

The Man in the Cabin

The Life and Influence of Ted K

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Part One: The Death and Life of Ted Kaczynski

Theodore John Kaczynski died in prison. He was found unresponsive in his cell during the early hours of June 10, 2023. That was over a month ago now. Since then, it has been revealed that he committed suicide by hanging. He was 81 years old and had spent the last few years of his life receiving treatment for cancer.¹

I don't think it's much of a surprise that Kaczynski's life would end like this. His own father shot himself after he had been diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. His writings touch on both quality of life and acceptance of death. In 1998, he made a similar attempt on his life during his trial, and in an interview regarding his sentence, he stated that he didn't want to live long.

Regardless of what we may speculate about his death and regardless of how we may feel about him, we cannot deny that Ted Kaczynski led a truly unique life.

Theodore John Kaczynski was born into a family of Polish immigrants living in Chicago on May 22nd, 1942. Personal writings seized and published by the FBI, give a great deal of insight into his early life and upbringing. These writings would show that his parents were cold and harsh. His incredible intellect and advanced academic status would isolate him from his high school peers and aroused jealousy from his younger brother David. They would also detail his homoerotic experiences as a teenager and his problems approaching women, as well as his dissatisfaction and occasional anger at society.² I think it is worth noting that Kaczynski would often express a rather misogynistic, passive-aggressive attitude towards women, which he would regret and apologise for in later life.³

Kaczynski attended Harvard University on scholarship, aged only sixteen, and would earn his Bachelor of Arts degree in mathematics. During this period, he became a test subject in the psychological experiments of Dr. Henry Murray. Many have speculated

¹ Parnaby, Laura. (2023). Unabomber Ted Kaczynski 'hanged himself' in North Carolina jail cell where he wa. The Daily Mail. [Online]. 13 June 2023. Available at <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12190389/Unabomber-Ted-Kaczynski-hanged-South-Carolina-jail-cell.html> [Accessed 13 June 2023].

² Kaczynski, Ted. (2023). Ted Kaczynski's 1979 Autobiography. [Online]. The Ted K Archive. Available at: <https://www.thetedkarchive.com/library/ted-kaczynski-ted-kaczynski-s-1979-autobiography> [Accessed 15 July 2023].

³ Kaczynski, Ted. (N/A). Apology to Women. [Online]. The Ted K Archive. Last Updated: N/A. Available at: <https://www.thetedkarchive.com/library/ted-kaczynski-apology-to-women> [Accessed 15 July 2023].

that these experiments were part of the MK Ultra programme ran by the CIA. However, Kaczynski expressed scepticism towards this theory and also stated that the experiment had little influence on him.⁴

Kaczynski began to build a respectable and successful academic career in the field of mathematics. Despite all of this, he was deeply unhappy living within the establishment. By now, he had already begun to develop his philosophical critique of modernity and technological progress.

He managed to acquire a secluded plot of land in Lincon, Montana, where he built a wood cabin and lived a predominately self-sufficient lifestyle.⁵

It was here in the wilderness that Ted Kaczynski found his sense of catharsis. That was until civilisation caught up with him. Over time, his life in the wilderness would be disturbed by aircraft, dirt bikes, logging, and various other industrial ventures, as well as a highway built through the forest. Filled with rage Kaczynski decided he would fight back against technological civilisation.

He would begin sabotaging industrial developments within the vicinity of his cabin. More infamously, he would launch a bombing campaign targeting airlines, scientists, and industrial lobbyists that would leave three people dead and twenty-three injured. Given just how angry Kaczynski was in his youth, he may have had a disposition towards aggression and violence. The bombings were investigated by the FBI, who refer to their culprit as “*The Unabomber*” (a university and Airline Bomber).

Kaczynski left no clues behind, leading to a 17-year-long manhunt that would employ over 150 agents and cost over 50 million USD. This was the largest and most expensive manhunt in FBI history, and it churned up nothing.

When the mysterious Unabomber promised to end his crime spree if his manifesto was printed in a major American newspaper, they were forced to submit to his demands.

On September 19, 1995, “*Industrial Society and Its Future*” would be printed in both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*.

The 35,000-word manifesto was printed on the front page and opened with the now much-quoted and iconic words: “The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race.”

What followed was a harsh and intricate critique of modern technology.

Kaczynski would state that the technological system created by man no longer serves his needs. Mankind now adapts to meet the needs of machines.

⁴ The Ted K Archive. (n/A). Uziel,Alex & kaczynski, Ted. [Online]. thetedkarchive. Last Updated: N/A. Available at: <https://www.thetedkarchive.com/library/alex-uziel-ted-kaczynski-debunking-the-ted-kaczynski-mk-ultra> [Accessed 15 July 2023]

⁵ Blackfoot Valley Dispatch & The Anarchist Library. (2001). An Interview with Ted Kaczynski. [Online]. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/ted-kaczynski-an-interview-with-ted-kaczynski>. Last Updated: N/A. Available at: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/ted-kaczynski-an-interview-with-ted-kaczynski> [Accessed 15 July 2023].

Our reliance and servitude towards the system have made our lives unfulfilling and caused widespread psychological suffering in “developed” countries and physical suffering in the “third world.” Much of the manifesto would explore the environmental, lack of freedom, and psychological damage the system has caused, which Kaczynski would hold scientists and “*technophiles*” accountable for. Kaczynski states that the collapse of the system is invertible and will have catastrophic consequences. He does, however, believe that it is better that the system collapse sooner rather than later. If the system continues to tighten its grip on humanity, forcing humanity to become even more dependent on it, its collapse will be even more devastating.

Kaczynski called for a revolution against technology to help quicken the collapse of the system and return humanity to nature.⁶

Often, when we discuss the thinking of Kaczynski and the ideas put forward in his manifesto, we point towards Jacques Ellul and a number of psychologists, anthropologists, and zoologists, but we never realise that the ideas expressed to some extent reflect his own experiences. Ted Kaczynski was troubled when he lived in civilization and only felt at peace in the wilderness.

Ted Kaczynski’s victory was short-lived.

A woman named Linda Patrick read the manifesto and found this thinking rather familiar. She then convinced her husband, David Kaczynski, that his brother Ted was the infamous Unabomber.

David then turned his brother into the FBI, and on April 3, 1996, Ted Kaczynski was arrested outside his cabin. David scored a final victory in their long-standing sibling rivalry but would be left stricken with guilt.

Ted Kaczynski’s actions were undoubtedly destructive, but let us not forget that Dante also reserved a circle of hell for traitors as well as killers.

The highly publicised trial that followed was highly complex and dramatic. It would end with Ted Kaczynski being found guilty and convicted of 10 counts of transportation, mailing, and use of bombs, and three counts of first-degree murder, and given eight consecutive life sentences without the possibility of parole.

His sentence was served in ADX Florence, a Supermax prison in Colorado, until eventually being transferred to Federal Medical Centre, Butner, in North Carolina, towards the end of his life.

Although Kaczynski did not want to spend the rest of his life in prison, he found the Supermax to be a liveable environment. He would find that the heightened outward

⁶ Kaczynski, T. (2010). *Technological Slavery: The Collected Writings of Theodore J. Kaczynski*. 10th ed. USA: Feral House. pp.38-120.

awareness he developed in nature had now turned inward. While there, he would befriend other high-profile prisoners, such as Ramzi Yousef and Timothy McVeigh.⁷⁸

Kaczynski received a flood of letters. It is alleged that over 400 people wrote to Kaczynski in prison. Many of his letters have been published or posted online. One notable individual in this army of pen pals was a woman named Joy Richards, whom Kaczynski referred to as his “*Lady Love*.” The two developed a romantic attachment to one another that would blossom into a long-distance relationship that would last until her death from cancer in 2006.⁹ David would make several unsuccessful attempts to reach out to Ted, who never forgave him.

Shortly after he was sentenced, Kaczynski began working on an ill-fated book called “*Truth Versus Lies*,” in which he wrote about his relationship with his brother and gave his own account of the trial. Publication would be plagued with legal issues, and the book was never given a proper release.¹⁰¹¹¹²

Kaczynski also wrote several essays and even a few short stories. Many would make their way into small publications and eventually the internet.

Several essays would be collected and printed in a book called “*The Road to Revolution*.” However, he would feel like the publisher handled his work unprofessionally, and eventually his collected essays would be published by Feral House as “*Technological Slavery*”. He would also deeply disapprove of how Feral House handled his work and even expresses his dissatisfaction in a forward to this edition, which featured a forensic reconstruction of one of his mail bombs on the cover and a title he didn’t choose.¹³

In the year 2015, he would publish a new book called “*Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*,” which gives a more detailed inside look at his philosophy and sets guidelines for an anti-tech revolutionary movement. This book and a new book were published by

⁷ Bailey, Holly. (2010). The Unabomber’s not-so-lonely prison life. Yahoo News. [Online]. 21 January 2010. Available at <https://www.yahoo.com/news/the-unabomber-s-not-so-lonely-prison-life-210559693.html> [Accessed 15.07.23].

⁸ The Anarchist Library. (N/A). Ted Kaczynski’s Comments on Timothy McVeigh. [Online]. theanarchistlibrary.org. Last Updated: N/A. Available at: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/ted-kaczynski-ted-kaczynski-s-comments-on-timothy-mcveigh> [Accessed 15 July 2023].

⁹ Konstantinides, A. (2016). She’s beyond my wildest dreams!’ The pen pal teacher nicknamed Lady Love who sto. The Daily Mail. [Online]. 27 January 2016. Available at <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3418476/The-love-story-Unabomber-Ted-Kaczynski-teacher-Joy-Richards.html> [Accessed 15.07.23].

¹⁰ Dubner, S.J. (1999). Don’t Want To Live Long: Ted Kaczynsk. Time. [Online]. 18. October 1999. Available at <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,992264-1,00.html> [Accessed 15.07.23].

¹¹ Glaberson, W. (1999). In Book, Unabomber Pleads His Case. New York Times. [Online]. 1 March 1999. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/03/01/us/in-book-unabomber-pleads-his-case.html> [Accessed 15.07.23].

¹² Lane, W. (2000). The Unabomber’s Unending 15 Minutes of Fame. [Online]. TheAnarchistLibrary.org. Last Updated: 2000. Available at: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/walker-lane-pseudonym-of-peter-erbe-the-unabomber-s-unending-15-minutes-of-fame> [Accessed 15 July 2023].

¹³ Kaczynski, T. (2010). *Technological Slavery: The Collected Writings of Theodore J. Kaczynski*. 10th ed. USA: Feral House. pp.09.

a company called Fitch & Madison, which also published a new edition of “*Technological Slavery*,” which the author seemingly approved of, This publisher has announced a second volume of collected essays that is yet to be released.¹⁴

¹⁴ Fitch & Madison Publishers. (2023). Theodore J. Kaczynski, 1942-2023. [Online]. fitchmadison.com. Last Updated: 19 June 2023. Available at: <https://fitchmadison.com/theodore-j-kaczynski-1942-2023/> [Accessed 15 July 2023].

Part Two: The Influence of Ted Kaczynski

The Unabomber case was heavily publicised, and *Industrial Society and Its Future* is probably the most widely read philosophical text of our era. As a result, Kaczynski became deeply engrained in the collective consciousness of the United States and beyond. It is somewhat ironic that a man who initially wanted nothing to do with society would come to have such a vast cultural impact.

Long after this trial, Ted Kaczynski would feature heavily in the media. He has been mentioned in TV shows and movies as diverse as *Good Will Hunting* and *Family Guy*.

He would become the focus of several documentaries, books, TV shows, and film dramas. They have often made Kaczynski into yet another true crime spectacle and show superficial understanding of his philosophy, which they often reduce to a footnote or plot point.

The FBI has also been eager to contribute to this true crime legacy. In the years that followed his arrest, the FBI has flaunted their narrow capture of Kaczynski and even went so far as to put his cabin on display in a museum like a vulgar war trophy.¹

For many, Kaczynski's philosophy would overshadow his crimes.

In the years leading up to his arrest, a movement would emerge with similar views on modern technology and also call for the dismantlement of civilisation. This was the Anarcho-Primitivist movement.

John Zerzan, a leading figure in his new school of thought, became interested in Kaczynski after reading *Industrial Society and Its Future* and went on to befriend Kaczynski during his trial. Zerzan would even visit Kaczynski between court sessions.

They didn't always see eye to eye, however, and philosophical differences would eventually lead them to part ways.

Zerzan, who had compared Kaczynski to Nietzsche², would distance himself from the figure he once praised, and Kaczynski eventually published an essay titled "*The Truth*

¹ Atlas Obscura. (2017). The Unabomber's Cabin. [Online]. <http://www.atlasobscura.com>. Last Updated: 22 August 2017. Available at: <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/the-unabombers-cabin-washington-dc> [Accessed 15 July 2023].

² Zerzan, J. (2008). *Twilight of the Machines*. USA: Feral House. pp.97-99.

About Primitive Life,” in which he criticised Zerzan and the Anarcho-Primitivists for their unrealistic and utopian views.³

In Primitivism, as in all Anarchist communities, each individual differs in their thinking. Some are sympathetic towards Kaczynski, while others reject him. Some are in agreement with Zerzan, while others critique him. Many in this community, including John Zerzan, reject the violent methods of Kaczynski.⁴

In 2011, a group called Individualistas Tendiendo a Lo Salvaje (ITS) emerged in Mexico. They have taken ideological inspiration from both Ted Kaczynski and Anarcho-primitivism. ITS have committed several bombings and acts of arson for their cause.⁵

A year after they appeared, Kaczynski criticised them for their naive views on revolution and poor understanding of historical revolutionary movements.⁶

On the other side of the political spectrum is another school of thought that has taken influence from Kaczynski.

Eco-Fascists liked Kaczynski not only for his radical environmentalism but also because of his heavy critique of “*leftism*.”

Kaczynski had critiqued both the right and the left in “*Industrial Society and its Future*” but focused primarily on the left. This is potentially because of the left’s adoption of environmentalist issues and his own personal dislike of socialism.

In a handwritten letter sent from prison and posted online, Kaczynski denounced the Eco-fascists, comparing many of their views to those of the left.

He also rejects racism, which he believes would be damaging to the anti-tech movement and the anti-tech movement would require people of different races and backgrounds to work in cooperation towards the end goal of dismantling the system.

He would go on to say that they have misunderstood his ideas and that their thinking is based on emotion rather than rationality.⁷

Kaczynski’s presence in the media and the easy accessibility of his writings have introduced him to a new generation.

³ Kaczynski, T. (2010). *Technological Slavery: The Collected Writings of Theodore J. Kaczynski*. 10th ed. USA: Feral House. pp.128-127

⁴ Zerzan, J. (1995). *Whose Unabomber?*. [Online]. theanarchistlibrary.org. Last Updated: N/A. Available at: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/john-zerzan-whose-unabomber> [Accessed 15 July 2023].

⁵ Cabrera, A. (2015). *Toward Savagery: Recent Developments In Eco-Extremist Thought In Mexico*. [Online]. <http://www.ritual-mag.com>. Last Updated: 21 June 2015. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20200403001629/http://www.ritual-mag.com/toward-savagery-recent-developm> [Accessed 15 July 2023].

⁶ Kaczynski, T. (2012). *Ted Kaczynski on Individualists Tending Toward Savagery (ITS)*. [Online]. wildwill.net. Last Updated: 28 November 2017. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20180117093302/https://www.wildwill.net/blog/2017/11/28/ted-kaczynski-in> [Accessed 15 July 2023].

⁷ Kaczynski, T. (2020). *Ecofascism: An Aberrant Branch of Leftism*. [Online]. TheAnarchistLibrary.org. Last Updated: 29 September 2022. Available at: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/ted-kaczynski-ecofascism-an-aberrant-branch-of-leftism> [Accessed 15 July 2023].

He has become an unlikely hero in some corners of the internet culture and the affectionate subject of many internet memes.

These often anonymous internet posters make light of the bombing, quote the manifesto, and show a varied understanding of Kaczynski's philosophy.

It could be said that many of them have fallen for what Kaczynski called *The System's Neatest Trick* (Basically, people think they are rebelling against the system when in actuality they are supporting it).⁸

Many of these online posts refer to Kaczynski as "*Uncle Ted*." Although this may only be an abbreviation of his name, I think this term of endearment may highlight something interesting about his philosophy. It shows that his writings on dissatisfaction caused by technology can touch us on a personal level. Maybe for those who grew up in an age dominated by technology and the internet, Kaczynski could appear like a weird uncle who understands them.

There have been those outside of these niche political spheres and social media sub-cultures who have taken Kaczynski seriously as a thinker.

The first notable one was perhaps Bill Joy, who wrote the article "*Why The Future Doesn't Need Us*" for Wired Magazine.⁹

In recent years, figures like Chad Haag and Sean Fleming have written comprehensive studies of Kaczynski's thinking.

All of Kaczynski's writings are housed in the University of Michigan's Special Collections Library. It is possible that in the years to come, more of his writings will be made public, changing our views on his life, crimes, character, and philosophy.

There has not yet been movement quite like what Kaczynski had hoped for, but with continued interest in his work, increased public concern in environmental matters and technology may lead to the emergence of something.

Fleming speculates that in the years to come we will see a grown in anti-tech views in society and politics. He would go on to say that "*Kaczynski stands a good chance of being the Marx of this anti-tech movement*."¹⁰

The technological system has undoubtably grown since Kaczynski first published *Industrial Society and Its Future* but it has not yet collapsed. But perhaps Kaczynski will take revenge on the world for his imprisonment by proving to be right.

⁸ Kaczynski, T. (2010). *Technological Slavery: The Collected Writings of Theodore J. Kaczynski*. 10th ed. USA: Feral House. pp.193-205.

⁹ Joy, B. (2000). *Why The Future Doesn't Need Us*. [Online]. wired.com. Last Updated: 1 April 2000. Available at: <https://www.wired.com/2000/04/joy-2/> [Accessed 15 July 2023].

¹⁰ Ellis, J. (2022). "Kaczynski, Ellul, and the Future of Anti-Tech Radicalism with Sean Fleming". Hermitix. 09 February 2022. [Podcast]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgDMmZqqI6w>. [Accessed 15.07.23].

Note From the Author

Special thanks to T.C for his feedback on my early drafts of this essay.

Spelling and grammar were check by an A.I and may contain some errors (yes I understand the irony of using an A.I on an essay on Ted Kaczynski)

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uv9z4FurB5g>

Sources

I wrote most of this essay from memory. I have done my best to find where I originally read this information and cite it as a source. Any information here without a source was read somewhere very credible I simply can't remember or find where it was.

The Ted K Archive

A critique of his ideas & actions



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