

**Mumford, Lewis (1970). *The Myth of the Machine (Vol. II): The Pentagon of Power*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.**

29-30—I use it rather as a brief way of referring to the changes that took place during the Fourth Millennium B.C., both in Egypt and Mesopotamia, marked by a typical constellation of institutions and cultural inventions: the cult of Divine Kingship, astronomical time measurement, the written records, the division and specialization of labor, organized conquest by war, and the building of imposing monumental structures, temples, palaces, walled cities, canal and irrigation systems: not least the assemblage of the once-invisible Megamachine.

30—The Sun God, the symbol of centralized power, became the model of perfection for all human institutions....

238—...what were once ‘impossible’ wishes, vain hopes, and empty boasts in the mouths of the ancient gods and kings have now become actualities, and herald even more wanton expansions of both irresistible power and unrestrained irrationality. Let us assemble these necessary components in the order of their appearance.

...the centralization of political power, first in the emerging race of tyrants and despots and kings, who subverted both feudal obligations and municipal freedoms in order to exert unqualified command over private wealth, by taxation, expropriation, and downright conquest and robbery of weaker peoples. Out of this personal sovereignty of the king by divine right, openly proclaimed as such, rose the impersonal sovereignty of the State. Under oligarchic or republican rule, this collective agency claimed all the prerogatives and powers that the king had originally claimed in person, indeed more sweepingly than any monarch had yet dared to do.

239—These transformations only emphasize that there is no component of the modern megamachine that did not exist, in fact or in dream, in the original model. What is distinctly modern is the effective materialization of archaic dreams that had hitherto been technologically impracticable. With the coalition of political absolutism, military regimentation, and mechanical invention came the re-introduction of an ancient institution that has long been in abeyance: forced labor and compulsory national service for war.

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Thus the chief military innovation that made the Egyptian megamachine possible was re-introduced for the first time since as a permanent auxiliary of large-scale government.

240—The megamachine, accordingly, is *not* a mere administrative organization: it is a machine in the orthodox technical sense, as a “combination of resistant bodies” so organized as to perform standardized motions and repetitive work. But note: all these forms of power, one re-enforcing the other, became essential to the new Pentagon of Power.

241—Nietzsche once described war as the “health of the State”; but more than this, it is the body and soul of the megamachine.

All the properties of individual machines—high energy inputs, mechanization, automation, quantity output—are increased by their inclusion in the megamachine....

Even before ‘absolute’ weapons were invented, automatism and absolutism were firmly coupled together in the constitution of every military organization. Hence war is the ideal condition for promoting the assemblage of the megamachine, and to keep the threat of war constantly in existence is the surest way of holding the otherwise autonomous or quasi-autonomous components together as a functioning working unit.

244—The new form of the fascist or communist dictatorships was that of a single party organization, based on a self-appointed revolutionary junta, and headed by a flesh-and-blood incarnation of the old-time ‘king by divine right,’ one no longer anointed by God, but, like Napoleon, self-crowned: a ruthless dictator (Lenin), a demonic Fuehrer (Hitler), a bloody tyrant (Stalin), proclaiming the lawfulness of unqualified power, unlawfully seized.

247—In its extreme Stalinist form the Russian megamachine betrayed, even before Hitler, the most sinister defects of the ancient megamachine: its reliance upon physical coercion and terrorism, its systematic enslavement of the entire working population, including members of the dictatorial party, its suppression of free personal

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intercourse, free travel, free access to the existing store of knowledge, free association, and finally its imposition of human sacrifice to appease the wrath and sustain the life of its terrible, blood-drinking God, Stalin himself.

247-248—Even silence could be provocative. Because this revolution, like its bloody predecessor, devoured its children in a methodical saturnalia of violence, it was long before the megamachine could produce in sufficient numbers the new elite, whose views and whose way of life conformed to its requirements: the technicians, the bureaucrats, the scientists.

248—The fact that Stalin, like Lenin before him, was treated at death to the ancient Egyptian process of mummification, and was put on view for public worship, makes the parallel almost too neat to seem anything but contrived—as if invented by me to support one of the major themes of this book. But so it actually was.

250—... the Nazi cure for unemployment was on the best pharaonic pattern: the uniformed labor army. Meanwhile, the military spirit of brutal drill and mindless obedience was carried into the schools and universities, where, as had been proved during the First World War, it had never been entirely absent since Fichte's day. In short, the Germans not merely enlarged the dimensions of the ancient megamachine, but made important innovations in the techniques of mass control....

251—The first military triumph of the Nazis in the Second World War, the total destruction of central Warsaw, followed by that of the center of Rotterdam in 1940, carried out a technique originally established by the first megamachines. The Germans had caught the essential spirit of the original models, as in Ashurnasirpal's recorded boast: "I cut off their heads, I burned them with fire, a pile of living men and of heads against their city gate I set up, men impales on stakes, the city I destroyed and devastated, I turned it into mounds and ruin heaps, the young men and maidens in the fire I burned." It remained for our 'progressive' age to sanctify these psychotic acts and normalize this criminality.

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257—If one forgets the actual part played by the King (wartime American President), by the Priesthood (secret enclave of scientists), by the vast enlargement of the bureaucracy, the military forces, and the industrial establishment, one would have no realistic conception of what actually took place.

258—Both [ancient and modern] megamachines can be identified by their similar technological capacities: they are mass organizations capable of performing tasks that lie outside the range of small work-collectives and loose tribal or territorial groups.

259—From such evidence, one has reason to infer that the megamachine was originally the creation of the same weapons-bearing minority that invented organized warfare, and imposed unconditional obedience and regular tribute upon the passive, non-aggressive, compliant neolithic peasants, peasants who throughout all succeeding history have in fact formed the larger part of the human population. Though the modern megamachine is equally the product of war, it has, as we shall presently see, partly overcome the need for overt coercion by a more subtle kind, which substitutes rewards, or seeming rewards, for punishments.

260—The ideology that underlies and unites the ancient and the modern megamachine is one that ignores the needs and purposes of life in order to fortify the power complex and extend its dominion. Both megamachines are oriented toward death; and the more the approach unified planetary control, the more inescapable does that result promise to become. In the gross form of war, everyone is familiar with this constant historic drive, for military violence—as distinguished from sporadic minor forms of animal aggression—is the historic product of a special form of social organization, developed in certain ancient societies roughly sixty million years ago, and recovered, with all its sinister institutional accomplishments, in the Egyptian and Mesopotamian communities of the Pyramid Age.

All these ancient features were restored during the nineteenth century: above all, the collective dedication to death. During the last half century alone, between fifty and a hundred million people—it is impossible to make precise calculations—have met premature death through violence and starvation, on the battlefield, in concentration

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camp, in bombed cities and agricultural areas that have been turned into mass extermination camps.

261—As with all modern technical performances, the mass infliction of death has been both expanded and speeded up. But so far, nuclear explosions and rocket explorations, both directly issuing from war plans, have been the most conspicuous manifestations of these lethal facilities, along with the communications systems upon which they depend. The fact that no *human* purpose, present or prospective, would be served by these modes of extermination, no matter how successful in 'overkill,' only demonstrates the deep underlayers of psychotic irrationality upon which the fantasies of absolute weapons, of absolute power, and of absolute control have been laid. Freud made a parallel between the magic rituals of many so-called primitive peoples and the behavior of neurotic personalities in our time. But there is no practice in these arrested cultures, neither head-hunting nor cannibalism nor voodoo murder, that is comparable in superstitious savagery and mental corruption with the current plans of highly trained scientists, technologists, and military men to inflict collective death on the scale that modern technological agents have made possible.

261-262—Compared with this pervasive dedication to death in our own culture, the Egyptian cult of the dead, developed during the Pyramid Age, with its magniloquent pyramids, its magic rituals, and its elaborate techniques of mummification, was a relatively innocent exhibition of irrationality.

267-268—This high degree of dehumanization increases the lethal automatism of the megamachine. Those who plan its strategic objectives contemplate the extermination of a hundred million human beings in a single day with less aversion than the killing of a few hundred bedbugs. For them, the sacrifice of an equivalent number of their own countrymen has become equally 'acceptable,' once the 'balance of terror' fails.

In plain words, the religion of the megamachine demands wholesale human sacrifice, to restore in negative form the missing dimension of life. Thus the cult of the Sun God turns out, in its final scientific celebration, to be no less savage and irrational than that of

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the Aztecs, though infinitely more deadly. After all, the Aztec priests disembowelled their victims by hand, one by one; and human nausea at this spectacle was so great that the priests were compelled to ensure themselves against unfavorable reactions by threatening a similar fate for those who even turned their eyes away. The priests of the Pentagon and the Kremlin have no need for such threats: in their underground control centers they can do their job more neatly, merely by pressing a button. Untouchable: unchallengeable: inviolable. Such are these new controllers of human destiny.

269—Less than a decade after the explosion of the first atom bomb the megamachine had expanded to a point where it began to dominate key areas of the whole economy of the United States: its system of control reached beyond the airfields, the rocket sites, the bomb factories, the universities, to a hundred other related areas, tying the once separate and independent enterprises into a central organization whose irrational and humanly subversive policies ensured the still further expansion of the megamachine.

In twenty years, the expenditure upon the Atomic Energy Program came to thirty-five billion dollars: more than the total amount of American military expenditures on the Second World War. The subsequent Cold War itself, that essential device for expanding the megamachine, has demanded in the United States an expenditure of more than fifty billion dollars a year.

300-301—The modernized megamachine has reproduced all the early features of the ancient form by pyramid building on an even larger scale. And just as the static physical structures supported the worshipper's belief in the validity of the Pharaoh's claims to divinity and immortality, so the new dynamic forms of the pyramid-complex—the skyscrapers, the atomic reactors, the nuclear weapons, the superhighways, the space rockets, the underground control centers, the collective nuclear shelters (tombs)—seem equally to validate and exalt the new religion. No other religion has ever produced so many manifestations of power, has brought about such a complete system of control, has unified so many separate institutions, has suppressed so many independent ways of life, or for that matter has ever claimed so many worshippers, who by word and deed have



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testified to the kingdom, the power, and the glory of its nuclear and electronic gods. The miracles performed by the technocratic priesthood are genuine: only their claims of divinity are spurious.

Symbolically, at the entrance to the new pyramid complexes stands the nuclear reactor, which first manifested its powers to the multitude by a typical trick of Bronze Age deities: the instant extermination of all the inhabitants of a populous city. Of this early display of nuclear power, as of all the vastly augmented potentialities for destruction that so rapidly followed, one can say what Melville's mad captain in 'Moby Dick' said of himself: "All of my means and methods are sane: my purpose is mad."

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