

LEWIS
MUMFORD

THE MYTH OF
THE MACHINE

Technics and Human Development

THIS BOOK is an attempt to explain the forces that have shaped technology from prehistoric times on, and have increasingly been shaping modern man. Instead of beginning with the problems of our own generation, Lewis Mumford goes back to the origins of human culture; but so far from accepting man's rise as due mainly to his command of tools and his conquest of nature, he finds solid grounds for rejecting this view. He demonstrates how tools themselves did not and could not develop far without a much more significant series of inventions in ritual, language, and social organization.

This is but the beginning of a whole series of radical re-interpretations, based upon fresh research, in both ancient and recent sources, on the whole development of man, including his early life, his domestication, his utilization of power on a large scale at the beginning of civilization, and the development of complex mechanisms in the Middle Ages. This whole picture casts a new light on the totalitarian technology of today. While the general treatment follows an historic sequence, each chapter in accordance with Mumford's organic philosophy embraces the past, the present, and the future.

This book constitutes both a re-examination and a revaluation of the whole course of human development from the beginning to the threshold of the modern world. It shows the fundamental importance of many other activities besides food-getting and tool-making, establishes the religious and magical foundations of both ancient and modern technology, and weaves together into a significant pattern many tangled threads of historic experience, usually isolated in mind. Not least, it deals with the irrational aspects of both science and technics, so conspicuous in our own day, and traces them back to earlier manifestations in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Against the current view that the machine, in its modern automatic and cybernetic form, is the central fact of human life today, Mumford shows that man himself has from the beginning been and still is the central fact. So far from being a prophecy of doom, this is a straightforward effort to show that the errors we are making are not inevitable, or immortal, but, on the contrary, with sufficient understanding of our own human potentialities, can be overcome.

Illustrated with 48 photographs

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by LEWIS MUMFORD

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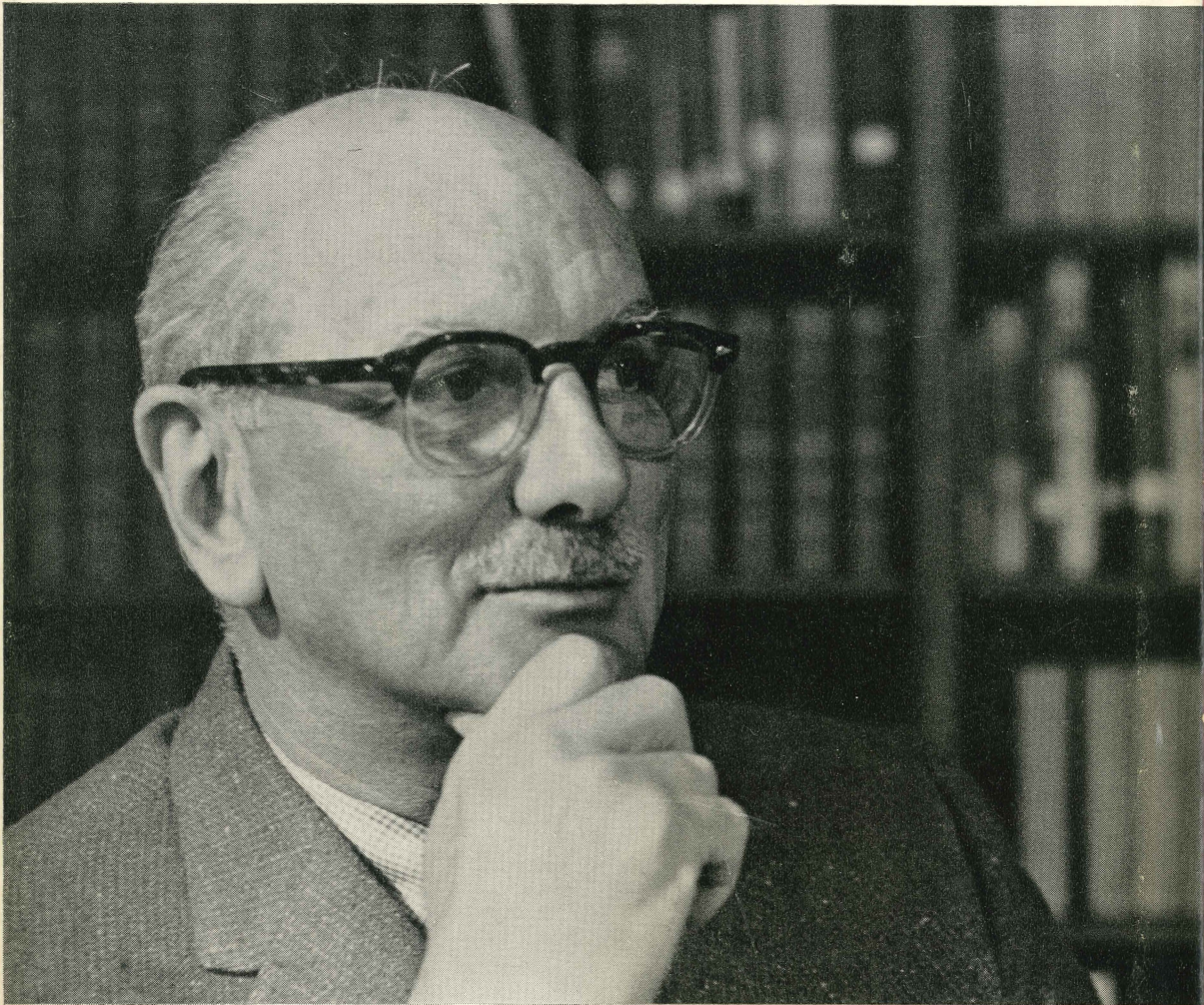
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LEWIS MUMFORD was born in Flushing, Long Island, and was educated in the public schools and higher institutions of New York, including the City College, Columbia University, and the New School for Social Research. At the age of thirteen he was an amateur radio experimenter, and chose to go to Stuyvesant High School, a scientific and technical institution, because he then intended to become an electrical engineer. His first published articles appeared in *Modern Electrics* in 1911, then edited by Hugo Gernsback of science-fiction fame; and his first article in the *Scientific Monthly*, in 1919, on "The Marriage of Museums," set the theme of his entire intellectual life, the unification in action and experience of science and art. In 1931 Mr. Mumford published in *Scribner's Magazine* an article on "The Drama of the Machines" which resulted in an invitation from Professor R. M. MacIver to give a University Extension course at Columbia University on the Machine Age: perhaps the first course on this subject to be given anywhere. From that course came his *Technics and Civilization*, a pioneer work in the interpretation of technical and cultural history, which has had a worldwide influence through many translations, and was most recently translated into Polish. His Bampton Lectures, published in 1952 as *Art and Technics*, have gone into their sixth printing.

Mr. Mumford is a member of the American Philosophical Society and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Among his various honors, he has received the Townsend Harris Medal of the City College, the Gold Medal of the Town Planning Institute, the Royal Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and the Emerson-Thoreau Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.



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