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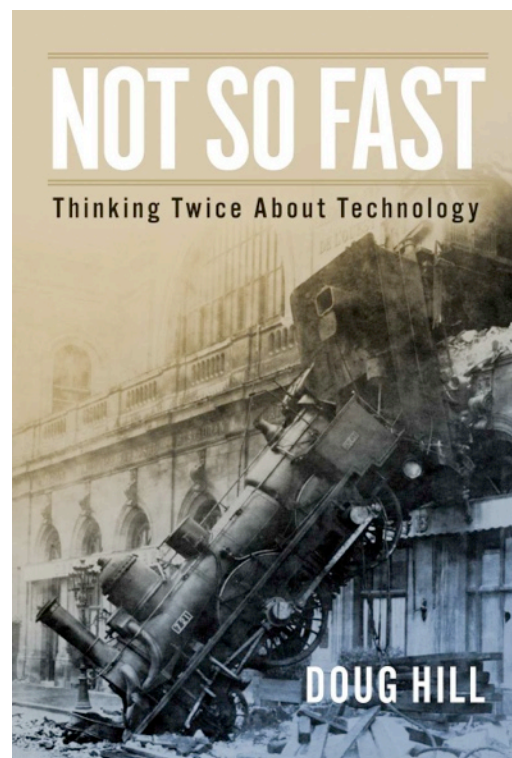
## **NOT SO FAST: THINKING TWICE ABOUT TECHNOLOGY**

### **Introduction, by Doug Hill**

I was introduced to what Martin Heidegger called “the question concerning technology” in 1992, when I moved from Manhattan to the leafy suburb of Montclair, New Jersey. The day we moved in I discovered that the house my then-wife and I had purchased was directly in the takeoff paths of two major airports, Newark and Teterboro. Wind patterns and timing had obscured that fact during our house-hunting expeditions. As a writer who works at home and who is especially sensitive to noise, I was devastated.

For a year or so I worked with the New Jersey Coalition Against Aircraft Noise, a small but determined group of activists seeking to redirect planes out over the ocean instead of over densely populated communities. This was an option that would cost the airlines time and money, and they fought it. As the battle dragged on I began to understand that once technological systems are in place, they’re very difficult to budge, and not only for political reasons.

Being far more inclined to reflection than activism, I soon found myself attending fewer hearings and buying more books. I discovered that there are two overlapping groups of



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scholars—historians of technology and philosophers of technology—who have spent their careers studying the influence of machines in our lives. I've been a voracious and admiring consumer of their erudition ever since.

This book is a combination of my absorption in the work of those scholars and of my own thinking about the issues they discuss. As my title suggests, I take a self-consciously skeptical view of mechanical miracles. I think it's too easy to take the promises of technology at face value and to ignore its hidden and not-so-hidden costs. Those assumptions need to be challenged.

This doesn't mean I don't appreciate the comforts technology provides. Like almost every writer these days, I spend much of my time sitting in front of a computer. I'm committed to air conditioning and indoor plumbing. I spend a lot of time listening to my iPod and I'm immensely grateful for the gift of Novocain.

I don't want to pass over this point factiously. I recognize and acknowledge that technology's gifts go far beyond simple comforts, especially when linked with science. In my work as a health writer I recently interviewed an epidemiologist who is developing more effective treatments for diseases that each year kill thousands of children who live in slums around the world. It's possible to be worried about overpopulation and still mourn the death of children. The concerns I address in this book are about the misuses of technology, and about the temptations for misuse that accrue from the powers technology puts at our disposal.

When I first began studying the question concerning technology there was almost no popular discussion of such topics as technological distraction, unexpected consequences, and the psychological effects of the Internet. That has now changed, and I go out of my way here not to belabor arguments that have been made, often superbly, by others.

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I try to follow the lead of one of my heroes, Lewis Mumford, who took what he called a “bird’s eye view” of our relationships to technology. Such a view can afford some crucial perspective that our daily immersion in a world of machines tends to obscure. The philosopher Albert Borgmann put it well: the true nature of technology can only be understood by looking at "*the pervasiveness and consistency of its pattern.*" For that reason, case-by-case appraisals of individual devices or activities are necessarily incomplete. It is when we stand back to observe technological life in its "normal totality" (Borgmann’s words) that we begin to see it for what it is.

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