



# The stakes of Information Technology

*Conference of* Marcel BOURGEOIS



*Read by Claire Lobet-Maris*



# A major intention

To question not only the **UTILITY** of information technology but above all the **STAKES** of information technology

*« It is everything we might have gained or lost in a near future, when everything will be irreversible »*

## In a clear philosophical frame

*« You don't buy scientists, technicians and machines to serve the truth but to increase your power »*

Jean-François LYOTARD



# The 4 spheres of the Information Society

➤ The information society is not a Society as a whole but a fragmented one into 4 different spheres, each functioning for itself and trying to make use of the others

- The technical sphere
- The economic sphere
- The capitalist sphere
- The political sphere

➤ Marcel Bourgeois analyses the stakes of IT by taking the viewpoint of each of these spheres without losing the fact that the real issue at stake is what Society as a whole (*not only the information society*) can win or lose



# The technical stakes

- Technique consists in searching « an even better » way of making or doing something
- To progress, scientists need financial and political support and to gain support scientists must convince the other spheres with certitudes.
- They become producers of mythical rhetoric that anticipates the use of the technology by taking optimistic projections as realities
- This is an irresponsible rhetoric since it ignores both the future development of the technology and its social impact



# The technical stakes

- This is particularly true for IT « *always proposed before being asked and assimilated by force, thus leading to more myths than the others* ». ... « *No surprise if the history of computerisation has been a tremendous economic and human mess ...with constant crisis...* »
- This is particularly serious for IT since « *IT profoundly affects the systems of personal relations, knowledge, teaching and even language it self , that is to say the very basis of our culture...* »
- The social and economic responsibility of the scientific is huge and the scientific must be aware of it and assume it as a citizen of the whole society



# The economic stakes

- IT is considered as « *the saviour of a very stagnant economy decreasing since the early 70 's. It is seen as the saviour because it should have the mythical power to open new profitable markets...and to restore the productivity and the competitiveness in all the sectors of the economy* »... so called « the **NEW economy** »
- *The information market is pushed and framed by the offer and not by the demand ...clearly dominated by the American model of consumption and production* »
- This frame is risky and dangerous



# The economic stakes

- Economists are making a mistake « *when they believe in a demand being dominated by the offer for the existence of a technique does not always give rise to the expected demand...* »
- Economists are making a second mistake « *when they think they can, by developing information technology, stop an economic crisis the origin of which is not technological but financial* »
- The responsibility of the Economy has to be the moderation, fixing solvency limits to the technological ambitions... This role of moderator is crucial to domesticate the technological development in a societal way that means acceptable regarding the human fulfilment and the existing resources ...



# The capitalist stakes

- « The « *imposture of the capitalism* » consists in identifying itself with economic liberalism and market economy » ...
- « *Liberalism* preaches tolerance and defends individual liberties while respecting laws and the general interest »
- « *Market economy* is based on the reciprocity of exchanges of goods or services between economic actors » ...
- But « *Capitalism* is based on force and intangible exchange»



# The capitalist stakes

- Information and technology of information open new important possibilities for the capitalists :
  - ✓ The **control of operation** « *modern capitalists need to know what is happening at every moment, everywhere ...* »
  - ✓ The **control of the media** through huge investment into media groups creating « *a true infocracy that takes on the task of making people dream...drowning them with unimportant information and turning their attention away from what they must not know* »
  - ✓ The **control of the transactions** by holding the sources of the goods or the channel of distribution in order to gain profit and to become a central regulator of the market
  - ✓ The **control of public goods** as knowledge, information... by their growing capitalisation on the stock exchange



# The political stakes

- The political stakes are marked by the balance of powers between Nation States and Capitalists
- Three major political stakes need to be discussed
  - ✓ the public management - E.government
  - ✓ the democracy - E.democracy
  - ✓ the freedom -Security



# The political stakes

- E. Government : public services know a deficit of legitimacy and of proximity with citizens. To gain in legitimacy and in proximity , they will invest into new services based on IT .... this will reinforce exclusion and technocracy
- E. Democracy : « *Internet has often been presented as the miracle solution to the democracy crisis... but, we are not in a situation where it is a question of making democracy work more effectively, but in one where it is a question of installing or restoring it...* »
- Security : « *Security ideology supports a huge development of police and military intelligence systems... at all levels ... This leads to a restriction of our privacy and to an international increase of violence and of use of IT with regards to this violence* »



# Conclusion

- The stakes of IT are extremely important and the forces acting on its development are colossal...
- In front of them most of the modest computerscientists feel lost and used for ends that they have not chosen to serve... for ends that they can not imagine due to the obscurity and the complexity of the technical process...
- « *The conditions are then ripe for the emergence, here and there, as Gunther Anders observed in respect to the Eichmann case, of horrifying acts for which no-one feels himself or herself responsible* »