

framed for a general audience? Perhaps the root of the problem with this book is precisely that Tanner has abandoned scholarly standards and scruples. An opportunity to link the academic world with the culture at large has been missed here.

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Technological Utopianism in American Culture. By Howard P. Segal. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 1985. Pp. x, 301. Appendix. \$30.00, cloth; \$14.95, paper.)

Howard Segal has found a group of writers each of whom "wrote at least one work in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries that vaunts technology as a means of establishing an ideal society and offers a blueprint of that ideal society." The more obscure utopians themselves are not especially interesting, at least as presented here, but Segal's discussions of related ideas and tangential issues are intelligent and useful.

Technological Utopianism has several forgivable weaknesses: since thesis authors are thrilled to get their tomes into print, I blame editor more than author. A dissertation advisor, one senses, had Segal add a long-winded explanation of what "ideology" used to mean; it was part of the author's education but, since it is barely utilized, should never have been imposed on book readers. Ditto the stultifying string of definitions in chapter one. Dreadful organization, too: for a long while the reader fears that Segal is merely going to mention good related works by scholars such as Kenneth Roemer and Leo Marx and never engage them in dialogue or fail to explore the important intellectual and political tendencies which his utopians' lives intersect. In point of fact, Segal does ultimately get to such matters, but only after pages of plodding thesis prose.

Some of what Segal says seems obvious. That Bellamy's *Looking Backward* was popular in part because it was ideologically conservative is not exactly fast-breaking news, but were the book properly condensed and reorganized, that observation could be part of a useful presentation. "Like countless other Americans," Segal says, the utopians "were concerned about seemingly unprecedented so-

cial disorder, including crowding, competition, aggression, selfishness, and rudeness; . . . disease . . . ; . . . secularism . . . ; and the pervasive sense that individuals had lost control over the self, family, and community, and even advancing technology. . . . [T]hey reacted to the same conditions as did millions of other Americans. The utopians' anxieties were thus rooted in concrete developments of particular historical circumstances." Tie that observation to parallels with Progressivism, the Muckrakers, social novelists, religious writers, and other turn-of-the-century Americans, and one would have a decent contribution to knowledge congruent with the main thrust of scholarship on the era.

A curious feature of *Technological Utopianism* is that the twenty-five utopians at the ostensible center of the book are discussed very little; we don't get what biographical facts Segal has been able to uncover about them until an appendix, and there is little close analysis of individual texts. The second chapter, "American Visions of Technological Utopia, 1883–1933," reports that all the utopian works are identical in important respects and uses *Looking Backward* to stand for them all. They shared "common views of the future"; all were earnest and didactic; their authors "aimed at accurate prediction of the future, not at idle visions."

A middle chapter, "The European Origins," which ends with Marx and Engels, contains information that should have come much earlier or have been subordinated to the main argument. Nonetheless the summary is worthwhile, and Segal tells us to what extent each writer was "technological."

In an interesting chapter called "The American Origins," Segal rather arbitrarily decides to discuss Carlyle and then to contrast Carlyle's pessimism about the impact of technology with the brighter vision of the American Timothy Walker. Carlyle was of course important, and Walker is unquestionably a good choice, but one wishes that Emerson—who was much better at understanding and analyzing the impact of technology and its social implications than were most of the folks Segal names as well as more accurate in seeing what technology would mean for the future—had been considered.

Segal, incidentally, mentions Eugene Ferguson's "On the Origin and Development of American Mechanical 'Know How'" (*American Studies* 3, no. 2, pp. 3ff.) but fails to use (or perhaps forgets to acknowledge) it at the critical point in his text (p. 76) where he

seems indebted to it. It's a seminal piece; indeed, Segal could have organized his entire book around the relationship between his utopias and the tendencies that Ferguson was the first to recognize.

In very large measure, New England transcendental romanticism was a response to societal, cultural, and aesthetic changes caused by technology, and the concern continues in later writers who connect to that tradition. Thus Segal's study, though very specialized, is germane to scholars of New England culture. Henry David Thoreau, we learn, for example, unfavorably reviewed the utopian writings of John Adolphus Etzler in 1843; he found Etzler's *Paradise* too optimistic, materialistic, and authoritarian. Segal also offers a brief discussion of Henry Adams, which made me think of how much in "The Dynamo and the Virgin" is anticipated in Emerson. The topic of Segal's book is, in short, fruitful.

When Segal finally engages Leo Marx's idea of a "middle landscape," he suggests ways to modify it, but the discussion remains too abstract for the reader to evaluate Segal's evidence. One needs more substance before making up one's mind. The result would have to be a judgment call anyway: Segal would agree with Marx, I'm sure, that late nineteenth-century America was characterized by industrial abuse and exploitation; Marx would agree with Segal that there were some bright spots where humane ideals and technology were not in conflict. The reason for the apparent contradiction, of course, is that American society is complex. Even the largest of tendencies and movements affect our population in a stepped, uneven manner, with varying force, at different times, or not at all.

Late nineteenth-century utopians *write*, Segal notes; they do not found communities. This he explains, marks "the passing of the confidence of serious utopians that American society could be effectively reformed by the continued creation and duplication of small-scale communities. . . . Instead, serious utopians began to turn to" utopian writings. The alteration in tone also "brought a new emphasis on differentiation, specializing, hierarchy, complexity, organization," and so forth because of an alteration in intellectual models for understanding the modern world. Segal offers next a series of comparisons of utopianism to the conservation movement, the movement for scientific management, alterations in the form of government itself, city planning, regional planning (especially T.V.A.), national planning, the World's Fair movement (which was very "technology-can-solve-everything"-minded), and Tech-

nocracy. There is no question that Segal is right in seeing similarities, though, again, his selection of examples for comparison is necessarily arbitrary. One could think of others that would work as well and perhaps some that would not work at all. Even in these more interesting latter portions of his book, however, Segal retains an odd habit of talking around, rather than analyzing, his evidence. One hates to say so many negative things about a basically intelligent and useful book, but much of *Technological Utopianism* seems, like chapter seven, jejune. That chapter tells us that the social effect of technology has not been what the utopians hoped because life is crummy in modern America.

This leads Segal to Harold Loeb's *Life in a Technocracy: What It Might Be Like* (1933) and the works of other more recent writers who urge a more humane technological society based on a leveling-off of technological change. He also covers Simone Weil, who hoped "to utilize modern technology to create, in effect, the idealized state of the artisan in pre-industrial times," as well as Herman Kahn, Marshal McLuhan, Lewis Mumford, and others. Here Segal comes close to advocating the idea of "appropriate technology," which is, I guess, where he lives, for he entitles chapter nine "Appropriate Visions/The Uses of Utopianism Today."

The title of this book tells little of what is in it. The twenty-five utopians whose lives are outlined briefly in the appendix serve really as a jumping-off place for discussions of this and that. We never get to know them well. Moreover, the focus is only sometimes on the "American Culture" named in the title. Yet *Technological Utopianism in American Culture* is useful, fruitful, and intelligent in its best passages. I think of a parallel case, a ponderous dissertation on a related topic by Elmer Suderman (Kansas, 1961): Suderman examined eighty-odd dull religious novels, from the same era in which Segal's utopians wrote, to check out their social ideas and values. The conclusions—not the thesis itself—were interesting, even surprising, but Suderman had mercy on readers "out there" and said what needed saying in a couple of fine articles. Chicago editors did a bright author a disservice by letting the present book through in this form.

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John Frederick Kensett: An American Master. Edited by John Paul Driscoll and John K. Howat. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., for the Worcester Art Museum. 1985. Pp. 208. Appendix; exhibition checklist; 98 black-and-white illustrations; 48 color plates. \$35.00.)

The beautiful *John Frederick Kensett: An American Master* is the catalogue for the exhibition of the same name that opened last spring at the Worcester Art Museum, spent the summer at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York until 19 January 1986. It is also a monograph on Kensett's life and works which is likely to remain definitive for a long time to come.

The book is more coherently organized than some catalogues in its clear division of critical labor among four essays: John K. Howat surveys Kensett's life in its historical and social context in "Kensett's World"; John Paul Driscoll focuses more on the paintings themselves in "From Burin to Brush: The Development of a Painter"; Oswaldo Rodriguez Roque assesses "The Last Summer's Work"; and Dianne Dwyer, as conservator of many of the works exhibited, reports discoveries she made about "John F. Kensett's Painting Technique." Thus the book is more useful as a reference work or teaching text than it would be if it attempted to cover everything in one long essay.

Howat's essay reminds us of Kensett's central position among nineteenth-century American artists. Counting among his friends nearly every other American painter of note, he was first a "Hudson River" painter influenced by Cole and Durand and later a preeminent "luminist" along with Lane, Heade, and Gifford. We see his single-minded devotion to his art (never married, he once said he was "wedded to the arts"), his crucial role in founding the Metropolitan Museum, and his financial success. One strength of this essay is its richness of detail; we get a marvelously full impression of the art world through which Kensett moved.

Another of Howat's contributions is in addressing what might be now be called the problem of luminism. Rather than simply repeating (as so many have done) the provocative connection first