

## From Traditional Society to Industrial Society (An Anthropological Analysis of the Manifesto Ted Kaczynski)

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### Abstract

This paper is an anthropological analysis of industrial society and its future, Kaczynski's controversial manifesto, which radically criticizes the transformation of traditional society into industrial society. From an anthropological perspective, this change reflects not only technological and economic shifts, but also a restructuring of social structures, patterns of interaction, and cultural values that shape human identity. Kaczynski argues that traditional society provides a framework for life that is more in tune with human psychological and biological needs, particularly through power processes, small community relations, and connection with nature. In contrast, industrial society is accused of stripping individuals of their autonomy, accelerating social dislocation, and forcing humans to adapt to an autonomously evolving technological system. This study employs ethnographic and theoretical approaches to understand Kaczynski's critique as an extreme response to alienation and dehumanization in industrial modernity. While the author's violent methods cannot be justified, his ideas open up space for discussion about the crisis of meaning, the loss of cultural identity, and the tension between technological progress and the sustainability of human values in modern social order.

**Keywords:** Traditional Society, Industrial Society, Anthropology, Kaczynski, Modernity

### INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, human society has undergone massive structural changes in the way people live, work, and interact. Developments in machinery, energy, and digital communications have driven efficiency and mobility, but at the same time have created pressure on traditional social structures. These changes have sparked concerns across various sectors of society. One of the most controversial voices comes from Kaczynski (1995) in *Industrial Society and Its Future*, or what is more commonly known as the Unabomber Manifesto. In this text, Kaczynski presents a critical view of industrialization and modern technology as the primary causes of humanity's psychological and ecological destruction.

Kaczynski, also known as the Unabomber, was an American mathematician and domestic terrorist. A genius, he abandoned his academic career in 1969 to embrace a primitive, solitary lifestyle and lone-wolf terrorism. Kaczynski killed three people and injured 23 others between 1978 and 1995 in a nationwide letter-bombing campaign targeting individuals he believed were advancing modern technology and damaging the environment. He wrote a 35,000-word manifesto and social critique titled "Industrial Society and Its Future," which opposed all forms of technology, rejected leftist and fascist ideologies, advocated cultural primitivism, and ultimately suggested a violent revolution.

*Industrial Society and Its Future*, also known as the Unabomber Manifesto, is an anti-technology essay by Kaczynski published in 1995. The manifesto states that the Industrial Revolution began a process of dangerous destruction of nature due to technology, while forcing humans to adapt to

machines, creating a socio-political order that suppresses human potential and freedom. Kaczynski's manifesto, *Industrial Society and Its Future*, states that the Industrial Revolution has been a disaster for humanity, stifling freedom, creating psychological suffering, and forcing humans to adapt to machines. Kaczynski introduces the concept of "surrogate activities," which are modern artificial activities that replace the authentic process of achieving control over life through hard work, now replaced by technology and bureaucracy.

His manifesto states that technology is not neutral; it creates oppressive social structures and limits individuals' efforts to achieve authentic goals. Psychologically, Kaczynski saw industrial society as causing alienation, sleep disorders, psychopathology, and excessive hedonism due to accumulated frustration. However, he also criticized modern left-wing movements as the result of over-socialization of highly trained individuals who have lost the capacity for independent thought or revolutionary action against the system (Gupta, 2018).

The transition of human society from traditional to industrial is a major transformation not only in economic and technological aspects, but also in social, cultural, and ecological aspects, given how human social structures and cosmology have changed significantly with modernization. In traditional societies, life was built on the unity between humans, the environment, and traditional value systems through rituals, kinship, and locally inherited knowledge (Mulyadi, 2015).

The Industrial Revolution created a historical leap that led humanity to urbanization, bureaucracy, capitalism, and technological dominance, weakening humanity's connection to small communities and traditional values. Anthropologists like Bruno Latour argue that the modern separation between "nature" and "society" is actually a construct of modernity, and that pre-modern societies did not make such a rigid separation. Within this framework, modernity is not merely progress; it can separate humans from the ecological and social relationships that strengthen the meaning and identity of communities (Latour, 1999).

The critical anthropological approach highlights the dangers of romanticizing traditional societies. Edgerton, in *Sick Societies*, asserts that narratives of natural harmony in primitive societies are political myths; violence, gender discrimination, and environmental degradation persist even in pre-modern societies (Edgerton, 2010). Kuper also criticizes the construction of primitive societies as ideal models. In *The Reinvention of Primitive Society*, he traces the history of primitivist thought, showing how this idea was shaped by myths and distorted by modern and post-colonial discourse (Kuper, 2017).

Jordan investigates the discourse of primitivism in art and critical theory. He highlights the temporal narrative that separates the "modern" and the "traditional" as a colonialist construct: one develops, the other remains stuck in prehistory (Jordan, 1995). The Marxist perspective is also highly relevant in understanding industrial alienation. The concept of the metabolic rift describes the irreparable rupture between humans and nature caused by capitalist production, where a spirit of alienation, ecology, and economics converge. In his study of modern alienation, Harvey argues that capitalism causes universal alienation, including through personal debt and social inequality—phenomena that reflect a shift from authentic processes toward structural alienation (Harvey, 2020). Brannen and Fruin's study of cultural alienation in multinational workplaces shows that globalization creates identity mismatches, where individuals lose cultural integration within modern organizations (Brannen, 2009).

Ideologically, Kaczynski is not clearly right-wing or left-wing; some consider him to have morphological similarities with environmentalism or anarcho-primitivism, but historically his ideas do not stem from mainstream green environmentalism (Fleming, Sean, 2024). As examined in the *American Political Science Review*, a forensic analysis of Kaczynski's ideology reveals that his ideological connection to environmentalism is historically weak, despite certain conceptual similarities.

Philosophically, Moen in *Bioethics* argues that Kaczynski's arguments have implausible ethical premises and that the use of violence cannot be justified, though some of his concerns about technology are worth discussing intellectually (Moen, 2019). His manifesto has also been selectively used by radical groups, such as eco-fascists, although Kaczynski himself rejects such associations and criticizes the racist elements in their interpretations (Molloy, 2022).

Academically, criticism of technology and modernity has been widely discussed, from Ellul to Touraine, who offer alternatives to modernity based on subjective freedom and combine memory and diversity in resistance to market logic. From an anthropological perspective, it is important to examine how traditional societies adapt to modern changes. In many cases, this leads to conflict, marginalization, and the displacement of cultural identity. Latour urges us to rethink: society, nature, and technology are not separate entities but are intertwined in a hybrid network that is "non-modern."

Kaczynski condemns technological progress for the destruction of small human communities and the emergence of unfriendly cities. He argues that this relentless technological progress will not disappear on its own, as individual technological advancements are deemed good regardless of their cumulative effects, and technological growth is beyond the control of rational humans (i.e., autonomous). Kaczynski describes modern technological society as a totalitarian force of an order in which individuals are "adjusted" to fit the demands of the system and those outside the system are considered pathological or "bad."

The anthropology of technology approach also highlights how techniques and socio-techniques are formed in various cultural contexts. Pierre Lemonnier emphasizes that technology involves materials, bodies, rituals, and symbols more than just tools for creating complex socio-cultural systems (Villagómez-Reséndiz & Radamés, 2023). Conceptually, technological anthropology challenges the theory of hylomorphism (form-matter) in artifacts. Culturally sensitive studies reveal that technology is a conceptual and practical product of social engineering and shared knowledge.

This paper does not aim to justify Kaczynski's violent actions but uses his critique as a starting point for a broader anthropological discourse on human-technology relations, alienation, and ecological change. By distinguishing between ideas and critical methods toward modern systems without reducing traditional societies to an ideal future, we open space for alternative concepts of modernity that are ethical and sustainable. This analysis is intended to contribute to an understanding that criticism of industrialization can be conducted through ethical anthropological and philosophical research, encompassing historical, psychological, and ecological contexts without supporting violent extremism.

## METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with content analysis and hermeneutic textual study methods, as the main focus of the study is on the interpretation of the text *Industrial Society and Its Future* and the cultural meaning of social change from an anthropological perspective (Moleong, 2019). This study employs a cultural and structural anthropological approach, focusing on the impact of technology on social structures, value crises, and identity within society, as well as power relations between industrial systems and local/traditional communities. This study is a literature review and is not limited to a specific location. However, case studies may include communities documented as experiencing modernization pressures, such as indigenous Amazonian, Toraja, Dayak, or Navajo communities.

Data collection techniques in the study *From Traditional Society to Industrial Society: An Anthropological Analysis of Kaczynski's Manifesto (Industrial Society and Its Future)* is conducted through literature review by searching relevant sources, including scientific journals, books, archives, and news in online media and newspapers to obtain theoretical data (Miles, 2009). After all data is collected, the next step is to analyze the data using data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Manan, 2015, 2021). The final step in the *Industrial Society and Its Future* research method is writing according to the requirements so that it can produce a scientific paper on *From Traditional Society to Industrial Society: An Anthropological Study of Kaczynski's Manifesto (Industrial Society and Its Future)*.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The Critics of Kaczynski on Transformation of Traditional Societies into Industrial Societies

Known as the Unabomber, Kaczynski's experience at Harvard, including his studies in extreme psychology, likely reinforced his anti-technology views. The manifesto was printed by The Washington Post after Kaczynski promised to stop the bombings, sparking widespread media attention and ultimately leading to his arrest thanks to a tip from his brother.

Kaczynski began by stating that the Industrial Revolution was a disaster for humanity, as while it extended life expectancy in developed countries, it also destabilized society, caused psychological suffering, and damaged the natural environment. Kaczynski began his manifesto with a bold statement that the Industrial Revolution and its consequences had become a disaster for humanity, increasing life expectancy but also causing social instability, psychological suffering, and environmental damage (Kaczynski & John, 1995). According to him, modern life is unsatisfying; humans are trapped in meaningless routines and experience psychological suffering. In pre-modern societies, humans lived in accordance with their biological evolutionary conditions: small communities, local relationships, and connections with nature. The transition to industrial society required a dramatic adaptation that eroded this way of life.

In traditional societies, individuals undergo a process of power in which they set goals, work independently, and fulfill their needs. This process is crucial for self-esteem and psychological well-being. Industrial society eliminates opportunities for authentic empowerment; instead, "surrogate activities" such as entertainment, administrative work, or consumption emerge, which fail to satisfy human biological and psychological needs. The absence of genuine empowerment leads to boredom, depression, anxiety, and abnormal behavior problems that are far more severe in industrial society than in traditional societies.

Traditional societies are generally built on spiritual values, strong kinship ties, and ecological orientation. In such systems, production and consumption are carried out on a limited scale and in harmony with natural cycles. Industrial modernization, on the other hand, brings the logic of efficiency, competition, and mass production, which displaces these value systems. Anthropologists like Lévi-Strauss (1971) has noted that the transition from "primitive" societies to industrial societies is not merely an economic transformation but also a revolution in patterns of thought, power relations, and symbolic structures. Anxiety about this change is one of the central themes in Kaczynski's manifesto.

Industrial society requires individuals to place loyalty to technological and economic systems above local communities or small families, thereby weakening natural social bonds. Modern society causes stress, anxiety, and frustration due to the mismatch between the human body, which evolved millennia ago, and 20th-century urban life (Ellenberg, 2025). Kaczynski introduced the concept of the "power process": the basic human need for purpose, effort, and achievement. However, modernity has replaced this with surrogate activities such as work, hobbies, entertainment, and sports. He observed that many scientists are motivated not by curiosity or a desire to advance humanity, but by the need to fulfill the power process through scientific activities. Modern humans feel their lives are limited yet never concretely channel the potential of their bodies and minds. Examples include midlife crises and obsessions with health as manifestations of unfulfillment.

Freedom, according to Kaczynski, is the ability to control one's own life without the supervision of large institutions. Modern technology gradually degrades this freedom. Kaczynski argues that industrialization cannot be reformed; the only way out is a total revolution against the industrial-technological system. He distinguishes between small-scale technology (which can be used by small communities) and technology that depends on large organizations. When large systems collapse, organization-dependent technology will disappear. The industrial-technological system seeks to regulate human behavior to the maximum extent of control, which is increasingly subtle and systematic.

Modernity weakens traditional social bonds such as family and local community; loyalty shifts to the system, not the small community (Drucker, 2017). Kaczynski notes that while density and rapid dynamics in cities are often seen as causes of stress, premodern societies on the American frontier also experienced drastic changes without similar psychological issues. Systems may promote environmental solutions if it benefits them, but they never strive to preserve human freedom. In his manuscript, Kaczynski implies that violence or sabotage can be justified as part of resistance against the industrial system (Ellenberg, 2025).

The rapid pace of cultural and technological change has created a gap between human biological structures and modern demands (Kaczynski & John, 2010). Kaczynski criticizes modern leftism as a form of social control that perpetuates the industrial system. His criticism is also directed at conservatives who yearn for traditional values but support technology and economic growth. Although Kaczynski idealizes traditional society, in reality, many traditional societies are also fraught with problems such as patriarchy or social inequality.

In sociological discourse, many critics argue that Kaczynski's discourse is more creative fiction than empirical research-based scientific work. Ellul's view that technology creates a complex system where positive and negative aspects cannot be separated supports Kaczynski's critical framework. Technology drives urbanization, high density, and disconnection from nature, leading to stress and aggression not experienced in traditional societies. When traditional and natural environments change rapidly due to technology, humans lose their sense of security, unlike traditional societies that develop slowly.

Technology is indeed efficient, but it strips meaning from human activities, causing people to lose control over their lives. Industrial exploitation has caused massive damage to nature; Kaczynski highlights environmental degradation as a systemic problem. Modern humans are overly dependent on large systems with complex production structures, marked by the loss of independence to meet basic needs on their own. Though his views are extreme and highly controversial, some of Kaczynski's ideas about the mismatch between evolution and technology are considered prescient in today's digital age. Such criticism reinforces the notion of technology as an autonomous force shaping society, a discourse rooted in Thorstein Veblen and modern sociological studies.

Kaczynski argues that the industrial system is not neutral; it determines human behavior and demands adaptation, not the other way around. According to him, the industrial system cannot be reformed to sustainably combine freedom and technology; the system has no interest in fostering individual freedom. Many academics reject Kaczynski's manifesto as serious literature due to its lack of scientific references and ideological bias. This manuscript continues to be studied in the context of the philosophy of technology, modernity, and criticism of the industrial system, situated between anarcho-primitivism, technocriticism, and modernization theory.

The manifesto calls for an ideology that opposes technology. The wilderness is seen as a positive ideal that fosters religious respect as an alternative to the industrial system. Reform is considered weak because it does not inspire deep commitment. In contrast, revolution offers a transformative vision that can inspire great sacrifice, as happened in the French and Russian revolutions. There are two types of technology: those that can be used by small communities without large organizations, and those dependent on large systems. Once a system collapses, large-scale technology cannot be sustained.

Many criticize its violent methods, yet some consider its critique of technology worthy of consideration. However, most see it as "the ramblings of a madman" (Youvan, 2024). Although his violence dominates public attention, his ideas are still read in some circles, translated, included in university curricula, and developed in the follow-up book *Technological Slavery*. Kaczynski's violent techniques have caused such ideas to be overshadowed by stigma, making it difficult to examine them objectively.

Toffler called "future shock" the overload of information and rapid change causing social disorientation, parallel to Kaczynski's anxiety over rapid change in society. Critics argue that Kaczynski oversimplifies the causes of social problems, which are not only systemic but also the complexity of human needs that cannot be easily replaced by substitution activities. Concerns about technological decentralization, privacy, and the impact of AI have led some modern thinkers to reconsider some of his ideas of course, in a peaceful and reflective manner, not through terrorism.

The transformation from traditional to industrial society has indeed brought material progress, but as a philosophical question: are the losses in freedom, psychology, and social bonds worth it? Kaczynski offers a radical answer: reform is not possible; a revolution is needed. However, history teaches us that a violent approach will distort the discourse.

Overall, the anthropological approach to *Industrial Society and Its Future* highlights how the shift from traditional to industrial society creates alienation, the erosion of community, and the tension between human needs (power processes) and the needs of the industrial system. Kaczynski delivers a

strong critique of technology as a dominating force, suppressing individual freedom, and destroying the environment.

## **2. Kaczynski's manifesto reflection about social change from technological advances in industrial society.**

One of the most extreme expressions of criticism of this transformation can be found in Kaczynski's *Industrial Society and Its Future*, widely known as the "Unabomber Manifesto." In his writing, Kaczynski condemns the modern industrial system as a force that deprives humans of their freedom, creates alienation, and destroys the environment. He highlights how technology is no longer a tool for humans, but rather an autonomous system that demands humans adapt to it. This manifesto is not only a technological critique but also a call for revolution against the modern social order, which is seen as structurally destructive. Kaczynski's manifesto, known as "Industrial Society and Its Future," is a profound critique of technological progress and its impact on society. Kaczynski argues that modern technology has transformed human life and threatens individual freedom. While contemporary anthropological studies of technology warn that technologies like AI can exacerbate inequalities, particularly in different socio-cultural contexts, adding another dimension to Kaczynski's critique (Hagerty, 2019).

From an anthropological perspective, this manifesto provides interesting food for thought in understanding the shifts in values, lifestyles, and social structures that occur when traditional societies experience pressure from industrialization and modernization. Anthropology observes that in this process, there is a clash between the collective and spiritual values of traditional societies and the logic of efficiency, mass production, and rationalization characteristic of industrial societies. This process often gives rise to forms of cultural resistance, crises of meaning, and even dehumanization.

Anthropology views technology not merely as a tool, but as a cultural agent that shapes social structures and shared meanings. Frameworks such as Actor Network Theory emphasize the role of technology as an active participant in cultural practices (Alsaleh, 2024). Kaczynski operates on a deterministic view of technology, that technology is an autonomous force that shapes society and limits individual freedom. In anthropology, the mutual shaping approach rejects pure determinism by showing how society and technology influence and develop together.

Kaczynski argues that technology is a dominant social force that slowly erodes individual freedom through repeated compromises that appear neutral but continuously weaken human autonomy. He distinguishes between technology that can be used in small communities and that which depends on large organizations. When large systems collapse, simple technologies can still survive, offering hope for alternative ways of life. Kaczynski refers to every scientific advancement as a social experiment conducted on society without consent, producing unintended and uncontrollable consequences. He asserts that in industrial society, humans must adapt to the system, not the other way around. Freedom is sought within the framework of a technological system that leaves no room for autonomy.

Modern humans are forced to pursue activities such as entertainment or administrative work as substitutes for meaningful power processes, which are unsatisfying surrogate activities that fail to meet psychological needs. The primitivist movement or return to simple conditions is considered by Kaczynski as an ideal, but anthropologists often view it as utopian and neglectful of the complexity of modern culture. Kaczynski rejects the idea that improvements to the industrial system can be achieved through reform; only a comprehensive revolution can free humans from technological oppression.

Technology can be defined as the tools and methods used to solve problems and meet human needs. In this context, technology encompasses everything from simple tools to complex systems. Kaczynski criticizes that many modern activities are merely substitutes for power processes, which are evolutionarily important for human well-being. Technology creates dependence on large systems, reducing autonomy and connections to traditional small communities. Modern practices of education, propaganda, and surveillance not only reflect but define human behavior.

Kaczynski highlights the use of antidepressants as a way for the system to reduce psychological pressure without changing structural social conditions. Every scientific advancement is considered an uncontrolled experiment on society, posing unforeseen risks. He argues that the industrial system cannot be reformed; the only way forward is radical revolution and the destruction of the system.

Kaczynski proposes a primitive lifestyle as the ideal form, returning to a society rooted in community bonds and nature.

Kaczynski presents alienation as an exclusive product of industrial society; anthropology shows that alienation is more complex, tied to social interactions, environmental design, and global structures. Rather than yearning for Kaczynski-style autonomy, many communities now pursue technological integration in ways that strengthen local values through an adaptive middle ground. From an absolute threat to a tool for cultural protection, examples include the use of technology for language preservation and local forms. Social change refers to transformations in the structure and function of society.

Social change in modern society is greatly influenced by rapid industrial technological developments. From the Industrial Revolution to the current digital age, technology has fundamentally changed the way humans produce, communicate, and form social relationships. However, behind this progress, significant tensions and identity crises have also emerged, particularly in societies that previously lived in more organic, community-based structures that were in harmony with nature.

Kaczynski identifies several negative impacts of technology, including alienation, loss of identity, and a decline in quality of life. Anthropology shows that not all technology is accepted; some is rejected, modified, or adapted to fit local culture. Kaczynski highlights education, media, and pharmaceuticals as tools of control, while anthropology expands its analysis to the boundaries of cultural resistance and negotiation. Alienation, community fragmentation, and loss of meaning in contemporary anthropological findings (e.g., in public space interactions) reinforce some of Kaczynski's critiques, though not in a revolutionary way. Kaczynski argues that technology accelerates these changes in harmful ways.

The anthropological approach rejects violent and destructive methods; debates must be rational, reflective, and inclusive, not radical. The ideas of decentralization, humanistic public space design, and adaptive nostalgia for local communities are worth developing, without social destruction. Anthropology offers a non-violent critique of technology, fostering dialogue between cultural conservation and technological innovation without turning back the clock entirely.

Kaczynski's manifesto delivers a harsh critique of this situation with a call to "completely destroy the industrial system." He argues that no reform can reverse the dominance of technology, as the system has an internal logic that will continue to develop and suppress human freedom. However, Kaczynski's radical approach through terrorism and violence contradicts scientific ethics and the anthropological approach, which emphasizes contextual understanding and peaceful social transformation. Anthropology offers an alternative path: strengthening communities, adapting local technology, and decentralizing power.

Kaczynski's concerns about dehumanization and dependence on the system are indeed based on strong reflective grounds. However, the violent approach in the manifesto does not offer a long-term solution. This is where anthropology offers a more constructive framework: building a balanced relationship between humans, culture, and technology. An anthropological study of Industrial Society and Its Future is important not only for understanding extreme views on modernity but also as a foundation for formulating fair, participatory, and culturally diverse social sustainability strategies in an era of rapidly advancing technology.

An anthropological analysis of Kaczynski's manifesto acknowledges the validity of certain concerns about alienation, systemic power, and social fragmentation but suggests a constructive approach: managing technology in a contextual and culturally sensitive manner, rather than through destructive revolution. Finally, contemporary anthropology concludes that technology is not inherently antagonistic. If managed with respect for cultural values, empowered local communities can create inclusive innovations as a peaceful alternative that addresses the concerns Kaczynski raises without social destruction.

## CONCLUSION

The transformation of traditional societies into industrial societies has not only brought about changes in economic patterns and social structures, but has also created tensions between cultural values, spirituality, and human existence on the one hand, and the dominant technocratic logic on the other. In Industrial Society and Its Future, Kaczynski radically expresses his concerns about the

direction of technological development, which, in his view, has alienated humans from their personal power and created a repressive social system.

An anthropological study of the manifesto shows that although Kaczynski's approach is extreme and violent, some of his criticisms of alienation, ecological degradation, and the loss of human autonomy have a reflective basis that deserves attention. Cultural, political, and environmental anthropological perspectives offer a more constructive and ethical alternative approach to addressing the same issues, emphasizing local resistance, contextual technological adaptation, and the strengthening of community values.

Indigenous communities, through concepts such as Traditional Ecological Knowledge, data sovereignty, and locally-based development models (ethnodevelopment), have demonstrated that modernity and technology need not be hegemonic. If managed reflectively and inclusively, technology can be integrated into diverse cultural systems without erasing identity or damaging ecological sustainability. Thus, rather than rejecting technology entirely as proposed by Kaczynski, contemporary anthropological approaches advocate for more participatory, humanistic, and ecological social and technological engineering. The transition from traditional to industrial societies should not be interpreted as the domination of one system over another, but rather as an opportunity to create a new synthesis that values cultural diversity and upholds human dignity.

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