Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

GOYDER, JOHN, *Technology and Society: A Canadian Perspective,* Second Edition. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005, 270 p.

The first edition of this paperback book was published in 1997, and has evidently been successful enough to merit a revised second edition. The revisions are modest but valuable as up-dates. Thus, the eleven chapter titles remain the same, and unchanged in order, but John Goyder has updated relevant empirical data and source material. The section on " further readings" contained at the end of each chapter has likewise been somewhat revised, mainly to incorporate recent scholarship (though web sites are excluded as potentially transient). The single most important change is probably the cover illustration, which, in the original edition, imaged "technology" as a live video screen surrounded by internal workings and wires. To the uninitiated, it looked as if it had just escaped from a graveyard for scrap metal, and likely did little to enhance the book's appeal. The new cover consists of the title up front and a minimalist Avro Arrow's nose and wing section poking up from the bottom. Overall much more eye-catching, even if it does portray one of the great betrayals of successful technological achievement in this country.

Writing a book on this general theme for an advanced undergraduate audience is no easy task. Complex facts and theories abound in attempts by scholars to understand the relationships between technological and social change and between tools and people in their cultural roles. I admired the first edition of this book for covering the main themes with clarity and a certain humour, and with many Canadian examples. In general, this is still the case. Just as the chapter titles have not changed, so too the three main divisions of the book remain as before. The first part consisting of three chapters deals primarily with basis cultural relationships in the links between people and technology. Here, the main foci are "Technology as Fate" (foremost an analysis of historical stages in technological development), and discussions devoted to elements of technological creation, and technological diffusion respectively. The second part is entitled "Some Consequences of Technology" with "consequences" being interpreted sufficiently broadly to include chapters devoted to technology and economic development, technology and issues around the theme of technocracy, the debate about the role of technical change in "deskilling" occupations, the communications theories of Innis and McLuhan and the role of media in violence. There is also a linked review of research on the impact of computers (notably the Internet) on culture; and various issues associated primarily with artificial intelligence. The final part -- "the

Evaluative Dimension" -- consists of two chapters dealing with ethical responses to technology and debates about "freewill and fate" in an age when technology seems to have a life of its own.

With such a substantial set of themes, it is hard to pin down what Goyder does best. However, my money is on the chapter devoted to social diffusion, and his excellent brief account of the work of Innis and McLuhan. But one should also appreciate the fine short accounts of the work of many other doyens in the field: Daniel Bell, Alain Touraine, Jacques Ellul, George Grant, Sherry Turkle, and comments on Kondratieff's economic cycles and Turing's test of artificial intelligence. But, on the dark side, to ask the question originally asked of me by my external PhD examiner, "and so, what would you change, or improve on, given the opportunity?" In the case of this book, I see more scope particularly for the discussion of issues surrounding technology and surveillance which have become so vital, and controversial, since 2001. Also, there are a few occasions when Goyder makes statements, which really do not hold water. For example, he notes uncritically "the undoing of the fundamentalist Islamic regime of Ayatollah Khomeni in Iran has been held up as a case study of the importance of the Internet as an agent of grassroots power". But who seriously believes that the fundamentalist regime in Iran has been "undone" at any point? More significantly, in examining the social and individual impact of television violence, Goyder notes that "two facts are beyond dispute: that television depicts astounding amounts of violence every day, and that levels of violence are very high in modern societies". No disputing the first fact, but the second one only makes sense if the levels of real-life violence in modern societies are demonstrably higher than in past times. Assuming that he is not talking about such organized violence as war and terrorism, but rather violence which unlucky citizens might confront in their daily activities, it would be hard to find an historian who might agree with this statement. The Victorian era was rife with urban violence; the extent of physical violence, including murder, in medieval villages makes New York an Eden by comparison. Since Goyder suggests that the association between these two facts is undisputed, even if direct cause is not, the uncritical reader could easily ignore his subsequent cautious analysis. If our society is so violent, then what easier to blame than television and video?

Such criticisms aside, this is a thoughtful and well-written book. Its focus on Canadian themes deserves more attention than I have been able to offer here. In sum, a continuing "must" for university courses in science, technology and society.

Robert Pike, *Queen's University*.