

Contemporary Society and the World of the Future

Living With Technology

- Part 1) "The Transformation of Society", which examines the premise that technology has produced a fundamental change in our way of life.
- Part 2) "The American Dream", - an investigation of the special romance between Americans and their technology - documenting the practical bent of American science since the work of Franklin and of Edison.
- Part 3) "Implications for the World System" - deals with the global status of technology and the significance of the transformation that technology has wrought in the history of this suddenly very finite planet.
- Part 4) "Vulnerability: The System Tested" - this section of the programme indicates how dependent on technology we have become, and raises questions about the effects of our continued dependence.
- Part 5) "Visions of the Future" - here is stressed our pressing need to chart the future implications of our scientific and technological decisions, describing the current state of future forecasting, both the difficulty of accurate forecasting and the ironic twists forecasting can take.

Objectives

Informational:

- To make the student aware of the enormous, multidimensional impact of technology on modern life.
- To give students a clear understanding that the concept of technology can include more than just machines - can also refer to integrated man/machine systems.
- To help students understand the relationship between technology and change, and the effect that change has on our way of life.
- To show students that our values are challenged by our technology.
- To point out that we are dependent on technology, and therefore, vulnerable.
- To make students aware of the impact technology is likely to have upon the future.

Behavioural:

- Students should want to know more about technology and should be able to recognize new developments relating to the subject as they occur.

Behavioural (cont.):

- Students should feel impelled to examine their own values and the values of their society in terms of the questions raised in the programme.
- Students should exhibit a concern for the far-reaching effects of technological decisions, acknowledging some responsible relationship to those decisions.

A key question to raise in connection with this programme unit is "Does technology have a life of its own? Can it be controlled?" Increasingly, students of the subject are coming to feel that technologies have consequences that are very difficult to anticipate, and hence control. They seem to provide a dynamic, a generative force all their own. Harold Innis (Time/Life Books) believes that "technology has reorganized the flow of information within society, thereby creating new sources and centres of power". Whilst Jacques Ellul states "that technology is gradually shaping its creator - man - into its own image - man the technician." William Kuhns, in Post Industrial Prophets, draws a fine distinction, noting that "technologies are within man's control but their consequences are not."

And Erich Jantsch, in "For a Science of Man" The Futurists (Random House, 1972, p. 222), addresses the question of whether science and technology are value-free:

The traditional view, as expounded by numberless scientists, has been that science is value-free, that technology is neutral and that only the use to which technology and science are put is loaded with moral issues. This is a false distinction. Science is a creation of man. It is not given in raw nature . . . In other words, it is a selective activity and therefore deeply influenced by the tastes, predictions and interests of the men who do the selecting.

The content of this unit should prompt the following questions:

- 1) What do you think is meant by the term, technology?
- 2) What effects, if any, do you think technology has upon your lives?
- 3) Is technology neutral? Just a means to an end? Or does it seem to have a life of its own? That is, when it reaches a high degree of complexity, does it so change a society that the society is different in kind from what it was before, and from other pre-industrial societies?