, it was no longer possible to buy anything for the same price at night as in the morning; pockets were filled with worn, taped bills, and the face of General San Martín faded into the messages of love, insults, and pleas for help written by the people with ink more potent than that of the Central Bank. There were many heart attacks because when the system collapses, as it did six months after the Austral Plan went into effect in 1985, almost all of the small distracted investors were left with useless paper. This caused language to change at the rhythm of money and disenchantment” (Soriano, 1989, pp. 28-43). Regarding these same events, one of the great contemporary Argentine thinkers, Beatriz Sarlo (2001), wrote:

Then came the horrendous episodes of hyperinflation, when the need to survive took precedence over any other plans and the idea that Argentina could go under not only in the economic sense, but in the sense of liquidizing, losing the state, currency, capacity for public action, strength to reverse any process. When the vertigo of these processes tore away, like an uncontrollable magnet, any chance to plan in terms of culturally realistic time, suddenly what seemed like a boundless force stopped. The end of hyperinflation was an instance of zero gravity, of emptiness. Everything came to a halt, except the fear that something similar could happen again. That fear cannot be ignored from a cultural standpoint. (pp. 2-11)

It was that fear that, as strange and scandalous as it may seem, led to Menem’s electoral victory in the first round of the presidential elections: the triumph of the
memory of fear of inflation over the memory of genocide. Was it not Menem who pardoned many of the most responsible? But he was the one who pulled Argentina out of hyperinflation. Everything else, the neoliberalism that was brutally destructive of the public sector, his obscene submission to the USA, the varied and extensive corruption during his two terms as president, the disdain for public servants, coarseness as a personal style—all that did not matter in the first round, or it mattered less than the memory of the dissolution of daily temporality brought on by inflation. What the Argentine people lived through, and the political force that this experience still yields, is a painful metaphor for something greater and more inherent to current collective sensibility. When in a capitalist society the time of value par excellence, that of currency, is affected significantly and for an extended period of time, other values tend to keep pace. They become disconcerted, unhinged, and thus it is the very sense of time that loses value. It is time that is left without sense.

But society can tolerate neither a present without a future on the horizon nor a completely open future, one that does not have milestones that demarcate and delineate, “because it is not possible that everything is possible” (Lechner, 2000, p. 77). Here, the painful experience shared within the politico-cultural occlusion brought on by the hyperinflation in Argentina converges with other Latin American experiences. One of these is Ecuador’s loss of its currency (the “second assassination of Sucre,” as a friend from Quito called it) and worse still: Ecuadorian children are deprived of references to national heroes, who are now replaced by Lincoln, Washington, Jefferson, et cetera. The other side of this is the indigenous movement, which has reappropriated the huipala (the rainbow flag that was the emblem of Tahuantinsuyo) and brought it to the forefront of Ecuadorian life through a visibility that is not just symbolic but also social, with protests due to the government’s inattention to their needs, as well as political considering that this is the largest and most dense movement for the recreation of Ecuadorian nationality (García, 2003).

This political battle is split between, on the one hand, the bankers who stole the savings of Ecuadorian citizens and then took the money from the country, provoking an uncontrollable devaluation, and the dollarization of both the currency and the domestic economy. On the other hand, there is the return of the indigenous movement and their reappropriation of the huipala, their hidden symbol of ancestral struggles. This is the disconcerting interweaving of short and long periods of time, of instantaneous financial transactions that make it possible to move, in a matter of seconds, unimaginable sums of money from one end of the globe to the other, of slow sedimentations of plans and struggles that, originating in distant pasts, are thrust, also in an instant, upon the time-now that makes up the present, according to W. Benjamin (1982): a now from which it is possible to free the past that is chained by the pseudo-continuity of history and with it, build the future. With respect to the historicism that he believes can resuscitate tradition, Benjamin conceives tradition as a legacy that can neither be accumulated nor inherited and whose value is radically ambiguous. It is in constant dispute to be appropriated, reinterpreted, and reinterpretable; it is permeated and shaken by change and in perpetual conflict with the inertia of every age. The memory that takes responsibility for tradition is not the same as the one that takes us back
to a static period of time; rather, it is the one that renders present a past that destabi-

To conclude, we can now look again at the issue of technology and its mediation between politics and the daily lives of citizens. In keeping with Heidegger’s interpretation, this is what unveils media technology in politics: the profound gap between political parties and new sensibilities, and their social dislocation, the product of losing control of the symbolic configuration of representation. Here and now, philosophy, and intellectuals in general, continue to refuse to accept that technology presents issues for reflection, thus reducing the essence of the relationship between politics and television to a Manichean opposition of the truth of politics and the deceit of technology. From an antagonistic perspective, what cannot be seen—or thought—is precisely the tension generated by the public space and the screen, that new public stage, widespread and mobile, the “virtual space constructed between the public space and the screen” (Mata, 1992), indicative of the current complexity of urban society, of the cultural density of its technological mediations, of its speed, fragmentation, and fluctuation. In Buenos Aires’ Plaza de Mayo, the mothers of the disappeared march every week in a political act that does not just fail to shy away from televised representation, it seeks it out. This is because television does not occlude action, it reformulates its semantics: in the plaza, the actors are the mothers and the journalists are the spectators, while onscreen, the communicators are the protagonists in their mediation. Despite the conditioning of the biases of appearances as well as the requirements as a medium, the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo know that this mediation allows the country to see them; it makes public their struggle against forgetting.

The productivity of that between, a space that is cooperatively constructed by those who take part in the action, the subjects of the plaza, and by communication sources, mediators and receivers, the onscreen protagonists, allows the assumption that there is a crisis of organic forms of representation and participation that various actors in the plaza demand, but it only seems to play out from the seats in that virtual space that television promises and affords. (Mata, 1992)

Far from the anachronic but persistent idea of the immediate effects of the media using its influence and voiding politics of its essence, what we are beginning to see now is the need to place the communication/politics relationship on a map with three axes: the reconstruction of the public, the configuration of the media and images in a space of social recognition, and the new forms of existence and exercise of citizenship. Long devoured by the state, only in the last few years has the public begun to be viewed in terms of the peculiarities of its autonomy, fed by its double relationship with the arenas of “civil society” and communication. Interpreting the ideas of Arendt (1993) and Senté (1997), the public is simultaneously configured as “the common, the world belonging to all,” and “what is disseminated, ‘advertised’ among the majority.” Sennet emphasizes this when he links the public to that space of the city (from the Greek agora) in which people come together to exchange information and opinions, to wander and listen, to be entertained by questioning. German Rey has explained and developed this foundational interpretation of the public in the context of common interest,
civic space, and communicative interaction (Rey, 1988): circulation of interests and discourses whose common aspects do not in any way deny their heterogeneous aspects. This is what allows recognition of diversity by making it possible to affirm and contrast it. This is particular to citizenship today through its link to “reciprocal recognition,” the right to inform and be informed, to speak and to be listened to, which is indispensable in order to participate in the decisions that concern the collective. One of the most flagrant forms of civic exclusion today stems precisely from this, from the deprivation of the right to be seen and heard, given that this is tantamount to existing/being socially significant, in both the individual and collective space, in majorities as well as minorities. This right has no relation to the showman-like exhibitionism that characterizes our politicians, who also demonstrate a perverse penchant for replacing their loss of ability to represent common interest with television airtime.

If the technological revolution has ceased to be an issue of media and has instead come to be an issue of ends, it is because we are face to face with the configuration of a communicative ecosystem made up of new machines and media as well as new languages, sensibilities, knowledge, and writing; of the hegemony of the audiovisual experience over the written experience; and of the reincorporation of the image into the production of knowledge. All this influences our understanding of communication, as well as the concepts of coexistence and the essence of social bonds.

What we are experiencing is not, as the most pessimistic end-of-millennium prophets—from Popper (1996) to Sartori (1997)—believe, the dissolution of politics. It is the reconfiguration of the mediations that make up its means of making demands of subjects and of representation of the bonds that connect society. These mediations are increasingly more socially productive (as per Heidegger’s understanding of production), but their production has yet to be acknowledged, and to some extent cannot be acknowledged, for the instrumental conception of communication that still permeates a significant sector of the social sciences. At issue is the reintroduction, in the realm of formal rationality, of the mediations of sensibility that the rationalism of the “social contract” attempted to (in a Hegelian sense) overcome. As Eliseo Veron affirmed years ago, if television requires politics to negotiate the forms of its mediation, it is because with access to the viewing axis, politics can reach domestic space as well as reintroduce corporeality and body language into its discourse. This is the major materiality from which social interaction is made. We are thus referring to political culture. This categorization attempts to include the ways in which languages and cultures influence the configuration of actors and of the political system itself (Landi, 1988), and the symbolic and imaginary ingredients present in processes of power formation. The democratization of society leads to processes within the cultural and communicative fabric of politics itself. Social productivity cannot be separated from the battles that are staged in symbolic territory, and the participatory nature of democracy is not real outside the public stage on which the communicative ecosystem is built. Thus, beyond objects of politics, technology, and communication, the following are key issues in today’s political battlefield: the strategic scenario that requires politics to thicken its symbolic dimension, and its capacity to attract and create citizens, in order to confront the erosion of collective order.
Acknowledgment
The author would like to thank the translator, for the English translation of this speech.

Notes
* Written in memory of Norbert Lechner.

1. This speech was first published in the journal Ciencias de la Comunicación Nº 1, ALAIC, São Paulo, 2005.

References


