

GLOBALIZATION AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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Two rats are leaning on a food dispenser at the end of a laboratory maze. One rat says "Man have I got the guy in the white coat conditioned; all I have to do is run the maze and he has to give me a food pellet."

When we use technology, it also uses us. Technology trains the user to perceive in ways that benefit the technology, for the user becomes the primary content of a technology. The fact that a technology "does something," useful work, for example, is not meaningful until the user is put into the equation. The automobile has transformed the world. Design, power, ease of handling, economy of operation - everything about cars is predicated upon enhancing user convenience and comfort. The effects of that technology have to be measured in terms of the changes brought about in the user and, consequently, the general environment. This may not be as obvious as one would like to believe.

Technologies determine how we use our bodies, as, for example, with Trans- 4x4s, or dune buggies; escalators, subways and Danish vibrators; skate boards, bungee cords, and SST's; television , PET scanners, angiogram monitors for coronary by-pass surgery and micro-wave cooking. As well they change our minds in some fundamental ways, especially concerning the value of human values. The more one insists on being human in the face of technological systems, the more that becomes an intolerably expensive anomaly.

Computers demand of us the performance of logical (and analogical) operations and insist that we value those operations above the other actions of our hard to systemize humanity - like finding a parking spot, or someone to love, remembering where you put your summer hat, forgetting childhood emotional trauma. As we step up our conformity to logical, rational, analysis, all else about us emerges as aberrant, irrational, kooky, if not evil, and certainly too costly. The dark part of our humanity has no place in our information systems.

The A.I. dilemma doesn't center on our creating neurotic machines that will out-think us and eventually take over the world, as second rate science fiction continually suggests. The real danger, as with all technologies, is that we will enter the attractive limits of advanced programming mentality so successfully that we may lose the ability to think ecologically. We may lose our Links with the wholeness of our inner spirits, and thereby jeopardize our survival on this planet as a species with an evolving awareness. Our generally diminished mentality, however, will certainly be profitable for those who have no higher vision than the management of public consciousness for corporate benefits.

In the 15th century, print split mind and spirit into two separate categories history and myth - and print, seeming to have eliminated myth with fact, fashioned us into a rational public driven inexorably by the new but living myth of Progress perceived as historical, factual reality. Wanting to better themselves, people entered the highly ordered. technical space of print and became "literate," that is, valuing sequential, linear, standardized things in general over organic free flowing, unexpected forms.

Since the industrial revolution, (the Age of Machine Process, 1750 on), people have been judged by machine characteristics: standardization, punctuality, uniformity, regularity, (the laxative business burgeoned with the stressing of mechanized time and anal retentive behaviour), tireless toil, lack of emotion, steely nerves. Slowly, the values of electric process infiltrate general consciousness. The neuron and the electron merge: electronic circuitry extends the nervous system outside the body. The computer's surrogate intelligence inhabits every aspect of contemporary life. There are spiritual dangers in all of this for electric process breeds hubris:

Being in a colonizing discipline [A.I.] first demands and then encourages ... intellectual hubris. You need ... to have something to say about everything. ... Furthermore, since you cannot master all of the disciplines that you have designs on, you need confidence that your knowledge makes the "traditional wisdom" of these fields unworthy of serious consideration.¹

There are already among us too many individuals who appear to be seriously depersonalized in their strong preference for the logical poverty of computer mentality over the untrustworthy thought processes of actual people. How dependable and inexhaustible these slaves; how unprovoking the visage of a VDT compared to the face of a fool; how god-like one's control over these uncomplaining servo-mechanisms; how completely inadequate any human being to satisfy this control fantasy.

One can now have electronic sexual contact with other discarnate beings. These onanistic computer net links for the lonely are sad compensations for the depersonalized. People shop around by PC for someone whose erotic preferences seem right for them; instead of taking on the *job* of lover, one can invent a romantic *role* and engage creatively in mentally provocative erotic interactivity. The practice is somewhat abstract but AIDS-safe and with expenses at an absolute minimum.

Almost two decades ago, *The New York Times*, (Dec. 7, 1980) in an article on Stanford's John McCarthy, bearing a typically alarmist tide for that time, "Creating Computers That Think," forecast evil things from A.I.

There is a possible dark side to the forecast. If the new technology could be subverted, enormous evil could result. Computers taught to interpret speech could be programmed to listen in on virtually every human conversation, learn to ignore the trivia, report to the authorities on what would be considered objectionable and take action

This fear shows the naive misunderstanding of the extent to which all privacy had been obliterated even by 1980. We should take heart, one might suppose, that intelligent machines have not wholly taken over. Obviously they have.

Every major corporation is computer driven - we live in a *corporocracy* - government of the lawyers; by the companies, for the banks, run in conformity with computer demands. Can global corporocracy be surrounded locally by culture? There is every likelihood that this is the fundamental struggle that we will be witnessing over the next few years as the monster of globalization attempts to swallow human cultures whole in an ideology of convenience food for the third world.

A tribal disdain for her European cousins sank Mrs. Thatcher, ironically in the midst of Irish tribal responses to British occupation, but she may yet be vindicated in her regressive understanding of the Continent and its values. Global statelessness and corporate trust rooted itself into Europe but not into the lady's iron brain. A Roman friend smiles benignly when I mention Europe, chiding "There is no Europe." A united Europe is an artificial political entity that can be governed only by real intelligence.

The Russians placed a large symbolic bet on the Big Mac and ... to get what? The model of an improved capitalist agricultural system and a 99 cent burger for America, now that their deforested pastures in Brazil have become politically too hot to crop. How are the Basques doing? The Quebecois? The Slovenians? The Kurds? The Zulus? The Estonians? The Mohawks? The American black underclass pursuing the drug economics of instant access to capital so successfully employed by Oliver North? Does such local turbulence impede the growth of the world supermarket? Of course not, global order feeds on local chaos; that's what these events are all about.

First, retrieve who you used to be, historically, by establishing the politics of localization, then violently demand freedom from U.N. ideological restraint and access to American levels of goods and services; this guarantees the spread of global consumerism. We are already living beyond ideology, beyond democracy. Recent events have eliminated all other positions on the political spectrum. There is no spectrum any longer for liberal views. Finally the Soviets understand this and are prepared to embrace the corporate mentality which totalizes everything in terms of profit and loss statements. The Politburo and the boardroom are on the same wavelength. The Marxist agenda (gender equality, socialized education, worker control of industries and the rest) has been realized in America and the right wing now is bent on extirpating all vestiges of it. We in the West do not yet seem to understand that we are as bound, as Marxists to collectivism, but our collectivism is electronic for the masses.

On the horizon, the poor of the world are heaped up in unsalvageable mounds behind the billboards advertising life in consumer heaven. The third world is quickly disappearing as they become consumers. To become consumers they have to bring their minds in line with technical demands. And let the acquisitive urgency of corporate objectives move through them as consumer demands. They can pay for this by selling their identities or whatever they have.

In entering into the mentality of the surrogate thought patterns of A.I., the actual process of thought will become increasingly denatured. Too few people will want to think deeply enough for survival as individuals and the imaginative best of humanity will be suppressed. The present quality of our art suggests that this is already happening.

Increasingly people understand things only visually. Electricity and its deep effects are not visual. We see the numbers, not the formulae. We live in acoustic space, in a web of electromagnetic resonances that bring us palliative programming contents to aid our deteriorating cultural condition.

A decay of sensibility cannot be avoided in a world trained perceptually by television on the narrow spectrum of human evil. We have Yuppyism, that condition of the human spirit in which one knows the price of everything and value of nothing. Values themselves, (everything connected to a social conscience, for example) lacking the certainty that technology admires, may well become expendable since, as variables, they lack the cost accounting efficiencies that drive a society devoted, as ours is, mainly to economic ends. All social problems now require fiscal interpretation which means that the rich gain more power over the poor. In some quarters people think that this is God's will.

The entire globe is prey to transnational corporations which seek the course of least social resistance in moving about, mindless of national borders, in their quest for materials and labour. Electricity eliminates all borders. Whoever controls information systems, controls the management of public consciousness and the transformations in attitude required for the triumph of corporate domination of the globe by information technology. What happens to human culture in this process?

Put simply, the problem posed by the information revolution pits a technology which surrounds culture (global communications) against cultures which attempt to surround technology (retribalization), the latter being essential to the survival of traditional identities of peoples. It is sameness struggling with diversity.

When a TV camera is introduced into a human gathering that event is fundamentally transformed; the event becomes theatre, the participants, actors, and the rules governing how to succeed on TV prevail over deeper social or political objectives. There is something somewhat absurd about this but we have learned to accept it as normal. All traditional forms of government have been trivialized by information patterning.

The fakery of TV has become the fakery of government. Are people disturbed by media adulteration of the political process? Most get their decision-making information from TV but the acid of cynicism seeps into the joints of the body politic. TV now turns to hyperreality in its programming - reality with camera and editing hardly apparent. Endlessly we encounter new ways to fake the truth. Whatever that "truth" is, it always involves one wholly. The Illusion of getting knowledge by sitting and watching television is the fundamental illusion of our time. You can learn nothing of real human value by watching television. Culture doesn't live in the negative space between a TV screen and one's eye. Knowledge involves doing and sitting and seeing is not enough doing to gain understanding of anything.

Culture cannot surround technology simply by posing as content, for example, movies or novels, or televised plays. Print, the medium itself is culture as is painting, music, dance and drama. Electric versions of these human arts translate such experiences into technological forms. Think of the contemporary mega-movie devoted essentially to technological production values almost to the complete denigration of anything human.

Culture can surround technology only by our understanding the changes in perception that are inherent in each technical form. Education in media effects - a sensibility training - is essential for the envelopment of technology by culture. TV is TV is TV, and the content of programming is relatively ephemeral when compared to the changes in perception and thought effected by the medium as medium. No one on television is watching television. What do we have in common with these people?

Television, by its inherent bias for feeling over thought, trashes the past and so is counter-cultural. By reducing everything human to an inane cartoon, TV uses up the past like a cheap fuel to power its immediate economic needs which are always escalating. If we know the effects of TV we can escape the power this medium exercises over the user. TV is the major example of a technology surrounding culture on a global scale - the nuclear bomb and computer technology are others. Meditation and environmentalism are the opposite. Consequently, transcending TV, freeing oneself from the grip of electric process and its facile perceptions and interpretations, that is the sine qua non of creating a culture that has the power to surround technology.

At present this is more than most people can achieve. The national daily TV "fix" averages seven hours a day. Progress now comes to mean watching progressively more TV on more channels of what passes for life in our electrically denatured existences. The spirit should be weaned off the myth of progress first. Our future on this globe probably hangs on how we handle the problem of pursuing our economic well being in an ecologically responsible way.

A.I. guides the force of Globalization. Computer aided corporate thought, with its data profiling, mirror imaging, production control, market analysis, and so on, is artificial, an intelligence that ignores local cultural facts in the same way that A.I. on a personal scale ignores those aspects of personal existence that make life worth living. Those systems systematically stifle considerations of the broader human issues in the domain of values. Humanity and technology are incompatible if the human wants the upper hand.

When technology surrounds culture, as in the process of globalization, a lethal sameness spreads around the world. We live by differences as much as by sameness. With less difference in the world a cultural entropy results that is deeply antagonistic to local or tribal value systems. Globalization creates a climate of increased friction between groups.

The logic of the entropy theory suggests that as systems run down into randomness and chaos they come finally to their ends in that ultimate state of no change, the so-called "heat death" (i.e. : absolute cold) in which no differences survive and no energy for change. The wave of sameness that globalization enfranchises has the effect locally of heating up tribal, racial, and religious differences. This random chaos that comes in the wake of the breakup of larger polities may come finally to rest in a state of localized "all change" a sort of "heat birth" opposite to the entropy model more in line with the model of Prigogine's "fluctuating systems" seeking higher order. A-I. research and development are operating in the interests of the simplified orders of what computers can actually do to subdue the globe. For now, profound disorder, social and political fission seems the inevitable effect of this globalizing force. The things that must be ignored by A.I., the things that are left to fall between the cracks, between thoughts and feelings, may become, like the butterfly effects of chaos theory, the minuscule edges of events under massive change.

Note: *The Second Self*, Sherry Terkel (Cambridge, M.I.T. Press), 1987, p.25.