

A requiem for the Unabomber

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ABSTRACT

Theodore John Kaczynski, better known as the Unabomber, died by suicide in June 2023. One of the most best known criminals of the late twentieth century, and a former Harvard mathematics prodigy with an IQ of 167, Kaczynski is remembered for the 1995 publication of his 35,000-word anti-technology essay, *Industrial Society and Its Future*. This work called for the rejection of technological civilization and the embracing of wild nature. Its publication led to Kaczynski’s identification, apprehension, and a convoluted set of legal proceedings that culminated in a coerced plea arrangement and his incarceration in the US federal supermax prison. Kaczynski was not permitted to introduce a defense of necessity. Instead, he was labeled as ‘mad’ by the press and his family, and identified as a paranoid schizophrenic by a court-appointed psychiatrist. But several commentators have argued that Kaczynski’s reasoning is sound. Indeed, many of Kaczynski’s observations about technology and the environment have proven to be prescient. Accordingly, a new generation of followers have adopted his anti-technology philosophy. If Kaczynski was correct about technology and the environment, this might warrant a reevaluation of his socio-theoretical writings and reconsideration of his constructed persona as a mad genius.

Theodore John Kaczynski died on 10 June 2023. He died, at 81, in a federal prison, as part of the great, graying American carceral population (Bedard et al., 2022). And he died, if we are to believe the *New York Times* (Thrush, 2023), by his own hand. Yet *this*, his suicide, is not why Kaczynski’s name appeared in headlines across almost all major news outlets: ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Fox, AP, Reuters, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Post*, the *Sun*, *USA Today*, *Rolling Stone*, *Mother Jones*, and too many more to count. No, the reason that Kaczynski saturated the news is that he was a serial killer (and one of our most beloved killers, at that). Remember, ‘evil has its heroes as well as good’ (La Rochefoucauld, 1959, p. 60).

The world heard about Kaczynski’s death because the public is obsessed with murder. ‘Our newspapers are filled with murder, and murder streams from our radios. Murder transfixes us when we go to the movies, when we read novels, and when we watch television’ (Oleson, 2013, p. 57). After all, film’s number one villain – Hannibal Lecter – is a serial killer (Oleson, 2005b), and the most successful horror franchise in the whole world—*Saw*—is not about space aliens, ghosts, or vampires, but a serial killer (Oleson & Mackinnon, 2015). Jack the Ripper, Charles Manson, John Wayne Gacy, Jeffrey Dahmer, and Ted Bundy are cultural icons. In fact, people are more likely to recognize the names of serial killers from yesteryear than to recognize the names of this year’s Nobel Prize winners (Oleson, 2005b). Our killers are celebrities (Schmid, 2005). People buy serial killer trading cards (Jones & Collier, 1993) and action figures (Spectre Studios, 2023), and they collect murderabilia (Scouller, 2010) like holy relics. Dark tourists make pilgrimages to the sites of notorious murders (Hohenhaus, 2021; Selzer, 2021; Yonover, 2000), to places of execution, and to the graves of killers. Coppins (2023) recently described the “gross spectacle of murder fandom.”

It probably says something about our society – and not something good – that we venerate serial killers in this way (Egger, 1998; Heron, 1957; Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Norris, 1988; Seltzer, 1998). ‘[T]he serial killer constitutes a mythical, almost supernatural, embodiment of American society’s deepest darkest fears. We are compelled by the representation of this figure because he allows us to project our fears onto a clearly delineated villain’ (Beckman, 2001, p. 62).

Although Kaczynski was no Hannibal Lecter – which is to say that he was not an aristocratic cannibal psychiatrist with 11 fingers, red eyes, power over animals, and an IQ immeasurable to man (Oleson, 2006a) – he is just about the closest we get to that mark. He is iconic as a criminal genius (Lipton, 1970; Oleson, 2016; Rhodes, 1932). Indeed, Kaczynski was a child prodigy with a 167 IQ who attended Harvard University at the age of 16 (Chase, 2003), an introverted genius whose mathematical insights could be understood by perhaps 10 or 12 people in the country (Johnston & Scott, 1996), and, at just 25 years old, who landed a tenure-track assistant professorship at the University of California, Berkeley – the youngest such hire in the university’s history (Richardson, 2018) – the academic equivalent of winning the lottery.

Yet Kaczynski turned his back on all of this, and upon society itself, to live in a 10’ by 12’ cabin in the woods near Lincoln, Montana: 120 square feet, with no electricity and no running water (Waits & Shors, 1999), for 25 years. And it was there, in the woods, that Kaczynski metamorphosed from recluse to serial killer. Not the kind of serial killer who kills for psychosexual gratification (Chan, 2019; Giannangelo, 1996; Ressler et al., 1988; Toates & Coschug-Toates, 2022), but a serial killer nevertheless (Douglas et al., 2013). In fact, Kaczynski was the high-IQ killer who evaded the largest, most expensive, manhunt in United States history (Douglas & Olshaker, 1996). During his 17-year reign of domestic terror, Kaczynski killed 3 people and wounded 23 more, using increasingly sophisticated letter bombs to wage a war against universities, airlines, and technology industries. And we adored him for it:

Our construction of the ‘high-IQ killer’ is a sign of our desire to figure the serial killer as being above and beyond society, as someone who attempts to assert his freedom. It makes him Byronic or, more exactly, makes him related to the hero of every Bildungsroman taught to every child, from Huck Finn to Holden Caulfield. (Tithecott, 1997; c.f., p. 148; Brady, 2001)

Kaczynski *was* beyond society. He was an outsider (Wilson, 1956), literally. But the Unabomber case involved far more than violation of the murder taboo. The Unabomber’s actions were audacious, cunning, and defiant. He, like few others, invoked the existential rebellion described so ably by Albert Camus:

What is a rebel? A man who says no, but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation ... A slave who has taken orders all his life suddenly decides that he cannot obey some new command ... Up to this point he has at least

remained silent and has abandoned himself to the form of despair in which a condition is accepted even though it is considered unjust ... But from the moment that the rebel finds his voice—even though he says nothing but ‘no’— he begins to desire and to judge. (Camus, 1956, pp. 13–14)

The *Los Angeles Times* describes Kaczynski as taunting authorities like ‘a comic book villain’ (Chawkins, 2023). Indeed, Kaczynski fed investigators false clues – a letter to the *New York Times* using the street address of the FBI headquarters as its return – and planted misleading DNA evidence – inserting random hairs collected from a bus station bathroom between layers of electrical tape on a bomb. Finally, a criminal mastermind who lived up to the appellation. Numerous elements of the Unabomber case captivated the public’s collective imagination:

☒ His iconic hoodie and aviator sunglasses (as depicted in wanted posters, such that reproduced in Figure 1)



Figure 1. First sketch of the Unabomber. Note. FBI sketch of the Unabomber circa 1987 (superseded by Jeanne Boylan's iconic 1994 image), displaying sunglasses and hoodie. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

☒ His cabin in the woods (Richard Barnes' 1998 photos of the cabin are held in the San Francisco Modern Art Museum, and the actual cabin was exhibited for years in Washington DC's Newseum, and is now part of the FBI museum: the FBI experience)

☒ His suspected role in the 1982 Tylenol tampering case

☒ His 2012 submission for his Harvard class 50-year alumni book (listing his occupation as prisoner and listing his 'awards' as eight life sentences, issued by the United States District Court for the Eastern District of California)

But certainly one of the most captivating elements of the Unabomber case was the manifesto: *Industrial Society and Its Future* (Kaczynski, 1995), Kaczynski's 35,000-word essay on the corrupting influence of technology on human freedom (Barnett, 2015). What other criminal could extort the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* into publishing a bone-dry Luddite screed the length of *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1945)?

Tuba Mirum: hark, the trumpet

It is interesting, and telling, that ‘everyone wants to discuss the genius that became a serial murderer, and with few exceptions, no one wants to discuss Kaczynski as author and social revolutionary’ (Oleson, 2005a, p. 218, internal citations omitted). Books and articles about Kaczynski usually focus on the Unabomber crimes and the 17-year manhunt for America’s most wanted criminal (e.g. Douglas & Olshaker, 1996). Alternatively, they sometimes unpack his biography in a search for the underlying psychopathologies of his crimes (e.g. Chase, 2003). ‘In either case, the very name “Ted Kaczynski” is trivialized, either into narratological material for an hour-long whodunit show to kill time on a lazy Sunday evening or into advertising material for a thinly-veiled infomercial for the pharmaceutical industry’ (Haag, 2019). But Kaczynski’s *Industrial Society and Its Future* is usually ignored.

Sometimes mentioned but seldom read, Kaczynski’s manifesto asserted that technology is antithetical to human freedom, and that our dependence on technology exceeds our purported love of freedom. It is an exceptional work (Luke, 1996). The language of the manifesto is neither technical nor difficult: in fact, Corey suggests that Kaczynski ‘understands the complexity of the ideas and tries to compress them into language so simple it cannot carry the weight’ (2000, p. 174). The manifesto builds upon the foundations of other theorists (Fleming, 2022), notably Jacques Ellul (1964), Desmond Morris (1969), and Martin Seligman (1975). And as once lampooned in a column by Tony Snow (1995), there are striking parallels to Al Gore’s *Earth in the Balance* (1992). Indeed, Sale observes that the manifesto’s author is but one critic ‘in a long line of anti-technology critics where I myself have stood’ (Sale, 1995). Chase suggests that ‘except for the call to violence, its message was ordinary and unoriginal’ (2003, p. 89). Perhaps this is why its author engaged in instrumental acts of terror:

If we had never done anything violent and had submitted the present writings to a publisher, they probably would not have been accepted. If they had been accepted and published, they probably would not have attracted many readers, because it’s more fun to watch the entertainment put out by the media than to read a sober essay. Even if these writings had had many readers, most of these readers would soon have forgotten what they had read as their minds were flooded by the mass of material to which the media expose them. In order to get our message before the public with some chance of making a lasting impression, we’ve had to kill people. (Kaczynski, 1995, ¶ 96)

Maybe so. In *Endgame*, the deep green activist Derrick Jensen makes a similar observation. He notes that when activists protested against the use of the teratogenic defoliant, Agent Orange, in Oregon’s forests, transnational timber companies responded

by dropping the chemical from helicopters onto the protestors. But when a group of Vietnam veterans sent messages to the timber companies, telling them that they knew the names of their helicopter pilots and that they knew their addresses, ‘the spraying stopped’ (2006, p. 4). As the Unabomber recognized, instrumental violence can produce meaningful change. As Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has noted in another context, ‘Direct action gets the goods, now and always’ (Sainato, 2023). Alan Dershowitz has suggested, ‘The real root cause of terrorism is that it is successful – terrorists have consistently benefited from their terrorist acts’ (2002, p. 2).

In 232 numbered paragraphs, the manifesto argues that we are slaves, and that technology has enslaved us. It claims that the Industrial Revolution accelerated the pace of life, subordinated people to technology, and thereby fomented anomie and apathy. Human beings, asserts the manifesto, have a biological need for a ‘power process.’ To satisfy this need, people must have goals, must exert effort to attain them, and must have a reasonable chance of attaining them. In modern society, almost no effort is required to satisfy biological needs, and people are left psychologically hungry, focused on wealth or status, or immersing themselves in work. Surrogate activities, however, cannot satisfy the need for the power process. The manifesto compares American surveillance to Orwell’s *1984* (Orwell, 1949) and compares our growing reliance on mood-altering drugs to a ‘brave new world’ of soma (Huxley, 1932).

He even envisions a dystopian Matrix-like existence in which people have electrodes planted directly into their brains, allowing society to directly manipulate their thoughts and feelings with electrical impulses, and describes a *Terminator*-like future, in which humans exist as the slaves of intelligent machines. Aware that many of *Industrial Society*’s readers will dismiss his idea as science fiction, Kaczynski scolds his skeptics, reminding them that ‘yesterday’s science fiction is today’s fact’ (Oleson, 2005a, p. 220, internal citations omitted).

Indeed, some of Kaczynski’s outlandish ‘science fiction’ is already coming true: Elon Musk’s company, Neuralink, has recently started recruiting subjects for human trials for brain implants that ‘will make the paralyzed walk, the blind see and eventually turn people into cyborgs’ (Levy & Taylor, 2023).

Kaczynski believes that our single greatest obstacle to freedom is technology. Indeed, in a technological society, Kaczynski dourly concludes that the restriction of freedom (as he defines it) is ‘unavoidable.’ Although people prize both fulfillment of the power process and the comforts of modern technology, our appetite for technology is a more powerful social force than our need for freedom. The ‘human race with technology is just like an alcoholic with a barrel of wine.’ We are addicted to technological society. ‘Therefore, we subtly coerce people to conform and obey, and we use a host of subtle psychological techniques to socialize behaviors that support rather than undermine – the sustainability of technological society’ (Oleson, 2005a, p. 220, internal citations omitted).

Our society fetishizes technology (Harvey, 2003). That is, it understands technology as possessing mysterious, even magical, properties. It understands technology as exogenous to society, molding society from without, relentless and inevitable, rather than emerging within the available confines of social arrangements. It even understands technology as possessing moral qualities – thus the polio vaccine is ‘good’ while ransomware is ‘evil.’ Attributions of this kind are useful in enforcing existing power asymmetries. ‘Technology is agentic. This faith in technology – the belief that it creates our social arrangements and not that social relations create technology – absolves people from the consequences of their decisions’ (Kramer & Oleson, 2022, p. 140). Kaczynski uses the example of depression: ‘Instead of removing the conditions that make people depressed, modern society gives them antidepressant drugs’ (1995, ¶ 145).

Industrial Society and Its Future calls for the revolutionary overthrow of technology, through violent means if necessary (¶ 193; also Kaczynski, 2016), but it also embraces wild nature, which it understands as the opposite of technology: ‘[A]n ideology ... must be FOR something as well as AGAINST something. The positive ideal that we propose is Nature. That is, WILD nature’ (¶ 183).

However, as noted during his sentencing, Kaczynski mocked this very approach in his diaries: ‘I believe in nothing ... I don’t even believe in the cult of nature-worshippers or wilderness worshippers’ (quoted in Oleson, 2005a, p. 218). Thus, Corey (2000) might well be correct in thinking that Kaczynski tied his anti-technology philosophy to environmentalism for strategic reasons. Yet we should take Kaczynski’s assertion of nature seriously. After all, if Kaczynski was correct about nature being antithetical to technology (¶ 184), the affirmation of nature is implicit in the rejection of technology. That is simple math. Thus, contemporary concerns about climate change (e.g. McGuire, 2022; Thunberg, 2023; Wallace-Wells, 2019) are embedded within Kaczynski’s logic.

The Manifesto blasphemed everything that knits together the worldview of not only the mainstream, but also that of many reformers and radical critics. Many are able to say that Orwell’s vision threatens. But they think that to become alert to this danger is to solve the problem. They remain caught up in what Jacques Ellul has called ‘the illusion of politics’—the belief that in a democracy we actually shape our future through the political process. Many of the Unabomber’s anti-mythical ideas are unthinkable to us, more so than the use of violence. Given the right rationale, our society is willing to kill not only guilty people, but innocent ones as well, and then call it collateral damage. The Unabomber questioned our faith in politics itself, and challenges concepts of self, freedom and happiness. *He is a heretic at the deepest level.* (Eccles, in Mello, 1999, p. 41, italics added)

The publication of *Industrial Society and Its Future* was a triumph for Kaczynski, but it also served as the catalyst of his downfall. After Kaczynski’s brother, David, and his wife, Linda Patrik, recognized familiar turns of phrase in the manifesto that had

also appeared in Ted’s angry letters (e.g. ‘cool-headed logicians’), they were confronted with an agonizing choice. Like something out of Greek tragedy, something ‘more like literature than life’ (Kaczynski, 2016, p. 24), David Kaczynski was forced to choose:

We found ourselves in a place where anything we did or didn’t do could result in somebody’s death. Any choice we made could be fatal to someone. The realization that if we did nothing, there was some chance if this person — if Ted was the Unabomber, he might attack someone else again ... If that were to happen, we’d go through the rest of our lives with the knowledge that we could have stopped it. And instead, we had decided to do nothing ... On the other hand, ... there was a chance, maybe even a possibility that—you know, a probability that he would be executed. It was in the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing. Polls had come [along] significantly but, at that point, lots of people in America thinking the death penalty’s the answer to these kinds of crimes. And I had to ask myself what would it be like to go through the rest of my life with my brother’s blood on my hands (Kaczynski, 2006)?

Ultimately, David Kaczynski alerted the FBI, hoping to spare the lives of future victims by identifying his brother. On 3 April 1996, a swarm of FBI agents arrested Ted Kaczynski and seized his cabin as well as physical evidence (e.g. the typewriter that had produced all known Unabomber correspondence, the hooded sweatshirt and sunglasses from the FBI’s most wanted poster, a hit list of potential victims, and an explosive device ready for mailing) (Graysmith, 2021). After authorities finally persuaded Ted that it was his brother who had turned him in, Kaczynski denounced David as a ‘Judas’ (Kaczynski, 1999) and vowed to never speak with him again. He never did.

Although David Kaczynski’s decision might have saved the lives of those on Kaczynski’s list of targets, the Unabomber continued to kill – long after his arrest and conviction – through indirect means. That is, the 1995 publication of Kaczynski’s manifesto, combining a radical, anti-technology ideology with a call to revolution, mobilized others to violence. In 2011, Anders Breivik detonated a car-bomb in an Oslo government complex, killing eight and injuring hundreds more; before killing 77 more – victims as young as 12—on nearby Utøya Island (Borchgrevink, 2013). The massacre was intended to draw attention to Breivik’s manifesto – it was, in his words, his ‘marketing method’ (undefined). His 1,500- page manifesto, *2083: A European Declaration of Independence* (as Berwick, 2011), plagiarized heavily from *Industrial Society and Its Future* and adapted Kaczynski’s anti-technology rhetoric to advance his own alt-right, misogynist, anti-Muslim ideology. In turn, Breivik’s manifesto inspired other attacks, including but not limited to the 2019 New Zealand mosque attacks (Oleson, 2023). Thus, in the pantheon of revolutionaries who employ terror and violence in their bids to overthrow the existing social order, the Unabomber, paragon of criminal genius, occupies a place of particular prominence.

Confutatis: from the accursed

Serial murder itself is a social construction (Jenkins, 1994). But rather than cast Kaczynski in the die of the serial killer (e.g. Hickey, 1991; Norris, 1988), or even in the mold of the ecoterrorist (Scarce, 2016), he was constructed by almost everyone in the trope of the mad genius (Becker, 1978; Oleson, 2009). The FBI labeled him a ‘twisted genius’ (FBI, 2023); Deputy Attorney General James Comey called the manifesto ‘wacko’ (2006, p. 406); the *New York Times* ran a long profile on the ‘tortured genius’ (Johnston & Scott, 1996); the editorial staff of *Time* published a book entitled *Mad Genius* (Gibbs et al., 1996); and Kaczynski’s face appeared on the covers of both *Time* and *U.S. News and World Report*, underneath headlines that read ‘twisted genius’ and ‘Odyssey of a Mad Genius’ (Oleson, 2016). He was denounced as a ‘wild-eyed hermit’ and a ‘pathetic loner’ who lived in a ‘dingy shack’ (e.g. Balsamo & Whitehurst, 2023). Psychologists and the court-appointed psychiatrist diagnosed Kaczynski as mentally ill, his brother identified him as mentally ill (‘illness rather than evil’ [D. Kaczynski, in Mello, 1999, p. 60]), and even his own lawyers excused his crimes as the product of mental illness.

But Kaczynski rejected, vehemently, the allegation that he was ‘mad’ or in any way mentally ill. ‘In his diary, Kaczynski wrote of his fear that his bombing campaign against technology would be dismissed as the work of a “sickie”’ (Mello, 1999, p. 452). In the manifesto, Kaczynski recognized that any opposition to existing social structures would be pathologized:

Our society tends to regard as a ‘sickness’ any mode of thought or behavior that is inconvenient for the system, and this is plausible because when an individual doesn’t fit into the system it causes pain to the individual as well as problems for the system. Thus the manipulation of an individual to adjust him to the system is seen as a ‘cure’ for a ‘sickness’ and therefore as good. (Kaczynski, 1995, ¶155; c.f.; Cohen, 2016)

Kaczynski was not particularly afraid of death or martyrdom – after all, ‘we all have to die sometime, and it may be better to die fighting for survival, or for a cause, than to live a long but empty and purposeless life’ (Kaczynski, 1995, ¶168) – but he *did* fear being dismissed as crazy.

And this proved to be a well-founded fear. For, after reviewing the evidence collected from the cabin, Kaczynski’s team of experienced federal defenders concluded that their best chance of saving their client’s life was a mental defense. Mello (1999) speculates

that Kaczynski's lawyers first considered an insanity plea, but – after seeing the lucidity of his writing and the meticulousness of his bombing campaign – they realized that no jury would deem Kaczynski insane. Therefore, they decided to use a claim of mental illness in the penalty phase. Specifically, they sought to bring Kaczynski's cabin into the courtroom. One AP article explained:

'You cannot really understand this guy's life unless you can get in that cabin,' said Defense Attorney Quin Denvir. 'The cabin is 10-by-12 feet and 13 feet tall. It had no running water, no electricity, no toilet—not even an outhouse. And the irony was that a quarter-mile away was electricity and water that he could have hooked into.' Government lawyers oppose the demonstration and want to substitute a scale model of the structure ... but Denvir and co- counsel Judy Clarke indicated they will fight to use the actual building—because *if Theodore Kaczynski has a defense, it is somewhere in that shack.* (in Mello, 1999, p. 61, italics added)

But Kaczynski wanted no part of a mental defense. He did not even want to talk to a psychologist. As *Time* magazine explained, 'Everyone has a point of pride, a trait held paramount in defining oneself. Some might have looks or will; Ted Kaczynski prized his brilliance. So it was in a sort of self defense that he refused to allow his mind to be called into question' (Edwards, 1998). Some of the psychologists who diagnosed Kaczynski as suffering from paranoid schizophrenia never even met him, basing their assessments upon his refusal to undergo psychological evaluation, upon his unawareness of his disease (Treatment Advocacy Center, 2016), and his 'delusional' anti-technology philosophy (Mello, 1999, p. 56). But the anti-technology thesis of *Industrial Society and Its Future* is not delusional. Indeed, in the words of James Q. Wilson, 'If it is the work of a madman, then the writings of many political philosophers – Jean Jacques Rousseau, Tom Paine, Karl Marx – are scarcely more sane' (in Finnegan, 1998, p. 61).

So the paradox, as his case neared trial, could not have been lost on Kaczynski. His own lawyers, talented idealists intent on saving his life, were striving mightily to label him mentally ill. The prosecutors, meanwhile, intent on having him executed, were ready to accept him as the dead-serious dissident and violent anarchist that his writings said he was. (Finnegan, 1998, p. 55)

When Kaczynski *did* talk with psychologists, it was because his lawyers assured him that these findings were covered by attorney-client privilege and would be used only with his permission. But, as David Luban writes, 'His lawyers ... double-crossed him. At the last minute, they announced that at the guilt phase they would undertake the mental defense – the only one that might save his life' (2005, p. 828). From their perspective, Kaczynski's lawyers surely believed that they were serving their client's

interests – saving his life – and that his opposition to mental defense was a product of his social isolation and ideology. Given their ethical obligations as lawyers, they could not acquiesce to a trial strategy that was tantamount to suicide (c.f. Oleson, 2006b).

So Kaczynski attempted to fire his lawyers and to replace them with another lawyer – J. Tony Serra – who had offered to mount, pro bono, an imperfect necessity defense based on Kaczynski’s ideology – not upon a claim of insanity, not upon mental illness. This would have been a very different defense:

An imperfect necessity defense would have provided Kaczynski with a forum in which to expound the ideas articulated in *Industrial Society and Its Future*. He had disfigured and killed in order to draw attention to his claims, but a high-profile media trial would provide him with a vastly superior vehicle for communicating his views. Would the media have come? You bet. Kaczynski had made the cover of both *U.S. News and World Report* and *Time*, and prompted an in-depth series of articles in the *Sacramento Bee* and the *New York Times*. ‘Cold as a lizard and ambitious as Lucifer,’ Kaczynski was precisely the kind of defendant that, if unleashed, could have driven the media absolutely wild: a criminal genius, a mountain man who eluded the largest manhunt in American history for seventeen years until his own brother turned him in, a former Berkeley math professor who, acting as a serial killer, targeted other scientists and academics. And he did it all because he believed that he had to—because he was trying to save the world. The Unabomber trial would have been media catnip. The entire world would have lent an ear as a brilliant bomber explained, with the exacting detail of a mathematical proof, how the scientific developments that were supposed to liberate society had in fact made slaves of us all. While many television viewers would focus only on the celebrity of Kaczynski’s infamy, no more interested in the eccentric former professor’s diatribe than in *Industrial Society and Its Future*, some people would have attended to his arguments. They would have found his premises uncontroversial, and would have found themselves agreeing with many of his conclusions. (Oleson, 2007b, pp. 59–60)

In the epilogue to *Unabomber: A Desire to Kill*, Robert Graysmith speculates that this is exactly what Kaczynski intended to do: ‘His strategy, I long suspected, was to take the stand and deliver his antitechnology message to America ... This self-proclaimed political messiah might be in the process of fashioning himself into a political martyr’ (2021). In *Manhunt: Unabomber*, Paul Bettany’s Kaczynski says:

The outcome of the trial Is nothing. The trial itself is everything. It’s gonna give me the biggest microphone in the world. Before, I had to threaten violence to get one Manifesto published in the Post. Now I’m gonna be

piped directly into every living room in the country. And if you put me in a jail cell, I will spend the rest of my life appealing. But if it's the worst case, the very worst case a person like you can possibly imagine, the death penalty, I promise you, I won't even blink. (Yaitanes, 2017)

But the trial never materialized. The judge rejected Kaczynski's request to replace his counsel as 'untimely.' Judge Burrell also told Kaczynski that his attorneys – not he – controlled 'major strategic decisions' such as putting on mental health testimony (Mello, 1999, p. 89). That night, in response, Kaczynski attempted suicide, asphyxiating himself with the elastic from his underwear. In the eyes of many, this was further proof of the mad genius' mental illness, but Mello disagrees:

Under the circumstances, suicide was the only rational option open to him. He was utterly alone. He felt betrayed by his lawyers who kept him in the dark until it was too late for him to replace them or to defend himself at trial without a lawyer. The judge was poised to refuse his constitutional right to fire those lawyers and represent himself. For the next few months, he would have to sit in court and listen to his own lawyers build the case that he was mentally ill—and there was absolutely no way he could stop it. Except for suicide. (1999, pp. 89–90)

Boxed into a corner, Kaczynski asked to represent himself at trial. Judge Burrell appointed a forensic psychiatrist, Sally Johnson, to ascertain his competence. And after 22 hours of psychiatric examination, Dr. Johnson determined that Kaczynski was legally competent, although she also entered a provisional diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia and paranoid personality disorder (Mello, 1999). In doing so, she, too, interpreted Kaczynski's politics as a delusional architecture. However, in 'The Non-Trial of the Century: Representations of the Unabomber,' Michael Mello challenges this characterization:

If you think Kaczynski is a paranoid schizophrenic, I have a question for you: What are his delusions? The hallmark of paranoid schizophrenia is a delusional architecture: What are Kaczynski's delusions? That the Industrial Revolution has been a mixed blessing? Hardly a delusion. That technology is chipping away at our freedoms and privacy? Hardly a delusion. That committing murder—and threatening to commit more—was the only way to force the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* into publishing, in full and unedited, the 35,000-word Unabomber Manifesto? Hardly a delusion. That the powers that be in our culture would define the Unabomber as a pathetic lunatic? Hardly a delusion. That a simple, self-sufficient life, in one of the most physically beautiful places in America, is preferable to the rat-race of academia? Hardly a delusion. (Mello, 2000, p. 472)

Despite Dr. Johnson's conclusion that Kaczynski was competent to represent himself, Judge Burrell – the same judge that had ordered the competency assessment (Finnegan, 1998)– ruled that Kaczynski could not represent himself at trial. For this, too, was untimely. Therefore, confronted with the Hobson's choice of (1) a mental defense that was anathema to him and (2) pleading guilty to all prosecution charges in exchange for their not seeking the death penalty, Kaczynski opted for the plea deal. Yet it was not a fear of death that motivated this decision; rather, it was a fear of being characterized as crazy. Kaczynski explained:

They put me in such a position that I had only one way left to prevent my attorneys from using false information to represent me to the world as insane: I agreed to plead guilty to the charges in exchange for withdrawal of the prosecution's request for the death penalty ... I am not afraid of the death penalty, and I agreed to this bargain only to end the trial and thus prevent my attorneys from representing me as insane. (in Mello, 1999, p. 117)

At his sentencing in May 1998, Theodore John Kaczynski was sentenced to life imprisonment. For more than 20 years, he was confined in solitary confinement in ADX Florence, the federal supermax prison once called 'the last worst place' (Taylor, 1998). The conditions in Florence are austere:

The conditions in supermax prisons are even more dehumanizing and damaging than those of the warehouse prisons. In supermax facilities, inmates are entombed within solitary cells of about seven by twelve feet (slightly larger than a king-sized bed) bound by seven layers of steel and cement. The spartan furniture (for example, a stool, a writing desk, and a mattress pedestal) is made of poured concrete in order to prevent prisoners from fashioning weapons out of metal parts. Inmates are often confined within their tiny one-man cells for twenty-three hours per day; they only get one hour of exercise (in an even-smaller outdoor cage that is attached to the rear of their cell). This hour is also spent in solitude. The silence and the lack of human contact are dehumanizing. Indeed, the *Madrid v. Gomez* court concluded that the conditions in supermax facilities 'may press the outer bounds of what most humans can psychologically tolerate'. (Oleson, 2002, pp. 859–860, fn. 161)

Indeed, even early research indicated that sensory deprivation produces cognitive impairment, visual and auditory hallucinations, and measurable changes in brain function after just 96 hours (Heron, 1957). And 'within several days of isolation spent in a deprived setting, there is a risk of physical deteriorations in the brain' (Coppola, 2019, p. 187). After months or years in segregation, many prisoners suffer from lethargy, depression, and despair; they lose the ability to initiate behavior – in extreme cases, they

can literally stop behaving, becoming effectively catatonic (Gawande, 2009). Theodore Kaczynski was confined in his ADX cell – entombed (Amnesty International, 2014)—*for 23 years*. In his non-trial and his confinement, there are curious echoes of the trial of Joan of Arc:

You promised me my life; but you lied [*indignant exclamations*]. You think that life is nothing but not being stone dead. It is not the bread and water I fear: I can live on bread: when have I asked for more? It is no hardship to drink water if the water be clean. Bread has no sorrow for me, and water no affliction. But to shut me from the light of the sky and the sight of the fields and flowers ... without these things I cannot live; and by your wanting to take them away from me, or from any human creature, I know that your counsel is of the devil, and that mine is of God. (Shaw, 1930, p. 145)

After more than two decades in federal supermax, and after being transferred to the federal prison medical center in Butner, North Carolina, in December 2021, Theodore John Kaczynski died by suicide on 10 June 2023 (Thrush, 2023).

Lacrimosa: full of tears

Of course, in the end, it was the manifesto that was truly dangerous, not the bombs. Lydia Eccles explains, ‘The Medieval martyrs did not seek execution. They were executed because they refused to recant. It was worth sparing Ted Kaczynski to burn the manifesto at the stake – and there was community interest in doing so’ (in Mello, 1999, p. 128).

The manifesto was not dangerous because it was ‘wacko’ (Comey, 2006, p. 406), or because it would be plagiarized by a ethno-nationalist terrorist (Oleson, 2023), but because it was lucid. Because, as Elon Musk (CEO of Twitter and creator of the advanced technology companies Tesla, SpaceX, Neuralink, and A.AI) recently tweeted, ‘He might not have been wrong’ (Novak, 2023). Indeed, building upon the Center for AI Safety’s recent open letter (which reads, ‘Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war’), the 12 June 2023 cover of *Time* magazine features the headline: THE END OF HUMANITY. Yeah: he might not have been wrong.

That is why there could be no spectacular trial (Graysmith, 2021; Mello, 2000) and why Kaczynski had to be denounced as a ‘sickie.’ By pathologizing Kaczynski instead of martyring him, attention was diverted from *Industrial Society and Its Future*.

Haag (2019) identifies Kaczynski as the ‘single most underappreciated thinker of our era.’ However, by discounting his manifesto as the ravings of a paranoid schizophrenic and – contradictorily—as simultaneously indistinguishable from the vanilla environmentalism of Bill McKibben (1989), Al Gore (1992), and Greta Thunberg (2023)—all good exemplars of the leftism so roundly rejected in the manifesto – the threat of Kaczynski’s message was attenuated. Who would want to read a 35,000-word numbered proof if, instead, you could just watch the academy award winning film, *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim, 2006)?

But the manifesto is not the same as *An Inconvenient Truth*. It is not the same as 350.org (n.d.), as Earth First! (Davis, 2001), as the Earth Liberation Front (Rosebraugh, 2004), as Extinction Rebellion (2019) or even as James Hansen’s *Juliana* litigation (2015). Remember, although the manifesto affirmatively asserts wild nature (Kaczynski, 1995, ¶ 183), it is not a piece of environmental writing. It is not ecoterrorism (c.f., Arnold, 1997). Thus, the manifesto is not even the same as the anarcho-primitivism of John Zerzan (1994) or the deep green resistance of Derrick Jensen (2006). Indeed, there is ‘no indication that Kaczynski shared the sense, so prevalent in radical environmental subcultures, that life is worthy of reverence and the earth is sacred’ (Taylor, 1998, p. 15). Fundamentally, *Industrial Society and Its Future* is

an anti-tech declaration of war – a theme developed in full in Kaczynski’s later writing (Kaczynski, 2010, 2016). Although Kaczynski and environmental radicals agree upon many roots of the problem (i.e. the alienating, unsustainable, and destructive nature of modern technology), Kaczynski sees the technology as defining the problem of civilization, while Zerzan and Jensen (and their followers) understand technology as just one part of it. Moreover, these thinkers fundamentally disagree about viable solutions (Fleming, 2022): Jensen muses about blowing up a dam (2006, p. 172), Malm contemplates blowing up a pipeline (2021), but Kaczynski killed people. For revenge (Richardson, 2018). Deliberately, with bombs, over and over, for years.

It echoes the crimes of John Doe in David Fincher’s *Se7en*: they would have required a kind of superhuman fortitude. ‘Imagine the will it takes to keep a man bound for a full year. To sever his hand and use it to plant fingerprints’ (Fincher, 1995). It is also analogous to the character of Colonel Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola, 1979). Remember, too, that Kurtz, like Kaczynski, was dismissed as ‘totally insane.’ In the denouement of the film, Marlon Brando’s Kurtz muses:

I remember when I was with Special Forces. Seems a thousand centuries ago. We went into a camp to inoculate some children. We’d left the camp after we had inoculated the children for polio. And this old man came running after us, and he was crying. He couldn’t say. We went back there, and they had come and hacked off every inoculated arm. There they were, in a pile. A pile of little arms. And, I remember, I cried, I wept like some grandmother. I wanted to tear my teeth out. I didn’t know what I wanted to do. And I want to remember it. I never want to forget it. I never want to forget it. And then I realized, like I was shot, like I was shot with a diamond bullet through my forehead. And I thought, My God, the genius of that! The genius. The will to do that. Perfect, genuine, complete, crystalline, pure. And then I realized, they were stronger than we. Because they could stand it. These were not monsters. These were men, trained cadres. These men who fought with their hearts, who have families, who have children, who are filled with love. That they had the strength, the strength to do that. If I had ten divisions of those men, then our troubles here would be over very quickly.

Kurtz’s lament comes very close to what Kaczynski called in the manifesto when he wrote, “Until the time comes for the final push toward revolution, the task of revolutionaries will be less to win the shallow support of the majority than to build a small core of deeply committed people” (1995, ¶ 189). It is close to what Kaczynski envisioned in his *Technological Slavery* essay, ‘Hit Where It Hurts’ (2010, pp. 248–253; see also Jensen, 2006, pp. 808–833).

Today, there is a loosely-connected movement—consisting of both ‘acolytes’ and ‘heretics’ (Jacobi, 2016)—that has taken up Kaczynski’s anti-tech ideal-

ogy (see also Hanrahan, 2018). Surveying the landscape of indominista anti-tech scholars, divergent anti-civilization wildists, and violent eco-terrorists like the Mexican ITS (*Individualidades Tendiendo a lo Salvaje: Individuals Tending toward the Wild*), John Jacobi, dubbed the ‘Zelig of ecoextremism’ by journalist John Richardson (2018) writes:

This new eco-radicalism is not the stale ecological politic of mainstream environmentalism, nor is it like the weak and compromising ‘radical’ ideologies like primitivism or eco-socialism. No, this is anti-civilization politic taken seriously: a full rejection of not just the material basis of civilized society, but the moral and philosophical basis too. Of course, at the moment these new eco-radicals look like lone prophets in the wilderness, or worse, lost lepers there. But this is only because of how fundamentally contrary the new values run to the values of civility— an accomplishment, not a failure. And as climate change, antimicrobial resistance, mass surveillance, species extinctions, etc.—the problems central to the ideology—continue to dominate the politics of the 21st century, we can only expect the values to spread further. The only question that remains is which approach will take on. Will it be the traditional revolutionary approach of Kaczynski? The coalition building approach of the wildists? Or will it be the savagery and terror of the eco-extremists?. (2016, p. 32)

Time, it seems, shall tell.

Dies Irae: day of wrath

Kaczynski published *Industrial Society and Its Future* on 19 September 1995: 28 years ago. When his essay appeared in the *Washington Post*, the public internet – launched in 1993— was still in its infancy. Only 14% of American adults had internet access; three times as many (42%) had never even heard of the internet (Fox & Rainie, 2014, p. 10). Amazon.com was only a few months old and sold only books. Facebook wouldn't be created for another 9 years; smartphones were still 12 years away. And although McKibben (1989) and Gore (1992) had sounded the alarm on climate change – the decimation of wild nature – the Kyoto Protocol would not be signed for another two years, the infamous hockey stick graph would not be published for another three (Mann et al., 1998), and the 2105 Paris Agreement, limiting warming to + 2°C over pre-industrial baseline, was 20 years off. Climate activist Greta Thunberg wasn't even born.

Since then, much has changed, prompting former psychiatrist and Fox News contributor Keith Ablow to ask, 'Was the Unabomber correct?':

Kaczynski, while reprehensible for murdering and maiming people, was precisely correct in many of his ideas. Watching the development of Facebook heighten the narcissism of tens of millions of people, turning them into mini-reality TV versions of themselves, I would bet he knows, with even more certainty, that he was onto something. Witnessing average Americans 'tweeting' about their daily activities as though they were celebrities, with fans clamoring to know their whereabouts, he must marvel at the ease with which technology taps the ego and drains the soul. (2015)

The technology that Kaczynski despised has thoroughly infiltrated our lives. It comes, not in disguise like a terminator (Cameron, 1984), but welcomed in as a friend, since it is technology that allows so many modern humans to live like gods:

Although our jaded eyes no longer see the miracles in our everyday activities, we live in homes that are heated and cooled with central air, that are wired for electricity and natural gas and cable TV, and that have running hot and cold water and garbage disposals and toilets; we prepare our meals in microwave ovens; we watch DVD (or HD-DVD or Bluray) movies on high-definition televisions. We call our friends on cell phones, and check our email on Blackberries, and use the Internet to make instantaneous purchases from halfway around the world. We take photos on digital cameras

and edit home movies on laptop computers. In vast cities with populations in the millions, we drive to work in automobiles that are capable of 100+ mph speeds, and when we arrive at our offices, we use desktop computers that possess five to ten times more computational power than the system that put man on the moon. We pick up food from drive-up windows, pick up our children from public schools, and shop in malls that contain dozens or even hundreds of stores. We get annual flu shots, take Viagra for sexual dysfunction, Prozac for depression, get LASIK for perfect vision, and get liposuction for perfect swimsuit bodies. We work out in gyms, each of us wrapped in the cocoon of an iPod, and grumble about being treated like cattle when we fly coach class between the United States and Europe. (Oleson, 2007b, p. 71)

However, as Kaczynski observed in *Industrial Society and Its Future* (1995), all of this consumption does not make us happy. It tethers us. It enslaves us. It makes us anxious and miserable (James, 2007). Tyler Durden, it seems, was right: ‘*The things you own wind up owning you*’ (Fincher, 1999). Despite all of the material prosperity, just living in America increases the likelihood of suffering from depression and other psychological disorders (Vega et al., 1998). And it is getting worse: ‘Youth depression rates rose from 2% in the sixties to almost 25% today, according to Ronald Kessler of Harvard Medical School. Suicide among kids has soared 400% since 1950’ (Shenk, 1999, p. 23). Understandably, people lose themselves in sex, gambling, and drugs. US rates of drug overdose are rising, especially for opioid analgesics; more than 100,000 people in the US died of overdose during a single one-year period (CDC, 2021): this (famously) exceeds the death toll of a 737 crashing and killing everyone on board, every day, for an entire year. Today, more people die in the US from overdose than from car accidents (Bach, 2019). People are tired of ‘the shit job, fucking condo world, watching sitcoms’ (Fincher, 1999). Even our rich are angry and envious:

Lower uppers are professionals who by dint of schooling, hard work and luck are living better than 99 percent of the humans who have ever walked the planet. They’re also people who can’t help but notice how many folks with credentials like theirs are living in Gatsbyesque splendor they’ll never enjoy. This stings. If people no smarter or better than you are making ten or 50 or 100 million dollars in a single year while you’re working yourself ragged to earn a million or two—or, God forbid, \$400,000—then something must be wrong. (Miller, 2006)

Something is indeed wrong with this picture. The cost of this ... distraction ... is everything.

Americans comprise five percent of the world population, but they consume a quarter of its resources (Reece, 2004). Comparing the average citizens of the US and India,

‘the American uses fifty times more steel, fifty-six times more energy, one hundred and seventy times more synthetic rubber, two hundred and fifty times more motor fuel, and three hundred times more plastic’ (Jensen, 2006, p. 115). In fact, Edmund O. Wilson has suggested that for everyone in the world to live like modern Americans, it would require the resources of four additional earths (in Feldman, 2002). But William Catton (1982) argues that it would take not four earths, but ten. This demand for resources leads to overreliance on fossil fuels.

Let us use the letter ‘Q’ to stand for the energy derived from burning some 33,000 million tons of coal. In the eighteen and one half centuries after Christ, the total energy consumed averaged less than one half Q per century. But by 1850, the rate had risen to one Q per century. Today, the rate is about ten Q per century. (Toffler, 1970, p. 23)

This consumption of fossil fuels drives anthropogenic climate change:

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that the Earth’s surface temperatures will almost certainly exceed the 1.5°C threshold target of the 2015 Paris Agreement during either the late 2020s or early 2030s, increasing between + 1.6° and +2.4°C over baseline levels by 2050. This means that ‘a hotter future ... is now essentially locked in’. (Oleson, in press, internal citations omitted)

The physical consequences of technological expansion and its resulting climate change will be profound. It already is: ‘The era of global warming has ended and “the era of global boiling has arrived”, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, has declared ... “Climate change is here. It is terrifying. And it is just the beginning”’ (Niranjan, 2023). Pope Francis agrees: ‘Our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point’ (Harvey, 2023). Ice melt and sea level rise will further change the face of the earth. Even if temperatures track according to conservative IPCC models – rising ‘only’ between + 1.6° and + 2.4°C by 2050—it will still result to sea level rise of approximately half a meter over pre-industrial levels. At ‘only’ +1.5°C, storms will be more violent, floods more intense, and wildfires more frequent. The *New York Times* explains:

At 1.5 degrees of warming, ... nearly 1 billion people worldwide could swelter in more frequent life-threatening heat waves. Hundreds of millions more would struggle for water because of severe droughts. Some animal and plant species alive today will be gone. Coral reefs, which sustain fisheries for large swaths of the globe, will suffer more frequent mass die-offs. (Plumer & Fountain, 2021)

Kaczynski's ideal of wild nature (1995, ¶ 183) is at great risk. Already, many scientists believe that anthropogenic climate change has started a mass extinction – the sixth in the historic record Kolbert (2014)—making it likely that approximately one-in-six species will go extinct (Urban, 2015). A great deal of writing about climate change is bland, bloodless, and banal – Greta Thunberg has condemned the ‘blah blah blah’ of empty government platitudes (Carrington, 2021) for example – but one writer recently described the situation in unequivocal terms:

We have pushed ourselves beyond the point in the human narrative when we can worry only about ourselves. We have fucked ourselves into a massive die-off, killing half the world's species. California is on fire, Australia is on fire; we are already suffering, with displaced populations and major failures to the electrical grid. *Doomsday is here now*. We need to act collectively, we need to act fast, if all humans—libertarian or progressive or the hapless masses of the unprepared—are going to have a chance to survive this warming world. (Groff, 2023, italics added)

But humans are unlikely to act collectively. ‘Climate change isn't just about things getting hotter and wetter ... it's about things getting meaner and uglier’ (Naomi Klein, in Winship, 2016). Specifically, as temperatures increase, so does interpersonal and intergroup violence (Hsiang et al., 2013; Ranson, 2014): assault, rape, murder, coups, wars. At ‘only’ +1.5°C, there will be an estimated + 5.9% median increase in interpersonal violence and an estimated 21% median increase in intergroup violence (Hsiang et al., 2013). There will almost certainly be climate wars (Dyer, 2010). It is all too easy to envision the geopolitical climate-change conflicts modeled by the U.S. Department of Defense (2015).

At only + 1.5°C, we can expect to experience sea level rise of half a meter over pre-industrial levels and the potential displacement of some 200 million people (Myers, 2005, p. 1), the largest dislocation of humanity that the world has ever witnessed. As a point of comparison, the Syrian refugee crisis – claimed by many to be driven in part by climate change – has involved 5.6 million refugees. Therefore, in a *New Yorker* piece, Jonathan Franzen describes a not-so-distant future of climate migration. He writes: ‘The immigration pressure in the future will make the recent refugee crisis in Europe look like a Sunday picnic. I fear the outcome will be very ugly’ (2019). Temperature increases above + 2°C

will seriously threaten the stability of global society ... [yet] according to the most hopeful estimates ... , the world is on course to heat up by between 2.4C and 3C. From this perspective it is clear we can do little to avoid the coming climate breakdown”. (McKie, 2022)

Bill McGuire describes it:

As resources and habitable land diminish, nations will turn against one another in an effort to maintain or gain what they feel is their share and their right. As economies degrade, the social fabric begins to fray and mass migration becomes a global phenomenon, so the election of populist leaders promising the Earth is likely to become increasingly commonplace. (2022: 120/177)

As the risk of economic collapse becomes increasingly dangerous (Wallace-Wells, 2019) and as nations descend into lifeboat ethics (Hardin, 1974), states will flex the muscle of their police and security forces to reinforce and reproduce existing power arrangements. They will use violence to suppress domestic social movements and to manage ‘those on the losing end of economic and political arrangements’ (Vitale, 2017, p. 34). Mass surveillance technology will facilitate this (Cohen, 2010); mass incarceration will incapacitate any who constitute a recognized threat to the status quo (Hinton, 2016). A few lawyers might squawk about civil liberties and the ‘rule of law’ (c.f., Oleson, 2007a; Simon, 2014), but it is simple enough to create a ‘state of exception’ (Agamben, 2004). We have done it before (Hafetz, 2009); we have done it often (Powell, 2016).

But, and this is remarkable, though the world burns, we will not renounce technology. On the contrary, we shall cling to it all the more tightly. We shall do so because, despite the allure of beautiful rhetoric about it being ‘better to die on our feet than to live on our knees’ (Roosevelt, 1941), we value the security of technology more than we value freedom. We will do so because ‘technology is a more powerful social force than the aspiration for freedom’ (Kaczynski, 1995, ¶ 126).

Lux Aeterna: eternal light

What, then, if the conventional account is wrong? What if Theodore John Kaczynski was *not* a ‘mad genius’ (e.g. Gibbs et al., 1996; Johnston & Scott, 1996) was *not* a ‘paranoid schizophrenic’ (e.g. Kaczynski, 2016), and was *not* mentally ill? What then?

After reviewing the evidence, Michael Mello (1999, 2000) concluded that Kaczynski was lucid and sane. What if Kaczynski’s intelligence, a four-in-a-million IQ of 167 (Oleson, 2016), simply allowed him to appreciate the fundamental incompatibility of technology and freedom in a way that most people could not (c.f., Towers, 1990)? To perceive a pattern? What if like the unnamed narrator in Barbusse’s novel, *Hell*, Kaczynski simply saw ‘too deep and too much’ (Barbusse, 1932, p. 72)? Writing about the criminal genius, Rhodes wrote:

The ordinary man comes to terms with society. The ... genius will not. Those who will not are, when all is said and done, actual or potential criminals. It is the aim of the genius, although it may not be more than subconscious, to overthrow society and rebuild it upon lines that would bring it into harmony with *him*. (p. 59, emphasis in original)

What, then, if *Industrial Society and Its Future* (Kaczynski, 1995) is not some ‘wacko’ screed (Comey, 2006), but a work of penetrating insight? What if its analysis, simultaneously rational and unintelligible, is fundamentally correct? What if it is was dismissed, both as unoriginal (Chase, 2003) and as ‘demented’ (Fromm, 1998, p. 417; Gavin, 2023), only because it was so disruptive to existing arrangements, so fundamentally heretical (Eccles, in Mello, 1999, p. 41), that it really did seem like madness to most people? After all, to employ violence – to kill people – in order to destroy the technology that has allowed so many to live so well: well, that *would* seem crazy to most people:

Because only
tormented persons want truth.
Man is an animal like other animals, wants food and success and
women, not truth. Only if the mind
Tortured by some interior tension has despaired of happiness:
then it hates its life-cage and seeks further,
And finds, if it is powerful enough. But instantly the private
agony that made the search
Muddles the finding (Jeffers, 2008, p. 613).

In the allegory of the cave, when the philosopher returns to tell other prisoners that they are chained, seeing only shadows cast upon the wall, Plato asks, ‘Would he not provoke laughter, ... and if it were possible to lay hands on and to kill the man who tried to release them and lead them up, would they not kill him’ (1961, p. 749)? This sounds exactly like what happened to Theodore Kaczynski: a reception of derision and persecution.

So, then, what if Kaczynski was not crazy but correct? What if Elon Musk was right when he said of Kaczynski, ‘He might not be wrong’ (in Novak, 2023). And what if it is the rest of us who are crazy (for living in the manner that we do)? Given that the alarms have been sounding on climate change for decades (Rich, 2018) and given that the world is sleepwalking over a cliff, increasing – not cutting – its output of CO₂ (IEA, 2023a), *we* might be the ones who are acting irrationally. In *Manhunt Unabomber*, a fictional Kaczynski says, ‘The irony is they’re gonna show this cabin as evidence that I’m crazy. But if everyone was content to live simply like this’ we’d have no more war, no poverty, no pollution’ (Yaitanes, 2017).

Henry David Thoreau once wrote:

Moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep... The millions are awake enough for physical labor; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. (Thoreau, 1970, p. 221)

What if, at Berkeley, Kaczynski had simply awakened, realizing that we have been sold a dystopia? What then? One option to him, of course, was suicide. As Camus famously observed, ‘There is only one really serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide’ (1955, p. 3). Suicide remained a rational option for Kaczynski. He attempted suicide when his lawyers colluded with the trial judge, and he reportedly committed suicide in 2023. But the same despair that gives rise to suicide can also be liberating. Kaczynski explains:

Because I found modern life utterly unacceptable, I grew increasingly hopeless until, at the age of 24, I arrived at a kind of crisis: I felt so miserable that I didn’t care whether I lived or died. But when I reached that point a sudden change took place: I realised that if I didn’t care whether I lived or died, then I didn’t need to fear the consequences of anything I might do. Therefore, I could do anything I wanted. (in Kingsnorth, 2017, p. 123)

The idea echoes Tyler Durden: ‘It’s only after we’ve lost everything that we’re free to do anything’ (Fincher, 1999). It echoes Hassan-i-Sabbah: ‘Nothing is true: Everything is permitted’ (Burroughs, 1964, p. 149). And thus, perhaps, instead of suicide, instead of despair, Kaczynski said *no*. Perhaps he rebelled (Camus, 1956), choosing not death

but resistance and action. There is something principled in rebellion. Although DeValve (2017) unequivocally rejects violence as a legitimate means, he identifies rebellion as a dynamic, powerful social force: an act of love (p. 91), a sacrament (p. 98). Others, too, have urged action:

We have spent too much time in thinking, supposing that if we weigh in advance the possibilities of any action, it will happen automatically. We have learnt, rather too late, that action comes not from thought, but from a readiness for responsibility. (Bonhoeffer, 1953, p. 298)

Under this formulation, Kaczynski could be ‘a hero, a man who awoke from the dreaming masses and was willing to act upon what he saw’ (Oleson, 2005a, p. 222). He was willing to act decisively, even if that meant killing innocent people. Of course, as far as Kaczynski was concerned, his victims were *not* innocent: advocates and architects of technology, they were the creators of society’s fundamental problem – akin to the ‘little Eichmanns’ (Churchill, 2001) murdered in the 9–11 attacks – and therefore constituted legitimate targets. Moreover, the longer Kaczynski waited to initiate the anti-tech revolution, the worse the suffering would be:

If the breakdown [of the industrial system] is sudden, many people will die, since the world’s population has become so overblown that it cannot even feed itself any longer without advanced technology. Even if the breakdown is gradual enough so that reduction of the population can occur more through lowering of the birthrate than through elevation of the death rate, the process of deindustrialization probably will be very chaotic and involve much suffering. It is naïve to think it likely that technology can be phased out in a smoothly managed, orderly way, especially since the technophiles will fight stubbornly at every step. The bigger the system grows, the more disastrous the consequences of its breakdown will be; so it may be that revolutionaries, by hastening the onset of the breakdown, will be reducing the extent of the disaster. (Kaczynski, 1995, ¶ 167)

This logic provides the foundation for the necessity defense that Kaczynski had hoped to introduce with attorney J. Tony Serra: the use of instrumental violence, ‘ultimately to save humanity from self-destruction’ (Oleson, 2007b, p. 58, fn. 220). But the world never heard this argument, since, instead, Kaczynski was identified as a schizophrenic, denied a trial, and – in a modern iteration of civil death (Chin, 2011) – sentenced to eight life terms. Reflecting on his non-trial, Kaczynski demonstrates both insight and empathy. He does not sound particularly paranoid; nor does he rave. Instead, he writes:

Perhaps I ought to hate my attorneys for what they have done to me, but I do not. Their motives were in no way malicious. They are essentially

conventional people who are blind to some of the implications of this case, and they acted as they did because they subscribe to certain professional principles that they believe left them no alternative. These principles may seem rigid and even ruthless to a non-lawyer, but there is no doubt that my attorneys believe in them sincerely. Moreover, on a personal level my attorneys have treated me with great generosity and have performed many kindnesses for me. (But these can never compensate for the harm they have done me through their handling of my case.) (in Mello, 1999, p. 140)

Theodore John Kaczynski was not mad. He was merely furious.

Recordare: remember

The Unabomber case has loomed in the background of my entire academic career. *Industrial Society and Its Future* was published in September of 1995, just as I was commencing my doctoral research on IQ and crime. Although I never interviewed or corresponded with Kaczynski, his case figured prominently in my thinking on the topic. And although my interest in jurisprudential ethics (e.g. Oleson, 2006b) was not sparked by Kaczynski's 'non-trial of the century' (Mello, 1999), there are obvious connections between that subject and the way that Kaczynski's defenders and the presiding judge managed the legal proceedings. Similarly, my interest in the linkages between genius and insanity was not *about* the Unabomber, but, in a sense, it was. Kaczynski is frequently named in my academic work, but even when he is not, he is often present. It is a little like Prince Andrei, thinking, in *War and Peace*: 'Yes, that man is somehow closely and painfully connected with me ... What is the connection of that man with my childhood and my life?' (Tolstoy, 2010, p. 874).

These intellectual connections to Kaczynski's case became ontological ones when I spent one dark winter reading IPCC reports on climate change, the climate work of Lovelock (2006) and of Hansen and his colleagues (2007), and the green anarchism of Jensen (2006). For me, Jensen's virulent *Endgame* was like the red pill in *The Matrix* (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999), cracking open a vista that I sometimes wish I had never seen. 'We live in a time of social, economic and ecological unravelling' (Kingsnorth, 2017, p. 283). Lovecraft expressed it beautifully in 'The Call of Cthulhu':

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age. (1963, p. 124)

In that dark winter, the dawning realization that anthropogenic climate change will almost certainly drown cities and nations, displace millions of people, and precipitate intergroup conflicts and war left me despairing, depressed, and despondent. We will not fix this with long-life lightbulbs (Dyer, 2010), for every international flight we take, every shiny new cell phone we buy (Chan, Seldon, & Chan et al., 2020), every

steak we consume – these will indirectly kill someone (c.f., Matheson, 1970), possibly someone who has not yet been born. We know this vaguely, dimly, but the anonymity of our actions allows us to sustain a willful ignorance. Moreover, our arrangements of technological capitalism make this kind of consumption normative: to reject them is deviant, and requires herculean, deliberate effort. Similarly, the realization that legislators and industry leaders have known about this problem for decades and have done nothing (Rich, 2018) left me outraged. As I re-read *Industrial Society and Its Future* (Kaczynski, 1995), I was struck by the synthetic prescience of Kaczynski's argument. He was right about so much. But that is the crux of the dilemma: if you believe in the near-unanimity of the scientific evidence, and if you do not 'believe that our culture will undergo a voluntary transformation to a sane and sustainable way of living' (Jensen, 2006, p. 3), then what are you doing to change things?

Theodore Kaczynski died fighting for a cause, which he believed to be better than living 'a long but empty and purposeless life' (Kaczynski, 1995, ¶168). In reality, Kaczynski was neither the 'diabolical' (Rick Smith, in Gavin, 2023) and 'tortured' (Johnston & Scott, 1996) 'mad genius' (Gibbs et al., 1996) that the media needed him to be, nor the anti-tech messiah that he probably aspired to be (Balsamo & Whitehurst, 2023). Motivated not by altruism, but by revenge (Balsamo & Whitehurst, 2023), Kaczynski was responsible for 16 bombings, ultimately killing three people and injuring another 23. His victims suffered: the description of Thomas Mosser's death was *horrific*. This must neither be forgotten nor trivialized. But the casualties associated with technology (and with the climate change it has wrought) are infinitely greater. Even if we do not call it *poisoning* when we bear the costs (human and financial) from generations of deliberate lead contamination (Nevin, 2000). Even if we do not call it *murder* when corporations allow defective products to go to market when the cost of a recall exceeds the cost of litigation (e.g. Cullen et al., 2014). Yet violence wears a thousand faces. It is collective as well as interpersonal; it can be insidious, structural (Galtung, 1969), cultural (Galtung, 2016), and slow (Nixon, 2011).

I teach the trolley car problem originally introduced by Philippa Foot (1967) and subsequently developed by Judith Jarvis Thomson (1985). In this context, to explore the utilitarianism of Beccaria (1963) and Bentham (1879), I ask my undergraduate students whether it is justice to redirect a racing train from a track that will kill five people onto a side-track that will kill one (most say yes); then I ask them about whether or not to push the fat man in front of a train (most say no) (Edmonds, 2014). In these exercises, I pit ruthless utilitarian arithmetic ($1 < 5$) against human squeamishness and deontological principle. These, however, are not idle games. These are real questions, questions of life and death, as I think about whether murder – the ugliest of normal crimes – can be justified by necessity.

Murder (and other, lesser forms of illegitimate violence) frequently offend our intuitions about justice – indeed, the core aims and scope of this journal, *Contemporary Justice Review*, include, inter alia: 'peacemaking criminology ... peaceful methods of conflict resolution ... utopian visions of a just society ... and non-violent, needs-meeting

solutions to needs-denying, power-based social arrangements' (*Contemporary Justice Review*, n.d.). But even those who are committed unequivocally to peacemaking (e.g. DeValve, 2014; Pepinsky, 2006; Pepinsky & Quinney, 1991; Quinney & Wildeman, 1991) must reckon with the questions of whether (and when, and how) to employ violence – in any form – in the struggle against injustice. After all, even a nonviolent occupation will disrupt traffic, costing time (and therefore money, and – in the case of a delayed ambulance and its less- obvious analogues – human suffering and death).

If one billion people will drown in climate-change-related disasters in the next century, and if Kaczynski's actions had, let's say, even a 1% chance of reducing that number by just 1% (i.e. by 10,000,000), would it be justified for him to kill three people? The utilitarian economist says *yes*: 1% of 10,000,000 (which is, in turn, 1% of 1 billion) is 100,000. Kill three to save 100,000? Given those numbers, under an act utilitarian framework, Kaczynski's crimes can be justified. 'Some people say something stronger than that it is morally *permissible* for you to turn the trolley: They say that morally speaking, you *must* turn it – that morality requires you to do so' (Thomson, 1985, p. 1395, italics in original). And given the enormous scale of the potential casualties associated with our reliance upon technology and climate change, even a very remote chance to effect a very modest reduction in suffering might pass utilitarian scrutiny. Violence might be ugly, but 'direct action gets the goods' (Sainato, 2023). And at least under some models, violence can even be just (c.f., Kant, 1887).

Ultimately, if Kaczynski's rejection of technology was not the delusional architecture of paranoid schizophrenia (Mello, 1999), but, rather, a lucid formulation of political philosophy (Finnegan, 1998), then it might be prudent to consider – seriously— Kaczynski's assertion that technology imposes grave costs on society as well as conferring advantages. Obviously, society will not renounce the technologies upon which it depends (e.g. Catton, 1982; Toffler, 1970). In fact, amid climate change (McGuire, 2022; McKibben, 1989; Thunberg, 2023; Vince, 2022), on the back of the hottest September in human history (Hausfather, 2023), the oil and gas industry remains unapologetic about its pursuit of prosperity: 'Our mission is not to please them [anti-oil-and-gas activists]. Our mission is to deliver to the society the energy we need today and tomorrow' (Pouyanne, in Boyle, 2023). Another puts the matter more bluntly: 'I'm reminded of an old saying: "If you want to keep everyone happy, sell ice cream." *We are not in the business of ice cream*' (Taufik, in Boyle, 2023, italics added).

Under this kind of business as usual, things are going to get hotter; wild weather will wreak global havoc in 'natural' disasters; many species will go extinct, stripping the world of biodiversity (Urban, 2015). And as nature suffers, so too will the human world. As the world boils (Niranjan, 2023), things will get meaner and uglier (Winship, 2016). As seas, metaphoric and real, rise, many people will drown – the marginal, the poor, the unlucky – while others will stand by and allow it to happen (Hardin, 1974; Levi, 1989; Rosenthal, 1964; c.f.; Chokshi, 2017). The rich will consume the future. Temperatures will rise, and domestic crime rates will increase (Ranson, 2014); intergroup conflicts – climate wars – will spread and intensify at an even faster rate (Dyer, 2010; Hsiang et

al., 2013). And although it has been said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism (Fisher, 2009, p. 1), capitalism, itself, could collapse (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Schweickart, 2011; Streek, 2016). When these terrible things begin to happen, corporations and nation states alike, acting to preserve existing power arrangements, will turn to technology for their salvation. To survive today, they will extract gas and oil and rare earth – tomorrow be damned. They will build great walls, both to stem rising seas and to repel desperate migrants, the barbarians at their gates. Behind veils of state secrets (Fisher, 2006) they will declare legal states of exception (Agamben, 2004). They will exercise force. And they will surrender decision making to superior, post-human AI (Bostrom, 2014; Kurzweil, 2005), even though computers, like corporations (Bakan, 2004), are psychopathic and lack human empathy.

Computers often solve real-world problems better than humans: when Deep Blue defeated world chess champion Garry Kasparov in 1997, it was a watershed moment; but the 2017 defeat of Stockfish 8 (the world’s top-ranked chess program) by Google’s AlphaZero (after AlphaZero taught itself chess *in just four hours*) hints that the ‘singularity’—the moment in which technology begins to advance itself at a rate incomprehensible to humans—is not so far away. Accordingly, Elon Musk and Stephen Hawking both identified AI as one of humanity’s great existential threats. (Oleson, 2021)

As all of this happens, the feelings of despair and resentment experienced by people deprived of the power process (Kaczynski, 1995) will intensify, punctuated by occasional pockets of active resistance (e.g. Taylor, 1998), at least until feelings of helplessness and hopelessness are eclipsed by something worse: an authentic struggle for survival, or real enslavement, or the horrors of actual war. ‘Big darkness soon come,’ as Hunter S. Thompson (2003) warned in one of his final essays. More and more, our world might resemble the hells of Christianity (Alighieri, 2009) and Buddhism (Gardiner, 2012). Already, recently declared the Secretary-General of the United Nations, ‘humanity has opened the gates to hell’ (UN News, 2023).

Who knows if we can avoid this dystopia? ‘Long is the way and hard, that out of hell leads up to light’ (Milton, 2003, bk. 2, ln. 432–433). Some insist that it is still possible to hold climate change to a ceiling of + 1.5°C, although even they acknowledge that the window to do so is closing rapidly (IEA, 2023b); others, arguing that ‘optimism is cowardice’ (Spengler, 1932, p. 104) and believing that clutching at false hope is harmful, argue that we must prepare, now, for the world beyond + 1.5°C (e.g. Franzen, 2019). We will almost certainly cross + 1.5°C (Plumer & Fountain, 2021) and it is very possible that we were *never* going to limit warming to + 1.5°C (Cointe & Guillemot, 2023). So, instead of sacrificing everything to deliver the political target of <+1.5°C, it might be prudent to adopt a harm reduction framework (e.g. Marlatt, 1996) in managing our dependence upon fossil fuels and our addiction to technology. Which policies will allow

us to address climate change with the smallest number of human deaths (and the least damage to the non- human world)?

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