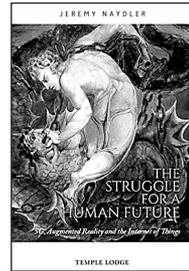


The Struggle for a Human Future: 5G, Augmented Reality and the Internet of Things

By Jeremy Naydler

Temple Lodge Publishing, 2020

Reviewed by M. Ali Lakhani



As the modern world continues to technologize in ways that increasingly disrupt humanity and nature, we are confronted by the challenge to understand our values, what it means to be human, an issue implied in the title of this book, ‘the struggle for a *human* future.’

Its author, Jeremy Naydler, describes himself as ‘a philosopher, cultural historian and gardener’ with a ‘longstanding concern about the impact of electronic technologies on our inner life and on our relationship to nature.’

The thrust of his argument is that by being conscious of our true humanity, we can become more clearly aware of the insidious ‘prospect of the colonization of the human by the inhuman’ (3), and can thereby work more effectively to ‘counterbalance the negative forces that today assail humanity and menace the living Earth’ (105).

By the term ‘human’, Naydler is referring to its connection with the Spirit, what in traditional terms is a spectrum of reality that opens to both intimacy and mystery, to the wonder of the transcendent realm of the source of that ‘Light’ whence all things flow and which imbues their being. Cut off from that reality, the ‘human’ becomes sub-human,

not merely animal, but a soulless machine. This reductive materialism, which has deep roots in the history of philosophy, is now colonizing not only our minds but also (literally) our bodies through new forms of technology.

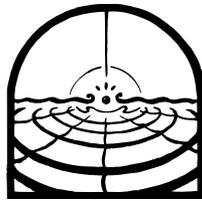
With regard to their effect on the mind, Naydler notes that ‘the whole thrust of contemporary culture is towards distraction, fragmentation and dispersion of consciousness’ (1), but in a more damaging way, they have the effect of ‘hardening of our souls: we must lose our innocence in order to be able to live in relation to them’ (9). This is, in part, because ‘our relationship with technology tends to confine us within an artificially constructed human-machine world’ (10), which ‘drives out the old instinctive participation in the natural world, and tears us away from contact with our soul-life’ (11).

Naydler singles out four soul-sapping effects of technology – addiction, psychic fragmentation, the abandonment of the real for the virtual, and the drift towards becoming cyborg – which ‘tend to draw us away from a living connectedness to the mystery of existence, and thereby from an essential human experience’ (12).

By being more addicted to our devices, we become susceptible, he argues, to what Heidegger referred to as an ‘increasingly hardened forgetfulness of being.’ Naydler comments that ‘The danger is that we are pulled away from our own center. We become alienated from nature, unable to endure solitude, unable to endure inactivity. We lose the secret of our own peace’ (14). By being constantly interruptible, and being expected to ‘multitask’ at all times and places, and by living through Internet avatars, we experience psychic fragmentation, eroding the boundaries of our identity.

Lured into virtual reality, we become ‘digital citizens’, where we are cut off from the Spirit, rather than citizens of the natural world. As ‘the fundamental gesture of the electronic is to close us off from objective spiritual reality’ (21), we become cut off from what Corbin termed the *mundus imaginalis* or the ‘imaginal’ realm. Thus, Naydler writes of the ‘assault on the imagination’ by the blurring of reality and of its ‘corrosive effect on the inner life of the soul’ (84). More insidious to our humanity than these elements is the prospect of our becoming computerized beings. ‘The wearable computer is a step on the way to a biologically integrated computer’ through devices like

To read the balance of this article, please subscribe to this volume.



SACRED WEB

A JOURNAL OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY

www.sacredweb.com