

would happen if even a fifth of the roughly half-million men who kneeled, held hands and embraced men of other races and classes took to heart the injunction to be their brother's keeper?

Today's Christian right is only one feature of the current great awakening; it may soon decline, as did such earlier episodes of moralist politics as the Prohibition crusade. But the sentiment that both the Promise Keepers and the Call to Renewal represent is with us to stay. American political culture was formed around a perfectionist dream; inside and outside churches, the intermingled desire for both virtuous citizens and a virtuous public sphere continues to motivate a good deal of political engagement. The only way that secular writers and activists can influence this debate is to acknowledge that a spiritual worldview can help bring about a better world. The "Cry for Renewal" puts it well: "The question is not whether religious faith should make a political contribution, but how... At stake is not just politics, but the meaning of faith itself."

That might provide the basis on which humanists and believers on the left can speak and work together instead of struggling apart.

We really do share the same elementary values—the desire for a greater equality of results, tolerance for cultural diversity and a society based more on cooperation than competition. Fortunately, we are not divided, like our adversaries on the right, between worshipers of self-interest and exponents of coercive community. But all progressives could use a large dose of humility. None of us, secular or pious, have managed to present a coherent, stirring alternative to the Gingrichite right and the Clintonian center.

We might begin by embracing the self-evident truth: An overwhelming majority of Americans draw on both rational and spiritual modes of explanation. This is no less true of political activists. In one of the most moving speeches in American history, Martin Luther King Jr. quoted from the book of Isaiah to imagine a non-racist society ("I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted... and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together"). The bashing of religious faith serves neither our democratic principles nor the practical need to build a culturally inclusive mass movement. It is a habit from which secularists on the left should free themselves, at last. ■

GET REAL! A MANIFESTO FROM A NEW GENERATION OF CULTURAL CRITICS

TECHNOREALISM

The New York Times recently launched a new technology section with an ad campaign that asked: *Are you a technophile or a technophobe? As far as we can tell we're neither—or maybe both. And we're not alone. Although most commentary about the Internet and other innovations is replete with either breathless hype or doomsday talk, a silent majority finds such extremism inconsistent with its own experience and beliefs. At least, that's the claim made by those giving this perspective a name: technorealism.*

Technorealism is a more nuanced way to think about the changes occurring due to the rise of the microchip, the digital bit and interactive networks. Among other things, it seeks to puncture some of the prevailing myths of this so-called information age—like the canard that technology can solve all market problems (such as inequality and monopoly), or the reciprocal claim that markets can solve all technology problems (such as protecting privacy and insuring universal access). Technorealism rests on a collection of shared principles, as set forth below by a new generation of cultural critics. We admire their document's public-interest pragmatism and are especially fond of its claim that public debate about new technologies must be politicized. Maybe we've been technorealists all along. Maybe you're one, too. —The Editors

TECHNOREALISM: AN OVERVIEW

In this heady age of rapid technological change, we all struggle to maintain our bearings. The developments that unfold each day in communications and computing can be thrilling and disorienting. One understandable reaction is to wonder: Are these changes good or bad? Should we welcome or fear them?

The answer is both. Technology is making life more convenient

and enjoyable, and many of us healthier, wealthier and wiser. But it is also affecting work, family and the economy in unpredictable ways, introducing new forms of tension and distraction, and posing new threats to the cohesion of our physical communities.

Despite the complicated and often contradictory implications of technology, the conventional wisdom is woefully simplistic. Pundits, politicians and self-appointed visionaries do us a disservice when they try to reduce these complexities to breathless tales of either high-tech doom or cyber-elation. Such polarized thinking leads to dashed hopes and unnecessary anxiety, and prevents us from understanding our own culture.

Over the past few years, even as the debate over technology has been dominated by the louder voices at the extremes, a new, more balanced consensus has quietly taken shape. This document seeks to articulate some of the shared beliefs behind that consensus, which we have come to call technorealism.

Technorealism demands that we think critically about the role that tools and interfaces play in human evolution and everyday life. Integral to this perspective is our understanding that the current tide of technological transformation, while important and powerful, is actually a continuation of waves of change that have taken place throughout history. Looking, for example, at the history of the automobile, the television or the telephone—not just the devices but the institutions they became—we see profound benefits as well as substantial costs. Similarly, we anticipate mixed blessings from today's emerging technologies, and expect to forever be on guard for unexpected consequences—which must be addressed by thoughtful design and appropriate use.

As technorealists, we seek to expand the fertile middle ground between techno-utopianism and neo-Luddism. We are technology

"critics" in the same way, and for the same reasons, that others are food critics, art critics or literary critics. We can be passionately optimistic about some technologies, skeptical and disdain-

ful of others. Still, our goal is neither to champion nor dismiss technology but rather to understand it and apply it in a manner more consistent with basic human values.

PRINCIPLES OF TECHNOREALISM

1. Technologies are not neutral. A great misconception of our time is the idea that technologies are completely free of bias—that because they are inanimate artifacts, they don't promote certain kinds of behaviors over others. In truth, technologies come loaded with both intended and unintended social, political and economic leanings. Every tool provides its users with a particular manner of seeing the world and specific ways of interacting with others. It is important for each of us to consider the biases of various technologies and to seek out those that reflect our values and aspirations.

2. The Internet is revolutionary but not utopian. The Net is an extraordinary communications tool that provides a range of new opportunities for people, communities, businesses and government. Yet as cyberspace becomes more populated, it increasingly resembles society at large, in all its complexity. For every empowering or enlightening aspect of the wired life, there will also be dimensions that are malicious, perverse or rather ordinary.

3. Government has an important role to play on the electronic frontier. Contrary to some claims, cyberspace is not formally a place or jurisdiction separate from Earth. While governments should respect the rules and customs that have arisen in cyberspace, and should not stifle this new world with inefficient regulation or censorship, it is foolish to say that the public has no sovereignty over what an errant citizen or fraudulent corporation does online. As the representative of the people and the guardian of democratic values, the state has the right and responsibility to help integrate cyberspace and conventional society.

Technology standards and privacy issues, for example, are too important to be entrusted to the marketplace alone. Competing software firms have little interest in preserving the open standards that are essential to a fully functioning interactive network. Markets encourage innovation, but they do not necessarily insure the public interest.

4. Information is not knowledge. All around us, information is moving faster and becoming cheaper to acquire, and the benefits are manifest. That said, the proliferation of data is also a serious challenge, requiring new measures of human discipline and skepticism. We must not confuse the thrill of acquiring or distributing information quickly with the more daunting task of converting it into knowledge and wisdom. Regardless of how advanced our

computers become, we should never use them as a substitute for our own basic cognitive skills of awareness, perception, reasoning and judgment.

5. Wiring the schools will not save them. The problems with America's public schools—disparate funding, social promotion, bloated class size, crumbling infrastructure, lack of standards—have almost nothing to do with technology. Consequently, no amount of technology will lead to the educational revolution prophesied by President Clinton and others. The art of teaching cannot be replicated by computers, the Net or by "distance learning." These tools can, of course, augment an already high-quality educational experience. But to rely on them as any sort of panacea would be a costly mistake.

6. Information wants to be protected. It's true that cyberspace and other recent developments are challenging our copyright laws and frameworks for protecting intellectual property. The answer, though, is not to scrap existing statutes and principles. Instead, we must update old laws and interpretations so that information receives roughly the same protection it did in the context of old media. The goal is the same: to give authors sufficient control over their work so that they have an incentive to create, while maintaining the right of the public to make fair use of that information. In neither context does information want "to be free." Rather, it needs to be protected.

7. The public owns the airwaves; the public should benefit from their use. The recent digital spectrum giveaway to broadcasters underscores the corrupt and inefficient misuse of public resources in the arena of technology. The citizenry should benefit and profit from the use of public frequencies, and should retain a portion of the spectrum for educational, cultural and public access uses. We should demand more for private use of public property.

8. Understanding technology should be an essential component of global citizenship. In a world driven by the flow of information, the interfaces—and the underlying code—that make information visible are becoming enormously powerful social forces. Understanding their strengths and limitations, and even participating in the creation of better tools, should be an important part of being an involved citizen. These tools affect our lives as much as laws do, and we should subject them to a similar democratic scrutiny.

Signed (in alphabetical order):

David S. Bennahum. Editor, *Meme*; contributing editor, *Wired*, *Lingua Franca*, *Spin*.

Brooke Shelby Biggs. Columnist, *San Francisco Bay Guardian* online; columnist, *C.M.P.'s NetInsider*.

Paulina Borsook. Author, *Cyberselfish: Technolibertarianism and the True Revenge of the Nerds* (forthcoming from Broadway Books).

Marisa Bewe. Former editor in chief, *Word*; former conference manager, ECHO.

Simson Garfinkel. Contributing writer, *Wired*; columnist, *The Boston Globe*.

Steven Johnson. Author, *Interface Culture: How New Technology Transforms the Way We Create and Communicate*; editor-in-chief, *FEED*.

Douglas Rushkoff. Author, *Cyberia*, *Media Virus*, *Playing the Future* and *Ecstasy Club*; columnist, *New York Times Syndicate*, *Time Digital*.

Andrew L. Shapiro. Fellow, Harvard Law School's Berkman Center for Internet & Society; contributing editor, *The Nation*.

David Shenk. Author, *Data Smog: Surviving the Information Glut*; commentator, National Public Radio.

Steve Silberman. Senior culture writer, *Wired News*.

Mark Stahlman. Author, *The Battle for Cyberspace* (forthcoming); co-founder, New York New Media Association.

Stefanie Syman. Executive editor and co-founder, *FEED*.

Join us! To sign on to these principles, or to learn more about them, visit www.technorealism.org. ■

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