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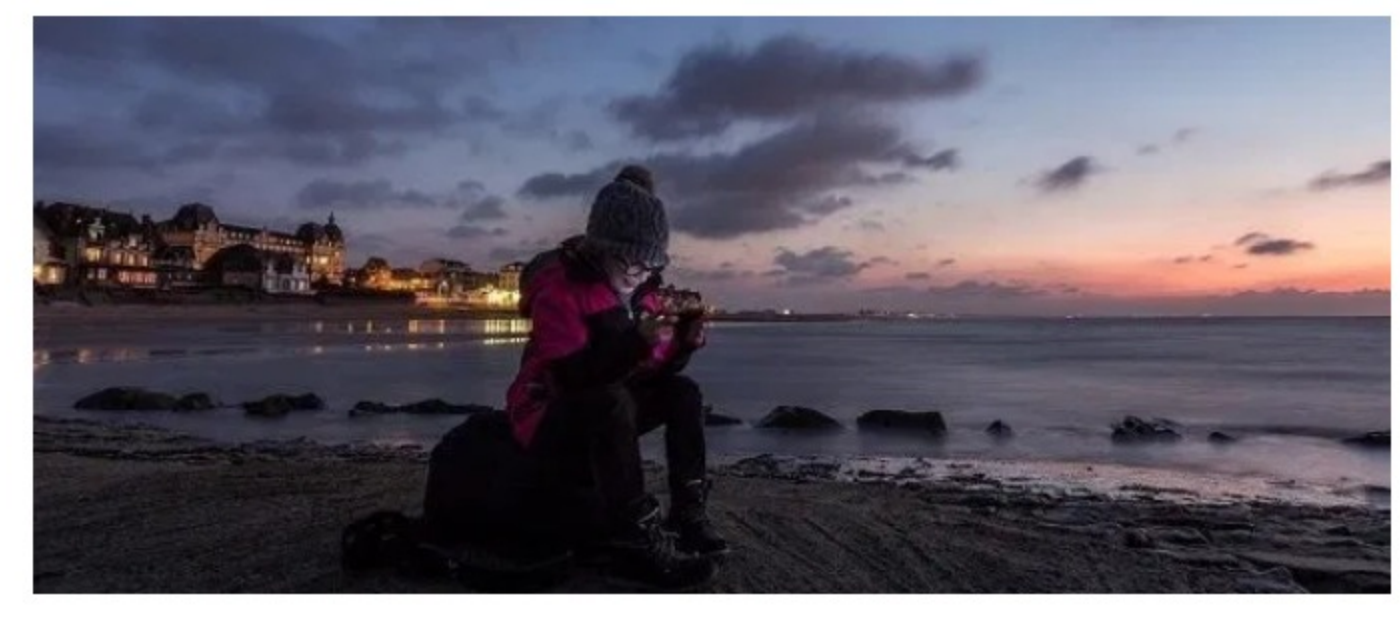
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Caliban's Rage at the Blank Touchscreen: On Becoming a 21st Century Savage

THE ACCELERATION OF TECHNOLOGY BEYOND THE LAYMAN'S KEN MAKES US LITTLE MORE THAN BLISSFULLY IGNORANT SLAVES - SHOULD WE NOT BE NOBLE SAVAGES INSTEAD?

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The technophobe is one who fears new advancements regarding them with suspicion and perhaps nostalgically seeks to halt advancement or worse go back to an imagined prediluvian past.

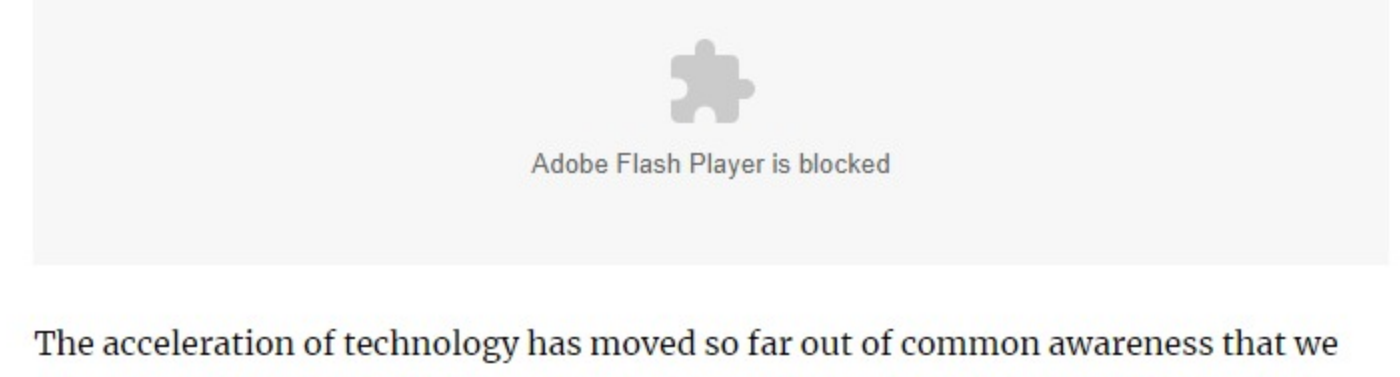
These people are vulnerable to missing out on the practical benefits of technology and demonstrate an inflexible and fixed mentality.

The technophile is one who is totally enthusiastic about technology, throwing themselves into the new gadgets and advances of our modern-developed world. These are the consumers and are vulnerable to the excess of their addiction. An extreme example is the Japanese 'Otaku-kids': young people so obsessed with media and technology that some have died in front of their machines through lack of nourishment. A less extreme example might be the ever growing black hole of wasted time playing inane games (Angry Birds, Fruit Ninja, Candy Crush, etc.) or staring at pornography on the internet.

Against both these positions we must assert a third, which represents overcoming the disadvantages of both the embedded Luddite and the superficial consumer: that of the techno-savage.



We live in a technologically advanced culture and yet most of us don't make this technology. We are allowed to use it, consume it and absorb its effects, we are the primitives of our own world. We no longer need to go to other places to see other primitives, we are compartmentalised so we don't know how things work or even what they were originally meant for! In this, we are like those wronged natives who were brought to great cathedrals and cities to be shown to Europe's leaders, allowed to wander through environments they had no part in constructing. Th exercise rarely went well for the novelty exhibit, who wandered agog, totally cut off from the meanings of the displayed world and only able to conceive of it in their own terms, terms which could not conceive of the changes that would be wrought on them.



The acceleration of technology has moved so far out of common awareness that we might consider code, computer programing and technical engineering as the new Latin. Like the church's hold on the creation and dissemination of meaning and culture, this new specialised language is very much alive and its cardinals and priests are not bound by any adherence to an institution with attendant moral dogma. Worse, they are disparate and brought to heel only by funding from institutions, individuals and governments with lots of money.

We are in the lazy habit of making science and technology synonymous with progress and fact. When was the last time you read a science team or research body's manifesto? But you do remember the last time some exciting new technology was unveiled to you and, like the audience in a theatre, you behaved yourself, reacted to the spectacle with wonder and curiosity, in thrall to our new religion and its demonstrable miracles.

What is at stake here? Why should we care? Firstly, without wanting to seem conservative, new technology creates new meanings and undermines old ones. This would not be a problem if not for the lack of awareness that pervades the sciences, where its common to regard research and innovation as a pursuit of purely benign forces. This coupled with the sheer speed of change rattling through the developed world creates a problem; why do we put so much effort into new tools while we take for granted the existence of meaning? As if meanings don't require creation, repetition and development.

It would be pointless and vain to attempt to halt this process, but to make the most of these technologies and changes we can't simply accept the terms of use and throw ourselves at the feet of our new masters, even if we want to. They are blind masters who don't accept responsibility for us! Instead, we must value the effort and need for meaning to be created or preserved, and assert ourselves accordingly.


The 21st Century Savage

Think of the ambiguous and potent figure of the 'predator' from the popular film franchise. Is this creature not a figure of 'anti-progress', and in his own way a heroic presence set against the lies and treachery of his human prey? He is in possession of technology which is far in excess of our own and yet is seemingly animal, awkwardly operating his equipment as if he has stolen it from another culture. He eschews much of it in the pursuit of fairness. This figure is a symbol of a mythological warrior which we imagine our forefathers were in ages past, his code and values have not been weakened by the technology he wields. He has subordinated it to his will.




The dignity of this position is that with or without the tools there is a value, a meaning, a sense of purpose by which the creature is motivated. Take away all the bolt-ons and you would be left with a still potent figure. I wonder how many of us have that (in whatever form) and whether we have the strength to assert our values against the forces which, like a huge un-captained ship, drift and crash through our reality?

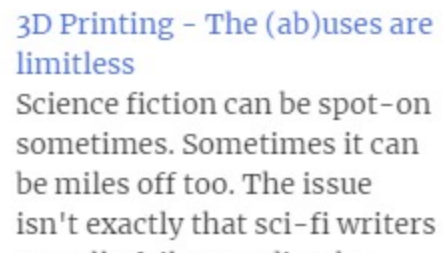
If we don't wish to end up as the equivalent of those 'native' cultures obliterated by our own in the 19th century, then we might like to consider what essential traits are worth asserting and, if robbed of all the gadgets and 21st century extras, what would we look like? We must embrace our own otherness and become savages, not natives.



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Michael Eden is the Arts Editor for Trebuchet Magazine, an artist and researcher working in London and the south east, his artistic practice is concentrated on painting and he divides his time between this and lecturing in art history and contextual studies.

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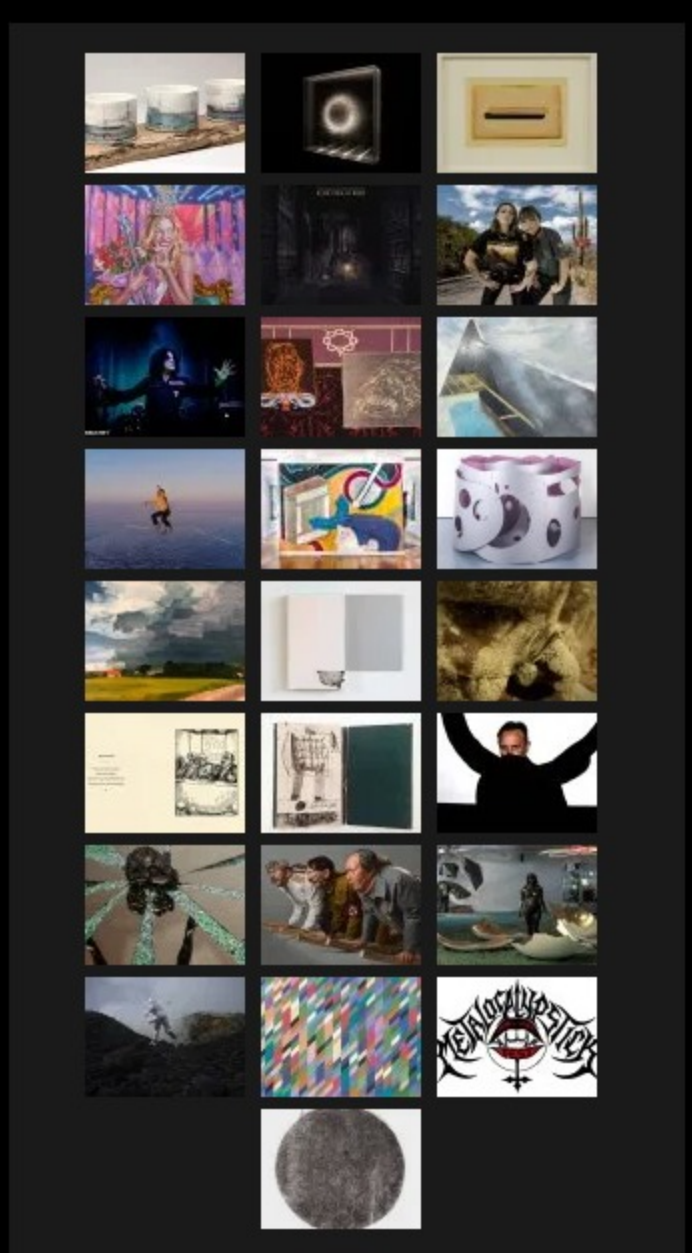
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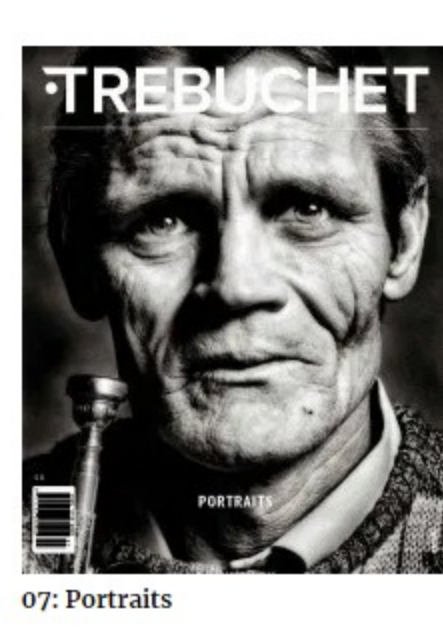
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