

technological divide. As John Lukacs reminds us, although the home of 1930 would be familiar to us, it would have been unrecognizable to the citizen of 1885.

Just as with household technologies, so too with other features of our surroundings and our cultural and natural environment generally. This thing-to-device example is representative of the pattern of the technological transformations of the Earth. Generally then, this transformation is one in which:

Devices ... dissolve the coherent and engaging character of the pre-technological world of things. In a device, the relatedness of the world is replaced by a machinery, but the machinery is concealed, and the commodities, which are made available by a device, are enjoyed without the encumbrance of or the engagement with a context [that is, the world of the thing].

Borgmann calls this pattern the *device paradigm*. At times I will call it the separation pattern of technology.

We can understand our age as one in which we reduce everything to resources that we want to control. Now we can see that the device pattern is used to get control of these resources. The purpose of the device is to supply people with unencumbered commodities. So now we can develop this picture of our age further. The fuller vision is one in which everything gets reduced to resources, machinery and commodities.

IRONIC CONSEQUENCES

So far we have developed a theory by which we can interpret what has taken and is taking place with regard to the technological transformation in our time. Using this theory we can pass from technological object to technological object, seeing how they more or less fit the pattern. The illustration of the pattern does not commit us as yet to an evaluation of the good or bad of what has taken place. Now we are in a position to begin that task. What are the consequences of this change from things to devices?

Don Ihde finds that technologies transform experience in a “non-neutral” manner. A tool

always amplifies in some way certain aspects of normal embodied experience while simultaneously reducing other aspects. A dentist’s probe shows the hardness and cavities in a tooth to a degree fingers miss, while the wetness and warmth of the tooth felt by the fingers go undetected by probe. This change Ihde finds is non-neutral because the amplified features are heightened, drawing our attention, while the reduced features tend to go unheeded and are overlooked and often forgotten. Asked what a hearth is for, we find it logical, after having experienced central heating, to answer that it supplies heat, ignoring or not even seeing its other aspects. Extending Ihde’s insight makes it more intelligible why we become fascinated with commodities, heedless of what has been reduced. Yet pointing out that this change is non-neutral is not enough. We now want to comprehend what exactly has been hidden from us. We need a language which articulates what is overlooked and forgotten, for then we can see in what ways this change is non-neutral. Our language of things retrieves and focuses this loss. It reveals the general pattern that things are transformed into devices, detaching people from things, their world, and each other.

Ihde further argues that these lost features only tend to recede, thus, implying that they are retrievable. With certain kinds of instruments (not all technological objects are devices, splitting means and ends), this is true. We can easily retrieve the features missed by the dentist’s probe. With devices, however, these features do not just tend to withdraw, so that a change of attitude, perception, or act of will could retrieve them. Notice that mere warmth, no matter how expanded the commodity has become, is not a substitute for the thing of the wood-burning stove. Mere warmth could not be the essence of a household; it does not warrant the kind of attention or care, of heeding. Indeed the source itself is concealed and the warmth is suffused throughout the house so that it fails to provide a focus. So warmth is no substitute for the thing because it lacks a world with which to become engaged. More than this, because it is impossible to recover in the mere warmth of the central heating plant,