

SKEPTICAL EYE

Every time I hear a political speech or I read those of our leaders, I am horrified at having, for years, heard nothing which sounded human. It is always the same words telling the same lies. And the fact that men accept this, that the people's anger has not destroyed these hollow clowns, strikes me as proof that men attribute no importance to the way they are governed; that they gamble — yes, gamble — with a whole part of their life and their so-called "vital interests."

Albert Camus, *Notebook I*,
August 1937

Though a lot of Americans claim to be dissatisfied with life in the U.S., how many actually decide to bail out? According to the State Department, less than 500 citizens a year take the following oath: "I understand that I have the right to renounce my United States citizenship and I have decided voluntarily to exercise that right..." Apparently the rest of us would rather grin and bear it.

from *Los Angeles Times*
January 27, 1974

If we really want to bring Robert Vesco back to stand trial, why don't we send the same "extradition" specialists we sent to Afghanistan for Timothy Leary?

What determines IQ? Heredity? Environment? Culture? Some combination? The debate rages on. Now from *Learning* magazine comes news of findings which lend support to the "environment" side of the argument — at least if what is meant by environment is the environment in which an IQ test is administered. Psychologists in Munich have discovered that children tested in bright-colored rooms (light

blue, yellow, yellow-green, orange) pulled ahead of a control group by 15 IQ points in six months, 25 points in a year and a half. Children tested in "ugly" rooms (white, black and brown) immediately dropped 14 points.

Today there is a new right which supercedes property rights in political and social importance. It is the right to survive — to enjoy income, health, and other rights associated with membership in the American community or in some component of that community including a corporation... This right derives not from any individualistic action or need; it does not emanate from a contract. It is a communitarian right that public opinion holds to be consistent with a good community. It is a revolutionary departure from the old Lockean conception under which only the fit survive. President Nixon, apparently unaware of what is happening, said once. "If you underwrite everybody's income, you undermine everybody's character." Well, of course, that depends on the definition of self-respect.

George Cabot Lodge
Harvard Business Review
March-April 1974

CONSERVATIVE, n. A statesman who is enamored of existing evils, as distinguished from the Liberal, who wishes to replace them with others.

Ambrose Bierce
The Devil's Dictionary

When Big Brother listens, it is illegal to take away his hearing-aid. That seems the only tenable conclusion to be drawn from the experience of Paul Castellano and three business associates who discovered a telephone

bug and a television camera secretly installed in their office. When agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, angered at finding themselves cut off, learned that the camera had been destroyed and the bug removed, they arrested the four men on charges of conspiracy and theft of Government property.

The official account hinted that the surveillance grew out of suspected Mafia links, and presumably the equipment was installed by the F.B.I. with court sanction. Yet the claim that getting rid of a bug in one's telephone or an electronic eye that intrudes on one's privacy is a punishable offense because the devices belong to the Government, raises some interesting questions. Must the target of a wiretap adjust to the bug as constant companion? Is it a must to stay on camera?

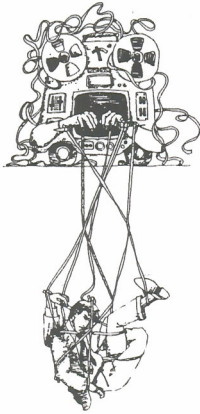
Important as court-approved electronic surveillance undoubtedly is in the governmental fight against organized crime, it is an Orwellian act of official arrogance to assign inviolable status as Government property to the instruments of clandestine intrusion on a citizen's office or home.

The New York Times,
February 13, 1974

Politicians have the power to do. Reporters have the power to watch. But it is true that watchdogs need careful watching even as they observe. The people can remain masters by issuing orders to politicians and journalists alike, insisting that reporters ask the hard questions and that elected officials answer them. My post-Watergate optimism says we are nearer that skeptical health than we have ever been.

Art Seidenbaum
Los Angeles Times
January 25, 1974

THE FORUM



Oskar Morgenstern concludes in his *Forum Letter* (Skeptic, February, 1974) that "It is one of the ironies of human existence that man, by progressing and developing his mind, advances science, his greatest achievement, and that thereby man increases the uncertainty of his existence."

The problem is not technology *per se*, but our inability to see in advance the consequences of new devices and discoveries, the problems they ultimately create for society. Who is to

blame? "Here is where social science ought to be ready: it should be capable of foreseeing these new forms of life and it ought to possess and develop methods with which to cope with the new tasks." But, charges Professor Morgenstern, "The social sciences are hopelessly out of step compared to the physical and life sciences. We may lose to technology."

The following letter was written in response to Professor Morgenstern.

Charlestown, Mass — There are two main causes of the situation Prof. Morgenstern describes: one philosophical and methodological, having to do with the logic of science itself; and one political. These factors combine to inhibit our control of technology.

Prof. Morgenstern is mistaken to hope for a solution in the development of the social sciences to the problem of how technology is to be socialized or integrated harmoniously into society. The very problem of the ethical unaccountability of technical innovations (resulting from scientific discoveries) derives in large part from the prevailing conception of scientific as disinterested or value-free. Scientific speculation enforces a separation of mind from body, quality from quantity necessary for its description/measurement of the physical world. This methodological hypothesis about the independence of scientific knowing has led to spectacular successes in the manipulation of nature, but has made it impossible to account for the ethical implications of technological innovation within the theoretical framework of science.

This is no call to disparage scientific

knowledge, the advancement of which is a necessary condition for the eventual humanization of technology. As we know more of the physical world, we will be better able to predict the effects of technological innovation (about freezing contrails and shockwaves from the SST, for example). The point is that such knowledge is not a sufficient condition for the harmonious integration of technology into society.

It is political considerations and not knowledge of the physical implications of a technology that are usually decisive in their social implementation: think of the success of weapons-systems (the greatest consumer of our productivity and greatest stimulant of further technological advancement), vs. the difficulty and failure of environmental protection systems. That thalidomide (and countless other drugs) are introduced on the market without testing, that industry is built up without regard for the environment is not value-free shortsightedness; it is politically conditioned shortsightedness in which profit-maximization, the main political consideration, goes unaccountable.

Technology may have the potential

to be universally beneficial, but it is controlled today by the ruling corporate elite of the country to the detriment of the rest of us. The answer to this situation is to make the decisions about what technology is to be developed and how it is to be introduced into society radically democratic — to make them rest with the people of the country and not with corporate executives or governmental officials.

A glance at the history of science itself suggests the path to this goal. At the beginning of the modern period, its inspiration and promise were all democratic; scientific knowledge was accessible in principle to everyone. Redemocratization may be the necessary condition for the continued progress of science. But in any case we must take the monopoly on scientific knowledge away from the political elite so that control of technology will be not merely administrative but fully human.

David Olsen teaches politics and philosophy at Tufts University and is the co-author of *Race to Power: The Struggle for Southern Africa*.