In the literature on Francis Bacon’s work few attempts have been made from a philological and historical point of view to reach an understanding of exactly what his attitude was towards technics, technical knowledge and its development.\(^1\) To introduce this theme, I would like to refer to some pages (pp. 84–91) from a classic of historiography, Paolo Rossi’s *I filosofi e le macchine*. This study has made an important contribution to philosophical historiography in general, and when it first appeared it undoubtedly marked something of a turning point for Italian historiography, little inclined as it was to deal with technics. The values informing this work are not, at least as far as I am concerned, in question. However, I do have some doubts about his interpretation of the relationship between forms of knowledge (including that of the philosophers) and technics, and its implications for the concept of progress.

As Rossi quite rightly points out in his book, the whole of Bacon’s work is concerned with replacing a rhetorical and literary culture with a technical and scientific one.\(^2\) Bacon’s protest against the sterility of traditional culture seems to be based on an opposition between the mechanical arts and philosophy, in other words on the opposition between *progressiveness*, a characteristic of technical and scientific knowledge, and the typically static nature of the dialectical exercises


of the Schools and the rhetorical exercises of Humanism.\textsuperscript{3} Knowledge in the mechanical arts is progressive and accumulative, and collaboration between researchers the norm. According to Bacon, all fields of knowledge (with the exception of poetry) should be characterized by progressiveness and collaboration.\textsuperscript{4} For this reason Bacon distinguishes between the inventor and the master, between the person who adds his contribution to the work of his predecessor and thereby contributes to the progress of science, and the enlightened scholar. For Bacon, the inventor is the emblematic figure of the mechanical arts, while the master-pupil pairing is predominant in other fields. He thus attributes a universal value to certain typical categories of technical knowledge: collaboration, progressiveness, perfectibility, invention. These, in his view, should inform the whole field of human knowledge, though within a context of close collaboration between science and technics that also moves beyond the ‘merely empirical and operational mechanics’ of the mechanical arts to date.\textsuperscript{5}

This is the essential framework of Paolo Rossi’s reading of Bacon’s reform of knowledge.

I would like now to look in more detail – limiting myself to Book I of Novum Organum (1620, Part Two, L. I, aphorisms 1–130),\textsuperscript{6} plus some references to Book II and to The Advancement of Learning –\textsuperscript{7} at the way in which Bacon develops his argument about technics, or rather, about the mechanical arts, to use the expression definitively codified in the Middle Ages and which he continues to adopt. Of the group of concepts highlighted by Rossi, I will just examine perfectibility and, in part, invention, leaving the concepts of progressiveness, collaboration and intersubjectivity for some other occasion.

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\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., 86.
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 90–91.