



# **Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry**

*Albert Borgmann*

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Blending social analysis and philosophy, Albert Borgmann maintains that technology creates a controlling pattern in our lives. This pattern, discernible even in such an inconspicuous action as switching on a stereo, has global effects: it sharply divides life into labor and leisure, it sustains the industrial democracies, and it fosters the view that the earth itself is a technological device. He argues that technology has served us as well in conquering hunger and disease, but that when we turn to it for richer experiences, it leads instead to a life dominated by effortless and thoughtless consumption. Borgmann does not reject technology but calls for public conversation about the nature of the good life. He counsels us to make room in a technological age for matters of ultimate concern—things and practices that engage us in their own right.

## Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry Details

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# From Reader Review Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry for online ebook

## Bryan Kibbe says

A extraordinary analysis of modern technology. Although tedious at times, Borgmann lays down an important extended analysis of the way in which modern technologies eclipse human flourishing, though his critique is not that of a simple reactionary. Instead, Borgmann in a particularly profound insight recognizes that putting technology in its proper place allows us to more fully grasp the wonder and value of technology. In short Borgmann, aims to restore the colorful vibrancy of the modern world through calls for self reflective engagement with what he terms focal things and practices where otherwise ubiquitous technology that offers immediate gratification in the form of commodities mutes the world to a dull, static gray.

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## Ryan Miller says

Brilliant theories but not written in a way that's easily accessible. His other books are more understandable, but this one lays the groundwork.

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## Jasonlylescampbell says

My review would be a number of pages ... so I will simply limit it to insights gleaned from the last chapter (only four pages long).

AMERICA would do well to listen up. We are a country founded upon the industrial revolution ... much of our success and failure is surely timing ... being born in post Enlightenment and poised for a full blown technological pursuit. Technology has always promised liberty and prosperity ... irradiation of hunger and illiteracy, equality for all, the end of drudgery and increase of leisure and personal time. But this brilliant promise has not succeeded "despite two centuries of gigantic effort. The technological measures that have freed us from hunger, disease, and illiteracy" have become part of the invisible periphery of life ... but, "the commodities that fill the center of our lives with entertainment and diversion" offer only passing and shallow gratification. We are, justifiably, proud of the intricacy and power of our technology, but this confidence about the means does not continue when we consider the ends. What are we producing?

"Medical technology provides healing and wholeness where otherwise there would be insufferable pain and crippling disfigurement. Media technology allows us to consider all things and to be enlightened about the world in an intelligent and compassionate way. But once restored to health and well informed, we are now able to take up life." **But what kind of life?** "Can engineers, managers, lawyers, and all the other members of technosphere be content in their work if they must admit that it serves a life that often is ruled at its center by triviality and frivolity?" Are we content producing healthy fools and trivial intellectuals? This is our problem.

Maybe the largest and most consuming argument of this book is that post-Enlightenment when we cast off any kind of divine center (and you have to travel through much of history to find any where without a divine center ... maybe the few intelligencia of ancient Rome) ... we found no center. Liberal democracy demands

that we leave any definitions of life up for personal choice. So there is no public discourse in what defines "the good life." What is an appropriate center for our lives? What is the right content to make us proud at the end of our days?

What Borgmann speaks generally about is focal practices. Engagement with things as opposed to commodities. The two he spends the most time on is running (jogging) and the culture of the table (feasting). Regular engagement with the world that involves your whole body, the seasons of the earth, the local world in which you live ... this is helping us toward an appropriate center. These are things that test our limits and require the slow development of skill and discipline and the real engagement with our world.

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### **Kenny says**

Insightful and penetrating analysis, very helpful .

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### **Megan McDowell says**

A bit dense and difficult to sum up here, but full of provocative ideas, as well as arguments that will confirm things that you've probably felt intuitively but didn't rationalize, regarding the importance of nature, and what Borgmann calls "focal concerns."

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### **Matt Hill says**

mainly a source for the thesis . . his main idea is hard to deny: technology has taken us from "focal things and practices" . . yes . . after that, it's all just academic posturing, wordiness, etc. . . still very worthwhile - - best understood for me in a spiritual context, which context becomes our "focal thing/practice" . . for the thesis, i'll try getting at writing/storytelling as focal for self . . edit as of 7-11: for how this ended up impacting my thesis, read it at <https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&am...> also, for my specific take on the entirety of this book, see the page i created at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technolo...>

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### **Jessica Zu says**

I decided to give up this book. It is really hard to read and I admit that I am unable to motivate myself to finish reading it. I will try some time later:)

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### **Mac says**

Borgmann was a student of Martin Heidegger, and he here takes up the question of modern technology following in the footsteps of his teacher, but offering a more hopeful vision for the future. Even though the book was written in 1984 Borgmann's analysis was prescient and insightful enough that it still feels relevant

and helpful in the 21st century. His proposal of recognition and restraint of what he calls the "device paradigm" is not rooted in nostalgia but in an honest evaluation of modern society.

Borgmann's treatment of hearths and heaters, eating and running are both beautiful and compelling. His description of nature as an aging parent beautiful to mature humanity in her fragility even as she was in her power was also quite moving.

Certainly the work has its flaws - imprecision of terms and a failure to adequately address some of the political and justice issues he raises are the two that I noticed most often - but it's an excellent work, and I recommend it to anyone interested in the way technology shapes our worldview.

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