

Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

FE Note: The letters which appear on these two pages are mostly responses to our July 1981 edition which was devoted mainly to a discussion and critique of technology and the modern world it has spawned. Single copies of that issue are still available from our office for 50 cents a copy. (See our index of available back issues on page 19 of this issue.) T. Fulano, author of last issue's "Against the Mega-machine," responds to supporters of technology elsewhere in this issue.

Animal Feel

Dear Humans,
Feel like an animal again after reading every word in last issue. Thanks for the lift. A lot of that stuff really needs saying. Again and again.
For an enlightened Stone Age,
Reti S. Levovbi
Washington, DC

Kick the Skulls

Dear Fifth Estate,
The writings of T. Fulano, "Against the Mega-Machine," [FE #306, July, 1981] approaches the oracular. With great character and volcanic irony the article appears to have arisen from subterranean vistas of instinct. I believe you are finding yourselves, at long last, beyond the road of return where hyenas cackle as they kick the grim skulls of priests through the underbrush.

It is time to announce clearly that the immediate task is instinctual warfare. Already and continuously waged by mammals, instinctively, recognition is due to the vast array of power and possibility ready to be unleashed concerted by the Unconscious mind and its reservoir which stretches and imbues all phenomena illimitably.

The habits, self-concepts, ideologies techno-syncretic paradigms, etc., are layered over the primal beast, and tolerated only by the numbing restrictions of a highly vulnerable rationality. As William Burroughs said, it is a war to extermination, but the mammalian alternative has always been to harness, or rather to unleash the onslaught of instinctive drives which can overturn highways.

We must war to exterminate the macro and micro-cosmic postulations of anthro-apologists, psychologists, geologists, technologists all of them! We must not be hemmed in by any sphere which overlaps in the crushing march of rationalism. Indeed, one terrifying and captivating "primitive superstition" is worth a hundred moon-landings; or a hundred thousand punk rock songs. We must first and automatically adopt Fourier's concept of ABSOLUTE

DOUBT; and positively establish, individually or in small groups—a reconstructed mythology and a demoniac naturalism.

The big battles will start taking place on the instinctive plane or not at all! We must go beyond the pit of decaying stars; yes, we must battle reason!

How to battle (to live is to battle) instinctively? What captures the imagination and extends it...what undermines thought and responsibility...what amplifies nature and the primal powers \of grace, beauty, and animal cunning... even the minerals in our blood have desires, find them.

No Name,
Ambassador of the Animal Kingdom

Keep Going

Dear Friends of the FE:

It is with the greatest pleasure that I renew my subscription to your newspaper. It is, I believe, the only truly critical voice to be heard consistently in the U.S. My only wish is that you don't relapse into one of your "having nothing to say" periods in the near future! Keep going. [See Editorial, FE #297, April 18, 1979.]

Dinos Stergides
Paris

Defeated Spirit?

To the Editors:

The latest issue, [FE #306, July, 1981] containing much excellent analysis of our techno-morass and its processes, nonetheless has bothered me.

The absence of a connection between the critique and its use is the most troublesome feature. From the articles I have a persistent sense of the too-remote, the academic; that-of a profound indictment minus any everyday applications.

Aside from some very visionary-sounding phrases, the only concrete references to a radical anti-technology approach were calls for "a defense of every little community," which strikes me as merely reformist, and for a "critical sociology," which could suggest, of course, a retention of specialization and of even the university!

To me the technology critique is the first coherent, contemporary attack on no less than every mediation and representation in social life, and therefore exhilarating. But it is not so for the FE authors: "We are in eclipse; the human spirit is moribund," says the introduction to the last issue.

This defeated spirit tends to inform the paper, and renders the goal of liberation an impossible (or even cynical) idea to the "Paleolithic Liberation Organization" which produces it. The depth of misery is laid out for all to see — only there's really zero hope for breaking what we can so clearly understand. Thus, the critique remains a banality: everyone can know it and no one can win. Perfect example is quoting Jacques Ellul at great length—Ellul who is equally known as lay Catholic theologian as for his (trenchant) ideas about the "Technological Society."

As the situationists used to counsel, "Nihilists! One more effort if you would be revolutionaries."

Not in eclipse, not even close,
John Zerzan
Newport, OR

FE View Not New...

To the Fifth Estate:

The "Against the Megamachine" article in the July 1981 *Fifth Estate* ought to influence pro-machine marxists, anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists in realizing the Frankenstein that the scientists have created.

George Bradford's essay, "On Marxism, Anarchism and the Roots of the New Totalitarianism" [FE #306, July, 1981] in particular deals with this phase most effectively. Bradford correctly points out that although anarchists are opposed to "authoritarian Marxism," they have failed to realize what the technological megamachine implies.

Nevertheless, not all anarchists have followed Peter Kropotkin's pro-machine position. In the weekly anarchist *Road To Freedom* (1924–1939), in an article entitled "Man's Liberation," appearing July 1925, this writer stated in part: "Man created machines. Machines that were to lessen man's toil. But alas! The machine has increased the wealth of the idlers and brought misery to the many...What is even worse, the machine has destroyed man's joy of artisan creation. Man merely became a spook of the very machine that he has himself created."

I think the future will prove that Kropotkin, from an anarchist point of view, has, in accepting thus the machine, made One of the greatest errors. Such an attitude was perfectly logical for the Marxian school of thought, but certainly not for the anarchist. In reality, man will never be able to master the machine without the sacrifice of endangering human life.

Kropotkin's pro-machine position received a new impetus when Murray Bookchin came out in favor of the machine under the alluring title "Toward A Liberatory Technology" in *Anarchos* issues 2 & 3, 1968–69. In a reply "Questioning the Premises" of Bookchin which appeared in the October 1971 issue of *The Match!* of Tucson, Arizona, I wrote: "Technology rests on the basic principle of centralized authority, as its technique shows in every move that it makes. Anarchism, on the other hand, rests on the very opposite basic principle of decentralization. Whether by intent or not, Bookchin is correct when using the words 'socialist ideal,' since Marxism fits into technology as into a perfect glove. But when he implies that technology is related or conducive to the building of an Anarchist society, he is totally wrong."

It is indeed good to find Bookchin changing his position by now as quoted by Bradford in his article.

Last but not least, the *Fifth Estate*, although not calling itself an anarchist publication, is nevertheless considered as such by "The [Cienfuegos Press] Anarchist Review" of England, anarchist groups and individuals who materially support it—for the reason of its most consistent anti-authoritarian reaction towards every political and social question.

Marcus Graham
Los Gatos CA

But A Pipe Dream

Dear Fifth Estate,

Your analysis lacks persuasiveness not necessarily because it is altogether false, but rather because it exaggerates to the point of absurdity. Assuming the highly unlikely event that your statements about technology, for instance, are correct, they are still irrelevant. That is because the total "dismantling of technology," is clearly a pipe dream, and absent such dismantling you present a picture of the contemporary world that is so hopeless that it's not worth worrying over.

The perspective you advocate is neither new nor original. In fact it is in the spirit of a tradition at least two centuries old, going back to Jean Jacques Rousseau, whose condemnation of "civilization" in his day, and eloquent defense of the—ways of the Indian "savages" from the New World, prompted Voltaire to exclaim in a letter to him: "One feels like crawling on all fours after reading your work."

Your exposition of the woes of modern day "technological society"—while lacking the poetic eloquence of Rousseau's works, is no less extravagant. You exaggerate the role of technology; you build it up into a veritable monstrosity, a threatening colossus which is about to swallow up everything and enslave everyone. Perhaps this is forgivable. After all, you are sons of the Motor City, and you were born in the country that built the first atom bomb, and put the first man on the moon. It is natural and predictable that the "megamachine" will loom large on your horizons. And certainly, no one would deny the destructive and dehumanizing effects of working on the assembly lines, or other such activities peculiar to industrialized societies. But having granted that much, we are in no position to conclude that technology must be dispensed with altogether (why not start with your bicycles, electric typewriters, and stereos).

Your assertion that technology destroys the individuality of various cultures, and inevitably spreads a gray, drab uniformity everywhere, can easily be disproved by a little traveling around the world. Your picture of a world turned one-dimensional and depressing by the effects of technology is a phantasy. Today's industrialized Japan, for instance, has not lost its distinct characteristics, nor has China or Russia.

Furthermore, technology is applied science, and opposition to technology in principle, implies opposition to science, for the pursuit of scientific knowledge without the goal of applying such knowledge in the real world is inconceivable.

But what is science and the scientific method? It is open, systematic, and rigorous reasoning based on observation. The opposing attitude seeks refuge in irrationality, or puts its faith in intuition (which is often reasoning at the subconscious level). Science, and the scientific approach, far transcends the cartesian method, and is a valuable part of mankind's intellectual inheritance. Science has its dangers and its risks. One of its dangers, which has to be dealt with, is the dehumanizing potential of some of its applied branches and the uses they are put to. These tendencies must be fought and counterbalanced.

However, science is by no means' omnipotent in our contemporary society. Strong opposing forces are pitted against it, some of them obscurantist and fundamentalist. Scientific, strictly rational thinking needs to be counterbalanced by other influences, and in this respect your emphasis on our need to commune with non-technological cultures is well justified.

The significance and value of spiritual insights, the magical poetic, and mystical attitudes and perspectives, need to be reasserted. The contemplative and speculative aspects of the inner life of the human spirit are no less valuable than the rational. But a fine balance must be struck, and we cannot indulge in an all out attack on "cartesian" rationality without risking to fall prey to obscurantism. The spiritual treasures which we must mine come from all civilizations and cultures, be they primitive, ancient, modern, and be they from whatever continent or race.

G.P. Mann

Shhh-Click-Shhh

Dear Fifth Estate:

Well, I was talking to my washing machine the other day, bemoaning the crisis of technology. "All the magick is gone from the machine," I whispered, fondling the dials, and stuffing more clothes inside. The dials winked and rose up, gulping my clothes, then with a thoughtful rumble, the machine said, "Another fifty cents, please."

I listen to the rhythm of the printing press: shhh-click-shhh-click-shhh-clickshhh-click, the clack clack clack of its feeder, the grip of its "teeth" that grab the paper, as it smears ink across the pages and then shoots them out the end of the line to fall so slowly, slooowwwly, fluttering like anti-gravity dancers, leaves on the wind, to the end. Whoala, another anti-tech, pseudo-situ leaflet, written in a language no one understands by out of work academics looking for another luddite revolution.

I don't converse with micro waves; that's much too perverse (pardon the 'rhyme), but my stereo and I have a revolutionary dialogue. I flip on some nuevowavo musick, listen to the omnipotence of synthetic, artificial mechanoid sound and hum along to the beat: shhh-click-shhh-click-shhh-click. Ah! punk revolts against all that surrounds it, using the tech of modern recording to release its message to the masses; we are our machines: shh-clickshhh-click-shhh-click. Talking Heads? No, thanks!

The workers revolt against the machine, but only because they will be put out of work. Now what a silly thought; I would embrace the machine like a lover if it would be so kind as to put me out of work. But the trade unions, the rank & file TM and the left all say this is bad. We want thirty for forty (whatever that means), full employment, limited automation. But I want none of this.

Workers at the Canadian post office fight total mechanization, for they would be unemployed, and they wouldn't want that because then they would have time, to plot revolution, the only way to get a square meal these days. Robots on the line threaten my right to be a wage slave and dammit, that's one of my fundamental human rights. Where are all the radical lawyers and civil liberties folks; can't they see that the robots are coming? Klattu warned us and it's true.

Tools do not equate technology. Too many of your “commie” readers mistake one for the other; you have the consistent good sense not to. Tools alter consciousness, technology controls and dominates consciousness. So pissed off was I when the vending machine didn’t give either my alienated product for my two quarters, I took my tool and smashed it to smithereens. The Luddites used tools to smash machines, the witches used tools to smash the technology of the church and state during the medieval uprisings, the Makhnovshchina used the carriage and machine gun tools against the train/tech of Trotsky, etc.

Sure, I’ll take a home computer, but I also don’t fear returning to the caves if we have to. Just make sure we all have plenty of warm clothes and surrealist poetry to read. I hear that glaciation makes for long winters. Nuff said.

Eugene Plawiuk
Edmonton, Alberta

Capital’s Runaway

Dear People:

By placing so much emphasis on technology, you take capital off the hook. Mention was made that, “Naturally capital is more than just technology,” capital and technology are, “in reality a complex of social relations.” But too much of the overall argument seems to revolve around the premise that technology is in itself capital.

Technology is only an aspect of capital as is “the consciousness that surrenders to the momentum of capital.” That consciousness is the soul of capital while technology is its musculature.

Of course that technological wonder—television—has helped permeate society with the commodity-crazed consciousness but TV may negate itself.

As it stands, advertising/propaganda TV’s primary function so as the economy deteriorates further, TV will have to promise everything an increasingly larger segment of society can’t and won’t ever acquire. It’s hard to make a person with food in their belly hungry, but that’s all about to change and the U.S. ideological apparatus has only created a paper thin patriotism.

Technology is inefficient, myopic and stupid because the run away of capital has steered it in that direction. Technology didn’t standardize bread and fruit; the run away of capital as a whole did. Today’s gargantuan tractor didn’t usher in agribusiness. If that tractor were under the active direction of a farming community, it would be simply a complex tool.

Technics become technology and tools become apparatus when absorbed by capital. Not all high technology is inherently negative.

Mark
Monroe

Words In Mouth

Dear Folks:

It’s Mark (See Letters, FE #306, July, 1981), not me, who seems to be putting words into other people’s mouths. Nowhere did I say that he wants to save all technology. I know too many pro-tech, anti-authoritarians to think that they want to save every piece of technology. But I also know enough such people to realize that they do want to preserve factories, computers, tractors and all the aspects of the present society necessary for the production of these things.

If I seemed to be differentiating between types of technology by using the term “capitalist technology,” it is only because I’ve noticed that pro-tech anti-authoritarians seem to think that an ape’s twig is just as much technology as the computer, the factory or the tractor.

Yes, the Lincoln Continental is capitalist technology. So is the Volkswagen. And the tractor used by agribusiness is capitalist technology. On the other hand, the tractor used to feed starving people is capitalist mythology. It doesn’t exist except in the propaganda capitalism puts out to justify continued industrial growth.

If Mark would just think a little bit of all that is entailed in the production and use of a tractor he'd realize that it promotes, rather than eases, starvation. In order to produce a tractor, land that could otherwise grow food must be used for factories and dug up for the metals and petroleum needed to produce the tractors (and, I might add, the machines in the factories). Then, in order to use the tractors, more petroleum is needed as fuel stealing more land which could grow food.

The type of farming a tractor is useful for is the type of one-crop farming that agribusiness practices and that devitalizes the soil. This makes the production of artificial fertilizers necessary. In other words, more factories, less land for the growth of food. And as this type of farming destroys natural forms of pest control, it necessitates the use of weed-killers and insecticides that puts poisons on the food we eat and necessitates still more factories taking away still more land.

Where high technology agriculture has been introduced into basically non-industrialized areas, its effects have been to destroy the natural balance and ultimately to increase either starvation or the dependence of the people in the area on one of the "major powers" for food—hardly an anti-authoritarian ideal.

For the abolition of everything that steals our lives from us,
Gypsy Demian Lawless
San Francisco



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