

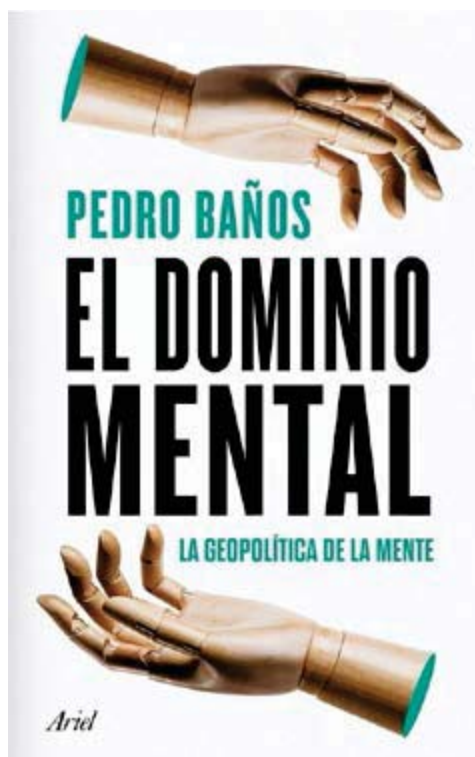
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## Recension

*EL DOMINIO MENTAL. LA GEOPOLÍTICA DE LA MENTE*  
*[MENTAL MASTERY. GEOPOLITICS OF THE MIND]. Pedro Baños*  
*Bajo, Publisher: Ariel, 2020*

*ISBN 9788434433090 (400 pages)*



André Glucksmann said that man does not think but informs himself. He is thus a consumer of a canned product selected by others; this saves him the effort and time to think for himself and even to think simply. In practice a brave new world in Huxley's ethology and combining effort and entertainment (the famous *soma*), but not in the reality of the facts, hidden by the combination of both factors.

We live in a society that defines itself as an "information society" when all the information in history today doubles every two years. With the knowledge available, the key lies in the criteria and tools for correct selection.

But this is also not easy in a complex and interconnected world built on weak and accommodating concepts, where the emotional takes precedence over the rational and a good speech is better than a true speech. The key is the management of the irrational aspects, of feelings, because feeling precedes thought as music precedes words. It is also more manageable than reason.

This is exacerbated by a globalisation that encourages the crossing of agendas and facilitates interference in internal affairs by third parties; the terms inside and outside have ceased to exist with globalisation. Influence policies are, within what is known as *Soft Power*, discreet and effective. And they supplant confrontation, which is very practical, particularly in this scenario of turmoil.

The dangers to democracy are obvious. Every model is based on a single truth from which, from a Cartesian perspective, the rest can be deduced. However, this is not the case in democracy, where there is no one truth that can be asserted over others, but rather, what really exists are basic agreements on different truths that make the existence of a political community possible and make it necessary to maintain a lively and constant dialogue for its maintenance and updating. This cannot be a completely fractured truth because a fractured truth gives rise to a fractured society. Moreover, truth and power go hand in hand, meaning that struggles for truth are at heart a struggle for power.

The manipulation of information brings democracies face to face with their own contradictions: control of information can lead to control of ideas, when it is the capacity for the inclusion of ideas that indicates the quality and solidity of democracy.

Moreover, the power that is attributed to the people actually resides in their vanguards, be they economic or otherwise, internal or external. And there are informal powers that very effectively promote acts in their own interest. Equality for all is a necessary fiction for the construction of a democracy.

The greatest risk to truth lies in what is taken for granted, unquestionable and transparent. The book *El dominio mental*, written by an old acquaintance of this house, Colonel Pedro Baños Bajo, former professor of the Strategy Department of the Higher School of the Armed Forces and a person of reference when talking about strategic thinking, offers us the opportunity to place ourselves outside the framework in order to evaluate its certainties and risks from a new, foreign and different perspective.

The book, written in careful prose, is a challenge to conventional schemes but also a call for reflection on the hidden threats and opportunities that scientific advances offer for social control. This is a logical extension of his two previous works: *Así se domina el mundo* and *El dominio mundial*, also published by *Ariel*. In these works, he already showed his concern for manipulation, in fact it is a consistent theme from the very first page of his first book in the context of an amoral and unrestricted use of power.

In this way, he insistently, and sometimes even crudely, exposes the existence of cross-interests and hidden agendas that are not known and even contrary to those that are made explicit by unclear informal groups. For the Colonel, many of the important decisions are made by individuals or groups belonging to the so-called powers that be. At the same time, he acts almost like a technological evangelist by spreading these advances in response to the power he holds dear. His work thus serves strategic oversight.

We are faced with a trilogy of domination which, as could not be otherwise, remains in the spirit – which is the place of the great battles – which makes this last work the necessary summary of the two previous ones, the basis. The chapters of the book are an expression of this: “social mind”, “mind surveillance”, “mind politics”, “mind warfare”, “COVID-19 elections”, “the new mental society”, “thought control techniques”, “hacking into other people’s brains”, “neurotechnology, mind control and human rights” and “mind control”.

“Hard” considerations such as military or economic power that were the *leitmotif* of earlier works can be supplemented if not replaced by “soft” operations that go beyond mere influence. In this sense, his new work is a reconsideration of his previous work. Genuine power is more inconcrete and undefined than it was then, but at the same time equally effective. What is hard can be broken. The inconcrete and hidden, as Lao Tse reminds us, cannot, and that is why power is installed there. As De Gaulle said, silence is the language of power: it puts an end in practice to any possible dissident formulation.

We are not in the realm of the delusional, conspiratorial or imaginary, but in the realm of stark reality. The *Snowden case* brought the possibilities of espionage, surveillance and the massive accumulation of data at all levels and in all areas to the public’s attention. In 2016, the *Cambridge Analytica* case showed the possibilities offered by data mining and demonstrated the effectiveness of these techniques in elucidating an issue as important as *Brexit*. This is not a conspiracy theory but practices that are as real as they are hidden and carried out by pragmatic actors.

Moreover, Colonel Baños delves into social psychology and informatively points out different methodologies of control of society by the forces operating in “the corridors of power”, as Carl Schmitt put it. Techniques and technologies that enable hypervigilance.

The great richness of the book is its compilation, which makes it almost like a manual. All in all, this is a necessary and different work, a breath of fresh air with an alternative point of view. It is not a vulgar importation of Anglo-Saxon ideas that dominate the market as a single way of thinking and are presented almost as if they

were a doctrine. Rather, it is a dialectic of defiance to precisely that. Rather, his work could be described as alternative and placed in the wake of American authors such as Chomsky, although his approach is different.

Criticism is an essential element for the survival of our societies, which rarely question their foundations, when doubt is part of the West's heritage and explains the keys to its success: progress and technology. So it is good to doubt, to submit one's own principles to this crucible, as Descartes proclaimed in his method, in order to at least be able to affirm with certainty that we exist, no matter how much we are deceived by evil geniuses.

A subject of great sensitivity and value is being touched upon, one that has its precursors in classics such as Gustave Le Bon, Goebbels and Bernays. The latter – the originator of the concept of *Public Relations* and author of *Propaganda* – with the ruse that cigarettes were “torches of freedom” contributed to the spread of smoking among mid-century women.

In the end, our societies are formally defined as democratic, but there is no democracy without informed citizens with the capacity to make the right choices. In this way, and although it may seem the opposite, we are not free because the control is stronger than is apparent at first glance; we are not presented with all the possible options and, furthermore, we are conditioned when it comes to doing so, seeking a false consent from the governed.

The key is not in the control of information but in the control of the information agenda. Some options are overexposed, others are not even considered, while the individual can be manipulated emotionally through powerful tools that are used continuously. The fact is that information can be selected, processed and biased in multiple ways, conditioning responses through the control not only of the frame, but also of the mind itself.

The different biases that can be induced on individuals with sophisticated techniques affect the foundations of democracy by altering its basis, since it is based on the supposedly free and unconditional decisions of citizens, which are thus affected in the criteria for their adoption, and are pedagogically oriented.

This is why, in the words of Alain de Benoist, “the political and media elites hold the same discourse”; it cannot be otherwise. There is a remarkable degree of covariation between the position of the media and public opinion. The media, as a business, can be manipulated and public opinion can be manipulated; indeed, it can work to condition individuals. Public opinion cannot be contradicted – at least not systematically – but it can be educated; let us not forget that the name of Goebbels' Ministry was *Propaganda* but also *Public Enlightenment*. Power is thus transformed into education, in such a way that it is exercised as if it were not really exercised at all, as if it were natural.

The “new” technologies will thus lead to the development of two social trends that are not necessarily opposed to each other. The first is oriented towards greater direct

democracy, which gives the polls more political weight. At the same time, however, greater control of the citizen by the state apparatus and consequently greater dirigisme is also possible. In this way, the previous tendency, which is concealed and disguised by the first one and which, moreover, legitimises the system, is annulled. The different forms of “social control” practised in China are here to stay and even to be expanded.

The main critique of the work is obvious: not everything is conspiracy, however much conspiracy there is. And such an unconventional approach, which additionally incorporates approaches that are not common, is risky and debatable. This gimmicky oversimplification distorts the work and loses objectivity, but by no means invalidates it. It does, however, require recourse to traditional and solid sources in order to establish the composition of the situation.

The author’s vision is realist in the strictest sense, no longer “Bismarckian”, but along the path of the purest Machiavellianism; that which confuses force with power, when what characterises power is capacity to build and not the other way round. To the perversity in his use to which the Colonel constantly alludes, the “so that” characteristic of any villainy is always missing.

In any case, this is not an academic work, but an informative and exploratory one, which is why it makes use of unorthodox resources. The aforementioned cases of Snowden and Brexit suggest that such approaches have not been sufficiently considered in the past. There are already many established sources for a more conventional view.

Watching the watcher, doubting, is the cornerstone not of democracy but of the West.

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