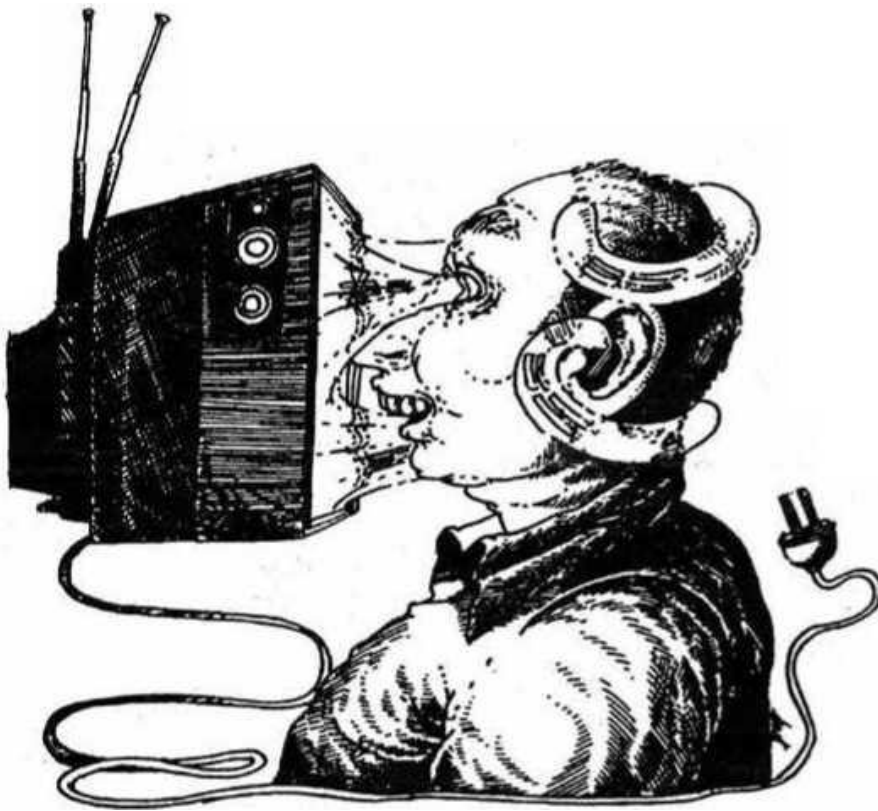


Questioning Technocentrism

Ross Freeman



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A year ago I lost my best friend to Bill Gates and the Microsoft machine. “You are so talented,” I told him, “why go to work for a corporate greed-monger like Gates?”

But my plea fell on ears deafened by a \$40,000 starting salary, stock options and fringe benefits. Our friendship and the distance his move to Seattle put between us didn’t factor into his decision.

To convince my friend to free himself from the rat race, I needed to present him an alternative world view free of consumer compulsion. But I’m still caught between knowledge and action, lost in a world of frustration.

I’m one of those people who doesn’t share the mainstream’s rosy outlook on the Earth’s durability: I don’t believe it can withstand endless consumption and the taming of all things wild. Humans dissect and distill the Earth into its component parts in their endless pursuit of knowledge. Then they recombine the parts in profitable ways to satisfy their boundless greed. Smoothing the rough edges of nature with technology does not make this world a better place. The frontier mentality of a technological manifest destiny is the Earth’s greatest enemy.

Creature comforts increase and the environment grows more unstable. People hide in their climate-controlled domiciles and avoid the damaged, dangerous outdoors. Virtual reality promises unspeakable delights: Experience the great outdoors without leaving the comfort of your own home! As long as basic needs are met, a person could gleefully surf the web to a bachelor’s degree and then telecommute on to retirement and beyond. What will motivate such a person to preserve what little is left of the “great outdoors” if they never go there?

It’s time to reconsider the free-market feeding frenzy and the ever-more-elaborate products created to satiate its hunger. I don’t want a tomato that was genetically altered with mouse liver DNA and picked five months ago in a field 1,000 miles from my home. However, it’s hard to resist such “refinements” when they are presented gushingly to you every waking moment.

The drive to distill life’s essence has led to numerous scientific discoveries and technological breakthroughs. But the business of transmuting this knowledge into gold will end life on Earth as we know it.

Technology is never value-free; every purchase, from the food one eats to the newest system software upgrade, strains the web of the world. Yet, industrialized society is increasingly resource-intensive and computer-dependent. A technocentric society cannot comprehend the intrinsic value of the unknown. A computer either has certain information or doesn’t—it is not aware of mystery. No computer can know the beauty of a raging river or a howling coyote. Systems developed to weigh the costs and benefits of clearcutting and nuclear energy are inherently flawed; they do not factor in non-human perspectives.

Computers and the ever-expanding frontiers of knowledge they offer are just a cutting-edge fix, sealing the user ever-deeper in addiction. No salve or tincture can help a technophile kick the habit.

If Earth First!ers use computers at all, they should use them sparingly to monkey-wrench the system and promote less technological dependence. The strength to break free from technology's grip is hard to muster. Earth First! can do more than raise consciousness through direct action—it must be a community of people committed to staying technologically clean.

The Earth's survival depends on revolutionary thought and action by people of moral and ecological conscience. It may be too late for us humans, but is that any reason to surf the web all the way to oblivion and ecological collapse?

The revolution against technology must be a collaborative effort to withdraw from industrial technology and celebrate all things wild. A step away from the machine is a step closer to ecological sanity. Humans must experience life first-hand without an electronic filter. People cannot fear the wild: They must embrace and embody it to survive the information age. Attempts to tame the Earth and stave off death are driven by fear and greed. But death is the inevitable end to the means of living, so get on with it—live and die wild.

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