

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6vq5d685>

Journal

Leonardo, 30(1)

ISSN

0024-094X

Authors

Penny, Simon

Postman, Neil

Publication Date

1997

DOI

10.2307/1576387

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

date from 1985 or later. Haraway, Virilio, even Guy Debord, John Berger and Armand Mattelart are absent from the list, let alone Deleuze and Guattari, Serres, Foucault, Baudrillard, Lyotard and the rest of the French post-structuralist gang. Ellul and Mumford figure strongly.

Postman's structuring argument is that human culture divides itself into three periods with respect to technology: the tool-using, the technocratic and the technopolistic. This is an interesting, if somewhat pessimistic, analysis. In contrast to the technocratic, the condition of technopoly is one in which the logic of industrial production comes to control not just economic thought, but cultural and philosophical thought as well. The book is full of amusing and pertinent factoids, but ultimately Postman's support for his argument feels anecdotal.

Postman's view offers us no way out: the subtitle of the book, "The Surrender of Culture to Technology," says it all. Most disappointing is that Postman never suggests possible emancipatory or potentially democratizing aspects of any technologies, nor does he offer any recipe for resistance, subversion or detournement. Much of the text reads like a thinly veiled sermon on moral collapse. The relentlessness of this tone became draining to me and began to echo the sentiment "it ain't like the good old days."

TECHNOPOLY: THE SURRENDER OF CULTURE TO TECHNOLOGY

by Neil Postman. Vintage Books, New York, NY, U.S.A., 1993 (first published 1992). 222 pp. \$11.00. ISBN: 0-679-74540-8.

Reviewed by Simon Penny, Art and Robotics, Department of Art, College of Fine Arts, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, U.S.A. E-mail: <penny+@andrew.cmu.edu>.

I had chided myself for not having read *Technopoly* since it came out. A book with such a catchy title automatically puts itself on the must-read list for anyone interested in techno-critique, but I just didn't get around to it. Though first published in 1992, the general tenor of the book feels dated: only 10 of the 60 references in Postman's bibliography