

the full-bodied experience of the hearth, the machinery of devices ineluctably withdraws the world from people. A device is necessarily unfamiliar in the ways that the context of the thing was familiar. Thus the transformation of the thing into a device does not merely tend to obscure possibilities of experience, but its very material structure makes the rich experience of the thing impossible.

Another way of putting this is that devices allow the possibility of only slim points of contact with “narrowly defined aspects of what used to be things of depth.” Devices force people to take them as commodity bearers; they leave them no choice. So our way of taking commodities is not a psychological matter, but a real matter. Technology is not only a way of seeing (and for this reason characterizing technology as a vision is perhaps misleading), it is more importantly a way of *shaping*. The very material structure of a device is such that it can be experienced only as holding up a commodity calling for consumption and nothing more.

The implication of this change of shape is alienation. What seemed promising at the outset—relieving people of burdens—leads ironically to disengagement, diversion, distraction, and loneliness. In short, we become not-at-home in the universe. But clearly, simply finding ourselves free from the exclusive use of candles and outhouses does not place us in this alienated position. So how can such positive events as electric lighting and indoor plumbing lead to these ironic results?

To be relieved of famine, cold, darkness, confinement, and other genuine adversities of the human condition was an intelligible and urgent demand for the early phase of modern technology. For the middle-classes of advanced industrialized countries, most, not all, of these kinds of challenges have been met for some time. At the stage of mature technology, the challenges can be quite frivolous. Food processors, electric pencil sharpeners, prepared fishing leaders, automatic cameras, electric knives, and some pain relievers are typical. The basic question here is: Do we need to be relieved of every last and least burden? Aren't some of these burdens actually good in senses that touch our very humanity? When people reflect on these questions they may answer

them differently, but when they act, they tend to act in agreement with a vision that seeks to bring everything under control. Ironically, in the wake of such technological success, in the wake of the initial excitement over owning the latest item, the item falls back into the ordinary every day and they become bored. Being bored, they become disengaged and alienated from what may have been a vital practice, such as preparing meals or gardening or photography. Accordingly, they seek diversion. Thus, ironic consequences follow from the disburdenment of every hassle, problem, or felt demand. If we pursue disburdenment in this unchecked and unreflective manner, as people are doing in the stage of mature technology, then these are the results we should expect.

However, it may seem as though we have been just too nostalgic. The disburdenment devices yield “frees us up for other things” as people commonly say. Yet this perspective makes us think that technology is mostly about freedom, as Charles Taylor thinks, when the promise and vision of technology are mostly a promise of happiness. The most unique and devastating critique of technology is not centered on technological freedom, but on the fact that technology *fails most where it succeeds most* at procuring happiness, at procuring the good things of life. As a culture, we think not only that we can use technology to liberate us, but also that we can use it to fill that new possibility space with technologically available goods. In short, what people are freed up for are not other things, but *more commodities*. Then too when people imagine what they are doing as they throw food into the microwave as freeing themselves up for other and more important things, they ignore how pervasive the technological order is. The totality of technological devices is far more consequential than any particular device. The former point can be advanced best by developing the latter first.

Extensively yet unobtrusively this technological way of taking up with the world pervades and informs what people think, say and do. We need an account of technology as *correlational environment*. Organizations, institutions, the ways nature and culture are arranged and accessible all become modeled on the device. As people make more