

Briefly on Technogenesis

(T)echnological (C)ollapse (T)heorist

Technological determinism is the idea that society, culture, politics—in some sense, human behavior—is shaped, limited, or otherwise explainable by technology and its demands.

Such determination is evidenced by widespread performance of technical necessities. Technical necessities are forced uses of artificial solutions. Such necessities maintain technical systems. An artificial solution is one which is mediated by language and or handiwork. A technical necessity is thus the forced use of language or handiwork. By “forced” it is meant that, on a cost-benefit analysis, abstention from or avoidance of performance of a technical necessity would confer an evolutionary disadvantage, a weakening of reproductive potential.

Complete dependence on the Technological System is marked by a life completely technologically determined, marked by a life rife with technical necessities. As dependence on the Technological System increases, the number of technical necessities—of I-have-to-s—increases.

If it is true that technology currently exerts at least some amount of determining power over the behavior of humans, and if the basic nature of neither has changed, nor the basic nature of their relationship, then we can reasonably assume that technology has had determining power over the behavior of humans in the past. Anything which influences, let alone determines, behavior exerts selective pressure. So, if technology has previously determined human behavior, then it is has also previously exerted selective pressure on human genes. This selective pressure is the target of the concept of technogenesis.

Technogenesis develops out of a reaction to the orthodox story of anthropogenic technology. Anthropogenic technology means that only “humans” have “technology” because technology is defined as the material products of (modern) humans. Such a story is about as compelling a story as the “anthropogenic climate change” with which the naive war. Instead, technogenesis can be summarized: “technology is not the product of humans; humans are the products of technology.”

At this point, we will make two comparisons: one, technology is to techno as language is to communication; two, technological civilization is to technology as cancer is to a (precancerous) cell.

On the comparison with language, it seems that humans communicate through both linguistic and non-linguistic abilities. When communication is mediated linguistically, it is considered uniquely human and called “language”. Likewise, when techno is mediated technologically—through material creations of handiwork or communicated through language—it is considered uniquely human and called “technology”, which we also call the “technologos”, the story of manipulation.

Just as communicative abilities are shared with other living things, so are technical abilities. Technical abilities reduce more or less to environmental manipulation, problem solving, resource appropriation, and acquisition. Techno is functionally equivalent to a human understanding of handiwork or manipulation, both “internally” and “externally”. When a bird builds a nest, it excersises its technical abilities; when a group of cells consume resources, multiply, and emerge latter as a larger organism or reproduce, they are undertaking a technical process; when a tree converts sunlight into sugar, it is being technical. It would be a cosmic comedy to wage war against technical processes as such.

That there is an acquisitive character to all life and living things is obvious. But acquisition is not the only character of life and living things. Acquisitive behavior is merely one act in the drama of life and but one aspect of a whole psyche. The question is then one of the relationship between acquisition and the rest of the cycle of life: does the acquisitive faculty serve the rest of the psyche? Does the rest of the psyche serve the acquisitive faculty? Or do they stand in some other relation with each other?

First, it seems that creatures without the acquisitive faculty lost out to those with it, so we have all inherited it. Second, it seems that creatures, even the greediest of humans, do not engage in perpetual, endless acquisition throughout their days and nights. Creatures with episodic acquisition won out over those without. We can imagine that if they had consumed endlessly, without contributing to the cycle of life in other ways, that they would have consumed all life, thus ending the cycle. Only those behaviors which are able to continue the cycle continue. It seems, then, that the acquisitive faculty—techno—can reasonably be seen as in the service of the rest of the psyche, at least under ordinary circumstances.

In light of this, it seems as though all creatures could be considered technogenic. This is indeed true to the extent that tech has exerted selective pressure on all the other creatures across their evolution. We certainly cannot deny that the domesticated animals of humans are more or less fully technogenic and that their behaviors reflect this genesis. Still, outside of domesticates, it seems that the technical faculty is able to remain in balance with other selective pressures. This is the state of natural selection, a state in which technogenesis is closer to a side-show than the main performance.

Still, we are specifically concerned with those things known as humans. If humans have a special relationship with their technologies and or if humans have a special advantage in the area of technological production (both of which humans do seem to have in comparison with other living things), then we should attempt to claim something more specific about their technogenesis. This is that humans are the pinnacle of the uniquely technical strain of life; they are the emblems of the technical evolutionary strategy as such.

That humans represent the current evolutionary peak of the manipulative strategy is partly evidenced by their highly refined and articulate hands and resultant neurology. In saying humans are uniquely technogenic, we mean that they are uniquely the product of pre-human—pre-*homo sapiens*, pre-*homo*, and pre-*hominid*—hands, stretching back to every iteration of handedness and handiwork that exerted selective pressure on proto-mankind. Indeed, they ride on the momentum of innumerable generations of accumulated handedness and carry with them into the world the evolutionary strategy and culture of handiwork. Handiwork, understood as both material and psychological manipulation, is at the core of mankind and its unique survival strategy.

An easy example of just one technogenic trait is this: that fire and clothing allowed early humans to inhabit new northern environments which eventually allowed for the emergence of lightened skin. This means that light skinned people only exist because of behavioral adaptations to technology, making them technogenic. The number of technical necessities, and thus the degree of technological determination and dependence, literally increased as people moved into colder climates. Novel technogenic traits and eventually populations and cultures emerge from novel levels of technological dependency.

This example highlights an alternative way to frame techno. If it itself originated as handiwork in the service of, or at least in balance with, the rest of the psyche, then we may find it likewise in the capacity to cope. For coping is primarily reacting to and interacting with the internal and external

realities of life—"the rest of the psyche". Coping may take on an adaptive or maladaptive character, determined by the degree of reproductive fitness conferred by the coping mechanism.

Though at present it seems that handiwork is the primary authority in our lives, and that our economy is nothing other than a endless cycle of self-justifying busy-work, it should be remembered that mankind possessed a bountiful inheritance of powers when it emerged. We have so far only focused on one part of that inheritance—that of the technologists. There are at least two other powers that are supposedly unique to humans. The first is human sociality, particularly the ability of memesis, of social learning and pattern repetition; the second is art.

Technology and art cannot clearly be reduced to each other, and attempting to do so misses a meaningful distinction between the terms. A difference between the two is that technology in a classical sense serves an instrumental purpose whereas art does not. Or, at most, the purpose of art is simply to present itself. Better art seems to arise more from inspiration than from technical necessity and focused intention. Obviously, though, art is mediated by technology: no carving, sculpture, or painting could exist without handiwork.

This leaves us seeing that art is technology employed in the service of something beyond itself. But it must be remembered that technology as language and handiwork necessarily includes the individual human performing these things as a kind of self-crafting material reality. This means that art is technology employed in service of something *beyond the individual human who is crafting the art*. We consider this realm of things "beyond the individual" the sacred realm of gods.

We have inadvertently demonstrated that techno is equally a god, something beyond human power and control. Still, being in the possession of gods is not a uniquely human trait, and so "divinity" or some other such thing cannot be considered uniquely human. Likewise, neither is complex sociality a uniquely human trait, nor tool use, nor communication, nor coping. Though one could argue that each of these things on their own reaches a uniquely high pitch in humans, the truly novel power bestowed on mankind is man's ability to synthesize these 'lower' powers into *art*. Thus, art results when techno as a god is subservient to other gods; and technology results when other gods are subservient to techno.

We maintain that technogenesis led to the emergence of behaviorally modern *homo sapiens* at that point when the *homo* lineage had become entirely dependent on and determined by techno. The obvious candidate for this is the agricultural revolution. Agriculture provided two conditions that allowed for the aggrandizement of techno and the shattering of the human psyche. These are sedentism and surplus. Sedentism allowed for a fixing of the psyche in one place and exercises the point-focused attention of handiwork; and surplus material provided techno an increasing amount of technology with which to name and identify, thereby literally increasing through exercise and reinforcement the size of the linguistic faculty. Runaway accumulation could not take hold without these two conditions, and the process of runaway accumulation has only resulted in more technological progress.

Technogenesis culminated in the technologists, which can also be called "history", the story of material accumulation and environmental manipulation, the extended story of agricultural civilization; the story of techno, through man, revolting against the other gods. When the technologists has fully captured the faith of a population, when the well-functioning of society is left to technicians and technocrats, the faithful of techno who are ruled by it, we consider it a technocratic society.

Tying the threads together, techno is at once the god of handiwork, the modern human, the ego, denial of reality (i.e. nature), and coping. Faith in techno is faith in man. When techno was invoked to cope

with the other gods—when nature was felt as more powerful than techno—things were, in some sense, “sustainable”. The historical triumph of techno was when techno began instead being invoked to cope with itself. This closing of the once open and dynamic genetic system created the self-aggrandizing technological feedback loop, the cultural memetic system, that has comprised history ever since.

If all of this can be accepted, we find the first and most genuine instance of “artificial intelligence” in civilized mankind itself. For civilized mankind is “artificial” in that it is genetically the product of the evolutionary strategy of handiwork—a self-reflective, self-reinforcing, and therefore self-selecting natural force. Civilized mankind’s “intelligence”—the actual character of the civilized human mind—in turn has been artificially created by such a selective force. It is unsurprising, then, that civilization has acted like an all-consuming assembly of machines and computers. Modern control theorists trouble themselves with reconciling human dignity with supposedly fast-approaching sentient computers that will “outstrip” human “intelligence”. Why do they bother trying to control electrified rocks when they cannot control themselves? History is our Singularity.

Now, if our genes are technogenic, then we must obey technology as much as our genetic parents.