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The Spaceships of Bordeaux: The Well/Library Concerning A Technological Society

Floor drawing quotations

Diogenes of Sinope (412/404-323 BC)

Diogenes maintained that all the artificial growths of society were incompatible with happiness, that morality implies a return to the simplicity of nature and that civilization is regressive.

Gerrard Winstanley (1609-1676)

"the blessings of the earth" should "be common to all.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

While government and laws provide for the safety and well-being of assembled men, the sciences, letters and arts, less despotic and perhaps more powerful, spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains with which men are burdened, stifle in them the sense of that original liberty for which they seemed to have been born, make them love their slavery, and turn them into what is called civilized peoples.

William Blake (1757-1827)

If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite
William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell 1790-93

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

Machinery is aggressive. The weaver becomes a web, the machinist a machine. If you do not use the tools, they use you.

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

Be wary of technology; it is often merely an improved means to an unimproved end.
Men have become the tools of their tools.

Bertrand Russell (1872 – 1970)

All the researches of psycho-analysis, behaviourism and biochemistry will be brought into play...The society of experts will control propaganda and education. It will teach loyalty to the world government ... will instill submissiveness into the great bulk of the population ... invent ingenious ways of concealing its own power, leaving the forms of democracy intact... all real power will come to be concentrated in the hands of those who understand the art of scientific manipulation.

Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976)

The threat of technology does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology. The actual threat has already afflicted man in his essence.

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940)

Not architecture alone but all technology is, at certain stages, evidence of a collective dream.

Lewis Mumford (1895-1990)

Western society has accepted as unquestionable a technological imperative that is quite as arbitrary as the most primitive taboo: not merely the duty to foster invention and constantly to create

technological novelties, but equally the duty to surrender to these novelties unconditionally, just because they are offered, without respect to their human consequences.

Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979)

By virtue of the way it has organized its technological base, contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian. For "totalitarian" is not only a terroristic political coordination of society, but also a non-terroristic economic-technical coordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests.

Jürgen Habermas (1929-)

Science can only be comprehended epistemologically, which means as one category of possible knowledge, as long as knowledge is not equated either effusively with the absolute knowledge of a great philosophy or blindly with scientific self-understanding of the actual business of research.

Theodor Adorno (1903 – 1969)

The all consuming engine driving disaster is an ever expanding capitalist economy fed by scientific research and the latest technologies.

Hannah Arendt 1906-1975

“The human artifice of the world separates human existence from all mere animal environment, but life itself is outside this artificial world, and through life man remains related to all other living organisms. For some time now, a great many scientific endeavors have been directed toward making life also “artificial,” toward cutting the last tie through which even man belongs among the children of nature.

This future man, whom the scientists tell us they will produce in no more than a hundred years, seems to be possessed by a rebellion against human existence as it has been given, a free gift from nowhere (secularly speaking), which he wishes to exchange, as it were, for something he has made himself.

Jacques Ellul (1912-1994)

True technique will know how to maintain the illusion of liberty, choice, and individuality; but these will have been carefully calculated so that they will be integrated into the mathematical reality merely as appearances!

Technology will not tolerate any judgment being passed on it. Or rather: technologists do not easily tolerate people expressing an ethical or moral judgment on what they do. But the expression of ethical, moral and spiritual judgments is actually the highest freedom of mankind.

Joseph Weizenbaum (1923-2008)

The computer programmer is a creator of universes for which he alone is the lawgiver. No playwright, no stage director, no emperor, however powerful, has ever exercised such absolute authority to arrange a stage or field of battle and to command such unswervingly dutiful actors or troops.

Theodore Roszak (1933-2011)

I think, however, the current fascination with the computer and its principal product, information, deserves a more critical response. This is because the computer does so ingeniously mimic human intelligence that it may significantly shake our confidence in the uses of the mind. And it is the mind that must think about all things, including the computer.

Fredy Perlman (1934 – 1985)

Thanks to science, capitalists were able to transform much of the natural environment into a processed world, an artifice, and to reduce most human beings into efficient tenders of the artifice.

Ivan Illich (1926-2002)

School has become the world religion of a modernized proletariat, and makes futile promises of salvation to the poor of the technological age.

Guy Debord (1931-1994)

The society whose modernisation has reached the stage of integrated spectacle is characterised by the combined effect of five principal factors: incessant technological renewal, integration of state and economy, generalised secrecy, unanswerable lies, and eternal present. . . .

Neil Postman (1931 - 2003)

If students get a sound education in the history, social effects and psychological biases of technology, they may grow to be adults who use technology rather than be used by it.

Theodore Kaczynski (1942 -)

It is not possible to make a LASTING compromise between technology and freedom, because technology is by far the more powerful social force and continually encroaches on freedom through REPEATED compromises.

John Zerzan (1943-)

Never before have people been so infantilized, made so dependent on the machine for everything; as the earth rapidly approaches its extinction due to technology, our souls are shrunk and flattened by its pervasive rule. Any sense of wholeness and freedom can only return by the undoing of the massive division of labour at the heart of technological progress. This is the liberatory project in all its depth.

Langdon Winner (1949-)

In the technical realm, we repeatedly enter into a series of social contracts, the terms of which are revealed only after the signing.

David Watson (1951 -)

We should be cautiously open to the spiritual and non-rational, and skeptical of the more invisible magical thinking—what we might call “magical reason”—pervading secular thought and experience in modern society. Science and technology are for most people a new religion, and their orthodoxies are believed with the same fervor.

Derrick Jensen (1960 -)

To be clear, civilization is not the same as society. Civilization is a specific, hierarchical organization based on 'power over.' Dismantling civilization, taking down that power structure, does not mean the end of all social order. It should ultimately mean more justice, more local control, more democracy, and more human rights, not less.

There is a language older by far and deeper than words. It is the language of bodies, of body on body, wind on snow, rain on trees, wave on stone. It is the language of dream, gesture, symbol, memory. We have forgotten this language. We do not even remember that it exists.