Theodore "Ted" Kaczynski: Enfant Prodige, Mathematician, Philosopher and Terrorist

History of a Tortured Genius

Lucio Cadeddu

04 June 2026

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Abstract

The dramatic trajectory of the *enfant prodige* Theodore "Ted" Kaczynski came to an end on 10 June 2023. Once a brilliant young mathematician, he became tragically notorious for the sequence of bombings that he perpetrated between 1978 and 1995 under the pseudonym "Unabomber," a code name assigned by the FBI. Convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of release, Kaczynski ultimately took his own life in his cell at the federal prison in Butner, North Carolina. A considerable body of writing and commentary has accumulated around the figure and life of Theodore J. Kaczynski—much of it historically imprecise and often "romanticized." Interpretations of his thoughts and actions oscillate between pure exaltation ("a misunderstood genius of mathematics" or "bearer of new and revolutionary ideas") and complete denial of any significant scientific merit, both as a mathematician and a sociologist. This chapter aims to put some of these aspects into a different perspective and explore Kaczynski's legacy as well.

Keywords

Ted Kaczynski · Unabomber · Mathematics · Sociology

Introduction

The life and posthumous reception of Theodore "Ted" Kaczynski present a complex case study at the intersection of intellectual history, criminology, and the cultural construction of deviance. Once celebrated as an exceptional mathematical talent, Kaczynski later became emblematic of a distinctly modern form of domestic terrorism; his actions framed and amplified through the media apparatus that surrounded the "Unabomber" investigation. His death in June 2023 has renewed scholarly interest in the narratives that have accumulated around his figure—narratives that are frequently marked by factual inaccuracies, s elective memory, and a persistent tendency toward mythologization. Interpretations of Kaczynski oscillate between idealization and dismissal, reflecting broader tensions in how societies negotiate the legacy of individuals who occupy both scientific and criminal histories. This chapter seeks to reassess these competing portrayals by situating Kaczynski within a more rigorous historical and intellectual context, clarifying recurrent misconceptions, and evaluating the contours of his contested legacy.

Family, Background, Education and Early Career

Theodore Background, Education John Kaczynski was born in Chicago on 22 May 1942 and spent his childhood in the working-class suburb of Evergreen Park, Illinois, where he was regarded as an exceptionally bright boy with a quiet and introspective disposition. His parents were of Polish descent; the Kaczynski family were Polish

Catholics who had emigrated to the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Ted's paternal grandparents, Jacob and Helen Kaczynski, settled in Chicago after a period in Pittsburgh, following relatives who had already established themselves in the production of traditional Polish sausages under the name *Kaczynski's Sausages*. Ted's father, Theodore Richard Kaczynski (born 1912), and his brothers Stanley and Alex all worked in the family business, owned by an uncle.

Ted's mother, Wanda Dombek, was born in Zanesville, Ohio, in 1917 to Polish immigrant parents, John and Mary Dombek. Her family also moved to Chicago, where she met Theodore. The couple married on 11 April 1939 and settled in a rented house on South Wolcott, a predominantly Polish enclave near the family's sausage business.

Ted's father was sociable and fond of the outdoors—hunting, fishing, and camping—passions he passed on to his sons. Wanda, for her part, was highly educated and deeply interested in science and literature. Though both parents had been raised Catholic, they later identified as atheists. Wanda kept a detailed diary about her son Ted and read to him daily: children's books, classical literature for young readers, and even texts surprisingly advanced for his age, including articles from *Scientific American*. With her guidance, young Ted was able to navigate concepts, especially maths, that would challenge many university students.

The birth of his younger brother, David, 7 years later, profoundly altered Ted's previously warm and expressive character: he became withdrawn and uncommunicative.

In 1952, the family had saved enough to leave the chaotic Chicago way of living for a small house in Cape Cod, in Evergreen Park, a middle-class suburb inhabited by shopkeepers, teachers, and office workers.

Ted grew increasingly introverted, seeking refuge in books and in his own thoughts. By age ten, in fifth grade, he had developed a powerful interest in science and mathematics, in which he displayed remarkable, crystalline talent. Both siblings were academically gifted, but Ted's abilities were simply extraordinary. A school counselor administered an intelligence test, and Ted achieved a score of **167**, a level associated with genius—found in only about four individuals per million. The counselor told Wanda that her son might 1 day become a "new Einstein."

Because of his exceptional intellect, he skipped a grade and found himself among older students, deepening his sense of social distance. On camping trips, he brought Raymond W. Anderson's *Romping Through Mathematics*, a text that began with elementary arithmetic and progressed all the way to the principles of modern mathematical analysis.

Adolescence and Academic Career

Ted's social difficulties became even more pronounced during adolescence. He skipped another grade, completed high school in just 3 years, graduating in 1958, and

won a scholarship to Harvard at the age of 16—an achievement that further widened the gap between him and his peers.

Back home in Evergreen Park during summers, he spent most of his time in his room. He loved classical music (Gabrieli, Mozart, Haydn, and Vivaldi were his favorites) and folk music; he despised television and rock 'n' roll, while loud noises infuriated him.

He successfully completed a degree in mathematics at Harvard in 1962, just days after turning 20.

Graduate Studies and Early Academic Work

In autumn 1962, Ted arrived in Ann Arbor to begin 5 years of graduate study at the University of Michigan. He enrolled in a master's program in mathematical analysis and accepted a part-time position as an instructor, teaching analysis and geometry over the next three academic years.

His professors remembered him as quiet, solitary, and extraordinarily dedicated to mathematics, even by graduate-student standards. While his Harvard professors barely recalled him, the faculty members at Michigan were impressed.

Professor George Piranian, who taught an advanced course on function theory, described him as precise and attracted to the most difficult problems. Working entirely on his own, Ted solved a problem on which Piranian and F. Bagemihl had long been working, publishing the solution in *The American Mathematical Monthly*—without informing either colleague or supervisor.

He earned his master's degree in 1964 and continued toward a PhD. Meanwhile, Ted's parents had moved to Lisbon, Iowa, where his father became a manager at Cushion-Pak, a manufacturer of foam padding for furniture, and his mother enrolled in a graduate program in English at the University of Iowa.

Meanwhile, Ted published additional articles: "Boundary Functions for Functions Defined in a Disk" in *Journal of Mathematics and Mechanics* (1965) and "On a Boundary Property of Continuous Functions" in *Michigan Mathematics Journal* (1966).

His dissertation, *Boundary Functions*, was built on results from his earlier papers. He not only earned his doctorate in 1967 but also received the Sumner B. Myers Award for the year's best doctoral thesis in mathematics. This accomplishment secured him a faculty position at the University of California, Berkeley, where he taught courses in number systems, set theory, general topology, and function spaces.

Student evaluations, however, were poor: he lectured directly from the textbook and refused to answer students' questions. Colleagues described him as aloof, shy, silent, and reserved. Nonetheless, as a researcher he was held in high regard. In 1968, his article Note on a Problem of Alan Sutcliffe appeared in *Mathematics Magazine*. In 1969, he published two additional articles in the prestigious journal *Transactions of the American Mathematical Society*.

Suddenly, on 30 June 1969, and without explanation, Ted resigned from his position. The explanation would emerge only years later, in this letter to one of his several anonymous pen-pals (Kaczynski 2008b)

> Meanwhile, I was doing well in mathematics. It was fun to solve mathematical problems, but in a deeper sense mathematics was boring and empty because for me it had no purpose. If I had worked on applied mathematics I would have contributed to the development of the technological society that I hated, so I worked only on pure mathematics. But pure mathematics was only a game. I did not understand then, and I still do not understand, why mathematicians are content to fritter away their whole lives in a mere game. I myself was completely dissatisfied with such a life. I knew what I wanted: To go and live in some wild place. But I didn't know how to do so. In those days there were no primitivist movements, no survivalists, and anyone who left a promising career in mathematics to go live among forests or mountains would have been regarded as foolish or crazy. I did not know even one person who would have understood why I wanted to do such a thing. So, deep in my heart, I felt convinced that I would never be able to escape from civilization.

At age 27, he left Berkeley determined to seek a simpler life in a remote place. After a trip to Canada with his brother to search for land, he moved back in with his parents near Chicago. His father took a new job with the Foam Cutting Engineers Inc. in Addison, Illinois, and the family moved to Lombard.

For a year, Ted remained unemployed, writing letters to magazines and public figures on consumerism and the harms of advertising. His dream of owning land seemed unattainable until spring 1971, when David, who had begun working in Montana, helped him purchase property.

Retreat to Montana and the First Bombings

County records for Lewis and Clark County show that Ted purchased his land in June 1971: a shaded 1.4-acre plot a few miles southeast of Lincoln, Montana. He built a small one-room wooden cabin with a loft, without electricity, telephone, or running water. He dug a well, installed a pump, used a kerosene lamp at night, and heated the cabin with a wood stove during Montana's severe winters. He lived almost entirely self-sufficiently, taking occasional odd jobs and receiving small sums from his parents.

In spring 1978, he traveled to Chicago to visit Professor Donald Saari of Northwestern University. Ted brought a manuscript criticizing technological progress and asked whether Saari could help him publish it. Saari suggested submitting it to the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, but the manuscript was rejected. Ted felt deeply humiliated and told Saari: "I will get revenge." Consequently, on 24 May 1978, he sent his

first mail bomb, addressed to a professor at the Chicago Circle campus. When returned to a fictitious sender at Northwestern University, it was opened by a campus security officer. It exploded the next day, seriously injuring the guard. The full chronology of the bombings can be found in the FBI on-line archives (FBI Archives).

Ted returned to Lombard and began working at the foam-cutting plant where his father worked part-time and his brother supervised. He operated machinery cutting foam for cushions. He briefly developed a relationship with a coworker, but after she rejected him, he suffered an emotional collapse. In open contrast with his brother who supervised the work, he was eventually fired.

Bombings continued: at Northwestern, on an American Airlines flight from Chicago to Washington, and at the home of United Airlines president Percy A. Wood. The FBI's code name for the unknown offender, "UNABOM," derived from these targets: **un**iversities and **a**irlines (**bom**bings).

Between 1981 and 1985, there were seven more attacks: at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City; Vanderbilt University in Nashville; twice at Berkeley (a faculty room and a computer lab); Boeing Airlines in Auburn, Washington; the home of a University of Michigan professor; and a computer store in Sacramento. Packages or bomb sites were marked with the initials "FC," later decoded as "Freedom Club," the same signature that would appear on his first manifesto. In 1985, the first fatality occurred: the owner of the Sacramento computer store.

Deaths, Renewed Violence, and the Manifesto

Ted's father retired after being diagnosed with terminal lung cancer in the late 1980s. When informed that his father's condition had worsened, Ted made only a brief phone call from the Lincoln post office. His father died by suicide in 1990; Ted did not attend the funeral, sending only a condolence call.

In summer 1993, after six inactive years, Ted resumed sending bombs. On 22 June, a device sent to Tiburon, California, severely injured a University of California geneticist. Two days later, a similar bomb severely injured a Yale computer science professor. Soon afterward, Ted sent a letter to *The New York Times*, claiming the attacks were the work of an anarchist collective (FC). On 10 December 1994, a package bomb killed Thomas J. Mosser, an advertising executive.

In April 1995, after requesting and receiving more money from his brother, Ted left Lincoln by bus for Sacramento. On 24 April, a bomb addressed to a former president of the California Forestry Association was opened by his successor, Gilbert P. Murray, who was killed instantly. That same day a letter arrived at *The New York Times* offering an explanation for 17 years of attacks:

> "Those we are seeking are scientists and engineers, especially in critical fields such as computers and genetics."

> The stated goal was nothing less than "the destruction of the worldwide industrial system."

Having gained media attention, Ted sent his 35,000-word manifesto, *Industrial Society and Its Future*, to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, promising to cease bombings if they published it within 3 months. Hoping to identify the attacker, the newspapers complied. When his brother David and his wife read the manifesto, they recognized Ted's voice, ideas, and style. The FBI formed a task force, surrounded Ted's cabin, and after 18 days arrested him.

On 23 January 1998, after a long and complex trial, Theodore J. Kaczynski pleaded guilty in exchange for the government's withdrawal of the death penalty. He received eight consecutive life sentences without the possibility of release.

His admission of guilt ended one of the longest, most costly, and most unusual investigations in FBI history. A $1 million reward had been offered for information identifying the bomber. Several attorneys attempted—without Ted's authorization—to pursue an insanity defense, which Ted adamantly rejected. He preferred the death penalty to having his ideas linked to mental illness.

Imprisonment, Later Writings, and Death

After sentencing, Kaczynski began serving his eight life terms at ADX Florence, a federal supermax prison in Colorado. He maintained extensive correspondence with approximately 400 individuals, most of whose identities will remain sealed until 2049.

In March 2021, he was diagnosed with colorectal cancer. On 14 December 2021, he was transferred to the Federal Medical Center in Butner, North Carolina, where he underwent chemotherapy until March 2023. He refused further treatment due to its side effects. At 00:23 on 10 June 2023, he took his own life by hanging.

During his imprisonment, in addition to his correspondence, he wrote several works besides the 1995 manifesto published by *The Washington Post*. These include *The Road to Revolution* (Kaczynski 2008a), *Technological Slavery* (Kaczynski 2010), and *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How* (Kaczynski 2020).

Sociology, Philosophy, Science, and M athematics

In his manifesto and subsequent essays, Ted Kaczynski adopted radical positions against science and scientists more broadly. According to his view, scientists—save for rare exceptions—are not driven in their research by curiosity or by any desire for the betterment of humanity but rather by the need to undergo what he calls "the power process": having a goal (a scientific problem to be solved), conducting research, and reaching that goal (the solution). Science is therefore, in his interpretation, a surrogate activity, because scientists work primarily for the intrinsic satisfaction it provides.

Additional motivations include money and the pursuit of status: without doubt, the majority of scientists—like most ordinary people—are influenced by advertising and marketing techniques and require financial resources to fulfil their ambitions to possess certain goods and services. Thus, science is not purely a surrogate activity, but it largely functions as such. In this way, science advances blindly, with no regard for the true well-being of the human race or for any other criterion, responding only to the psychological needs of scientists, governmental officials, and industrial leaders who supply research funding.

His position regarding the supposed necessity of encouraging young people to pursue science—an especially topical issue today given the promotion of STEM fields—is unambiguous:

> A chorus of voices exhorts kids to study science. No one stops to ask whether it is inhumane to force adolescents to spend the bulk of their time studying subjects most of them hate.

The same, he argues, applies to workers:

> When skilled workers are put out of a job by technical advances and have to undergo 'retraining,' no one asks whether it is humiliating for them to be pushed around in this way. It is simply taken for granted that everyone must bow to technical necessity, and for good reason: If human needs were put before technical necessity there would be economic problems, unemployment, shortages or worse. The concept of 'mental health' in our society is defined largely by the extent to which an individual behaves in accord with the needs of the system and does so without showing signs of stress. (Kaczynski 1995)

All of this may seem contradictory when compared with his youthful love for mathematics and for science more generally. Yet in a letter to a correspondent, written from prison, he clearly articulates his position on the necessity of studying scientific disciplines:

> If I started college again, what would I major in? If I had to do it all over again, I don't think I would go to college at all. I would just go to live in the mountains rather than wasting time on formal education. If I did go to college I wouldn't major in mathematics, but I'd probably take several math courses because they are good training in clear thinking. Say, three semesters of calculus, a semester of number theory, two semesters of modern algebra, a course in (mathematically rigorous) real analysis, a course in mathematical logic and one in axiomatic set theory. What I would major in, I don't know. Maybe computer science, but I would major in that only so that I could become a computer saboteur, i.e., one of those guys

> who invent destructive viruses and that sort of thing. Apart from that I'd probably take a lot of courses in the social 'sciences' (note the quotation marks), especially history and cultural anthropology. The reason is that I'd like to know more about how and why societies function and develop as they do.

He does not reject mathematics per se—as has often been claimed—but rather considers several foundational courses valuable as training for "clear thinking." Nonetheless, he maintains that he would ultimately have preferred computer science and the social sciences, as these would have enabled him to understand technological society more thoroughly and, potentially, to sabotage it.

Mathematics, however, retains a prominent place in his thought, to the point that he acknowledges the "elegance" so frequently praised by mathematicians. Reflecting on the ways in which the modern technological "System" has successfully manipulated even contemporary "revolutionaries," he states (Kaczynski 2008b):

> The System has played a trick on today's would-be revolutionaries and rebels. The trick is so cute that if it had been consciously planned one would have to admire it for its almost mathematical elegance.

One might therefore ask why he appeared to abandon mathematical research so abruptly, resigning without explanation from his position as assistant professor. Many articles and essays about his life either fail to address this question or provide incorrect motivations.

The first point to clarify is that Ted Kaczynski **never** truly abandoned mathematics. Even during his self-imposed exile in the Montana woods, he continued to solve mathematical problems for amusement and later responded to mathematical questions sent to him in prison. His own words are sufficient to explain both his departure from academia and his continued connection to the subject.

In an interview (Rychalski 1999) with journalist A. Rychalski of the *Blackfoot Valley Dispatch*, a local newspaper in Lincoln, Montana, he stated:

> At the time I accepted the job at Berkeley, I had already decided that I would keep it for at most two years before leaving it to go live in the woods. The fact is that I never at any time felt satisfied with the idea of spending my life as just a mathematician and nothing more. Ever since my early teens I had dreamed of escaping from civilization—as in going to live on an uninhabited island or in some other wild place. [. . .] But at about the beginning of my last year at the University of Michigan I went through a kind of crisis. You could say that the psychological chains with which society binds us sort of broke for me. After that I was sure that I had the courage to break away from the system, to take off and just go into some

> wild place and try to live there. When I went to Berkeley, I never went there with the intention of continuing there indefinitely. I took the job at Berkeley only to earn some money to get started with, to buy a piece of land.

Later, writing from prison to a correspondent known as M.K. in October 2003, he reiterated:

> Meanwhile, I was doing well in mathematics. It was fun to solve mathematical problems, but in a deeper sense mathematics was boring and empty because for me it had no purpose. If I had worked on applied mathematics I would have contributed to the development of the technological society that I hated, so I worked only on pure mathematics. But pure mathematics was only a game. I did not understand then, and I still do not understand, why mathematicians are content to fritter away their whole lives in a mere game. I myself was completely dissatisfied with such a life.

And again, though he deemed mathematics a "contemptible game," he acknowledged that it comforted him by offering a mental escape:

> [...] so many times I've gone looking for a place where I can escape completely from industrial society, and always...well, I'm very discouraged. So, I've been playing around with mathematics a good deal lately. It's a rather contemptible game, but while I'm involved in it, it enables me to escape from my grief.

He was even more explicit when describing his opinion of mathematicians (Kaczynski 1999):

> I considered mathematicians to be very uninteresting people, and I felt I had nothing in common with them. To them, mathematics was Important, with a capital I, whereas to me it was only a game—a game with which I had become bored.

For Kaczynski, then, mathematics was essentially a game—a way to occupy the mind, to distract it from other thoughts, a form of *escapism* from the real world. This mechanism is well known among many notable mathematicians, some of whom produced exceptional scientific research while in isolation (self-imposed or enforced), even in prison. See, for example, Cadeddu and Oppo Porcu (2022).

Kaczynski thus continued to engage with mathematics during his voluntary isolation in Montana. He wrote to his family in 1976:

> Some time ago—(last Nov. or Dec.) I submitted a mathematical paper for publication, and I am rather ashamed of this. Not because of any idea that the paper will advance technical progress—I feel confident that it will never have any practical applications, direct or indirect—but because it represents, to a certain degree, a personal surrender to one of the escape mechanisms which keep people distracted so that they can forget the purposelessness, subordination, and indignity of life in a technological society.

The paper, entitled *Four-Digit Numbers that Reverse Their Digits When Multiplied*, revisited topics in number theory and cited previous works in the field, including his own "Note on a Problem of Alan Sutcliffe" [*Math. Mag.* 41 (1968) 84– 86], L. F. Klosinski and D. C. Smolarski's "On the Reversing of Digits" (*Math. Mag.* 42 (1969), 208–210), and A. Sutcliffe's "Integers that are Multiplied When Their Digits Are Reversed" (*Math. Mag.* 39 (1966), 282–287). It is unknown whether the paper was ever formally submitted or whether it was rejected. Another manuscript on similar topics was later found in his Montana cabin. See Archive *Kaczynski* for a complete survey of Kaczynski's mathematical work.

During his imprisonment, Kaczynski also engaged in an informal distance learning activity, serving as a mathematics tutor by providing responses, evaluations, and corrections to those who wrote to him looking for help. A complete collection of the questions he received and his handwritten answers is available in Grant (2016). Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that Kaczynski never genuinely abandoned his passion for mathematics.

Similarly, the widespread notion that he was a monomaniacal scientist— absorbed solely in his research and indifferent to everything else—is largely inaccurate. An article from the time (McFadden 1996) titled *The Tortured Genius of Theodore Kaczynski* claimed that mathematics was his sole passion. Kaczynski himself forcefully rebutted this description, dismissing the labels of "tortured" and "genius" (Kaczynski 1999):

> In reality I am neither tortured nor a genius. McFadden proceeds to assert that in my Montana cabin I 'watched dying embers flicker visions of a wretched humanity.' I did nothing of the kind. The next paragraph states that mathematics was the 'sole passion of [my] life' and then it was 'suddenly dead.' Actually, mathematics was never the sole passion of my life, and my interest in it declined not suddenly but gradually, over a period of years. [...] I might be able to document the fact that mathematics was never the sole passion of my life.

In fact, besides being a passionate coin collector, he was also an avid music enthusiast. He learned to play the trombone and participated in his college band. Some of his college roommates even complained about his "noisy" musical activities. He regularly composed pieces in the Baroque style he loved. His brother Dave described Ted's passion and talent for music as follows (Kaczynski 2016):

> The Kaczynski home was almost always filled with music, either recorded or homemade. When the local classical music station wasn't on, Teddy played his trombone or I practiced my trumpet. When I grew older and more adept, Teddy presented duets for us to play together, some of which he'd written himself. Like many people gifted in mathematics, Teddy also had a gift for music. After Dad bought a piano (he'd learned to play in early adulthood), Ted would sometimes sit at the piano for hours composing counterpoint in the style of the baroque masters. I couldn't tell whether my brother was going to be the next Einstein or the next Bach.

His interests in sociology and philosophy led him, over time, to formulate the theories later expounded in his 1995 manifesto and successive essays. The first paragraph of the manifesto is sufficient to encapsulate much of his thinking (Kaczynski 1995):

> The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race. They have greatly increased the life-expectancy of those of us who live in 'advanced' countries, but they have destabilized society, have made life unfulfilling, have subjected human beings to indignities, have led to widespread psychological suffering (in the Third World to physical suffering as well) and have inflicted severe damage on the natural world. The continued development of technology will worsen the situation. It will certainly subject human beings to greater indignities and inflict greater damage on the natural world, it will probably lead to greater social disruption and psychological suffering, and it may lead to increased physical suffering even in 'advanced' countries.

Regarding the methods by which technological progress should be opposed, he writes:

> We therefore advocate a revolution against the industrial system. This revolution may or may not make use of violence; it may be sudden or it may be a relatively gradual process spanning a few decades. We can't predict any of that. But we do outline in a very general way the measures that those who hate the industrial system should take in order to prepare the way for a revolution against that form of society. This is not to be a POLITICAL revolution. Its object will be to overthrow not governments but the economic and technological basis of the present society.

The role of violence—and its connection to the terrorist acts he committed— becomes evident in this context. He explains this with chilling clarity:

> To make an impression on society with words is therefore almost impossible for most individuals and small groups. Take us (FC) for example. 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.

Although his ideas may, on a superficial reading, appear left-leaning, they were in fact nothing of the sort. On the contrary, an entire section of the manifesto is devoted to what Kaczynski regarded as the flaws and errors of left-wing ideology.

Unabomber's manifesto is probably the most widely read text in the philosophy of technology, due largely to the notoriety of its author rather than the originality of its ideas. Indeed, Jacques Ellul had already laid much of the groundwork for these themes. In his 1954 *La Technique ou l'Enjeu du siècle*, Ellul argued that technology had undergone a fundamental transformation: from a tool enabling human beings to transcend their limitations, it had become an autonomous process to which humans are subjected. This work constitutes the first volume of Ellul's trilogy on technology, followed by *Le Système technicien* (1977) and *Le bluff technologique* (1988). On the subject of revolutions, a text cited by Kaczynski himself in a prison letter is *Autopsie de la Révolution* (Calmann-Lévy 1969).

Ellul maintained that all techniques—industrial, governmental, financial, educational, etc.—became interdependent over the course of the twentieth century. His thesis is that this interdependence prevents technology from being considered a mere intermediary between humans and nature; it is no longer a submissive tool or simple means. Having attained near-total autonomy from the machine itself and obeying its own internal laws, technology has become the organizing principle of all modern societies. Thanks to Aldous Huxley (author of the dystopian novel *Brave New World*), Ellul's work was translated into English in 1964 under the title *The Technological Society*, subsequently attracting considerable interest in North American academic circles.

Long before Ellul, however, the ideas echoed in Unabomber's writings were already foundational to Luddism. The movement takes its name from Ned Ludd, a young man (whose existence may be apocryphal) who allegedly destroyed a mechanical loom in 1779 in protest. Ludd became a symbol of machine-breaking and evolved into the legendary figure of General Ludd, protector of wage laborers oppressed by industrial capitalism and displaced by the Industrial Revolution. Today, the term "Luddism" or "neo-Luddism" refers to all forms of resistance against the introduction of new machinery and, more broadly, to opposition to technological progress.

Kaczynski's ideas later inspired various antitechnology movements (in a neo-Luddite vein), as well as certain imitators—such as the so-called *Italian Unabomber*, who be-

tween 1994 and 2006 injured 17 people across 30 attacks in Veneto and Friuli. The moniker was assigned due to the similarity of methods and devices, yet the perpetrator was never identified, and no motive was ever established, as there were no claims of responsibility. Many people were suspected of being the perpetrators of the attacks, but suspicions ultimately focused on the figure of the Italian engineer Elvo Zornitta. He has complained of serious personal and financial damages, including the loss of his job, due to the investigations against him and the continuous statements made against him by the investigating authorities and the press, and has joined the civil action, requesting substantial compensation.

In October 2022, Zornitta finally received compensation from the State amounting to AC300,000. Both the State Attorney's Office and the civil action attorney's office have appealed the decision on the amount of compensation, initiating new proceedings in January 2025 at the Court of Venice. Only recently, in September 2025, Zornitta was definitively exonerated by DNA testing, as no genetic material attributable to him was detected in any of the findings. Hence, the legal case is still open against unknown persons.

More disturbingly, and in a manner much closer to Kaczynski's ideological framework, Unabomber also influenced Anders Behring Breivik, the Norwegian neo-Nazi terrorist responsible for the 22 July 2011 attacks in Norway, in which he killed eight people by detonating a car bomb in Oslo's government district and then murdered 69 participants at a Labour Party youth camp on the island of Utøya. On the day of the attacks, Breivik sent out a manifesto entitled *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*, outlining his worldview. This document partially reproduces Kaczynski's ideas, even copying entire passages from the Unabomber manifesto, substituting terms such as "leftists" with "cultural Marxists" and "black people" with "Muslims."

Recent Antitechnology Ideas Raising in the Music and Entertainment Industry

In the artistic world, the American rock band *Rage Against the Machine* also adopted, at least in part, themes reminiscent of antitechnological ideas. For example, in January 2000, the band enlisted film-maker and political activist Michael Moore to direct the music video for the song "Sleep Now in the Fire," shot on the steps of Federal Hall in the financial district of lower Manhattan. Filming was interrupted by the New York City Police Department, and the band attempted to move toward the New York Stock Exchange while Moore was threatened with immediate arrest. "We decided to shoot this video in the belly of the beast," Moore declared. "For a few minutes, Rage Against the Machine were able to shut down American capitalism, an act for which I'm sure tens of thousands of oppressed citizens would cheer."

In a similar manner, in 1997, the band's guitarist Tom Morello stated (Young 1997):

> America touts itself as the land of the free, but the number one freedom that you and I have is the freedom to enter into a subservient role in the workplace. Once you exercise this freedom you've lost all control over what you do, what is produced, and how it is produced. And in the end, the product doesn't belong to you. The only way you can avoid bosses and jobs is if you don't care about making a living. Which leads to the second freedom: the freedom to starve.

More recently, over 200 high-profile musicians belonging to the **Artist Rights Alliance advocacy group**, a nonprofit organization run by music industry veterans, has signed an open letter asking for tech companies not to develop AI tools that can replace human songwriters, lyrics writers, and artists.

The organization has been able to gather signatures from artists spanning various musical genres and eras, from REM and Stevie Wonder to Nicki Minaj and Billie Eilish. The estates of legendary artists Frank Sinatra and Bob Marley have also signed the document.

The use or, rather, the indiscriminate exploitation of AI technology into every field of the music and entertainment industry was the subject of many concerns throughout 2023. Recently (Cave 2023), the Australian artist and musician **Nick Cave** has criticized lyrics generated by ChatGPT as "a grotesque mockery of what it is to be human."

Conclusion

A considerable body of writing and commentary has accumulated around the figure and life of Theodore J. Kaczynski—much of it historically imprecise and often "romanticized." Interpretations oscillate between those who have exalted him as a misunderstood genius of mathematics and sociology, a bearer of revolutionary ideas, and those who have dismissed him as merely a homicidal schizophrenic, devoid of significant scientific merit and lacking originality of thought.

His mathematical talent—unquestionably remarkable according to his mentors and colleagues—remained confined to a narrowly defined area of research. Although he published in leading journals such as *Transactions of the American Mathematical Society* , *Proceedings of the American Mathematical Society*, and the *Michigan Mathematical Journal*, his contributions did not prove seminal for subsequent lines of research.

In the sociological and philosophical fields, his work was largely derivative, revisiting ideas that were already well established, from Luddism to, above all, the seminal and highly influential writings of Jacques Ellul. Without the notoriety brought by Kaczynski's violent acts, these ideas would likely have remained largely unknown to the scholarly community.

What is certain is that Kaczynski possessed an exceptionally curious and lively intellect and that he employed mathematics for three essential purposes: as a release

valve for his inner tensions, as a means of "escaping" from his daily reality ("to escape from my grief"), and as a source of income to finance his adolescent aspiration to live in isolation, far removed from society and technology.

He was, in many respects, an "inverted Crusoe," to borrow a term coined by the English novelist J. G. Ballard. Whereas the original Robinson Crusoe becomes a castaway against his will, Ballard's protagonists often choose deliberate abandonment on a remote island, becoming "castaways" in a process that is simultaneously one of healing, empowerment, and entrapment—allowing individuals to discover a more meaningful and vital existence (Ballard 1974). This, in essence, is what Ted Kaczynski pursued until the end of his days.

Competing Interest Declaration

The author(s) has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this manuscript.

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Lucio Cadeddu
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History of a Tortured Genius
04 June 2026

Chapter from the book *Handbook of the Mathematics of the Arts and Sciences* edited by B. Sriraman. <doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-70658-0_166-1>
Author affiliation: Department of Mathematics & Computer Science, University of Cagliari, Cagliari, Italy e-mail: cadeddu@unica.it