

# Unmachined Words: A Reading List to Keep You Human

*A room without books is like a body without soul.*

*Marcus Tullius Cicero*

In our [recent interview](#) with [Tessa Carman](#), we asked her what books she would include if she were to organize a seminar for high schoolers and adults on the Machine. We shared her list on notes and [invited readers to add their book recommendations](#) on the Machine. [Mary Harrington](#) kindly [picked up on this invitation](#) and shared her syllabus for the summer seminar at Harvard's [Abigail Adams Institute](#), in turn asking her readers to add their suggestions for "readings on the philosophy, history, or demonology of the Machine". We collected all of the reader's responses and are now sharing with you the resulting rich collection of modern and classic fiction and non-fiction books.

In an age of machines, books can keep us human. The books on the following list have one thing in common: they point us back to our essential nature as embodied, grounded, relational, and spiritual. We hope you find something in this collection that points you away from technology and back to reality and encourages you to read, think, discuss, and thus spread seeds of sanity.

The books on this list have been curated by ourselves, [Tessa Carman](#), [Mary Harrington](#), and motivated readers. We recommend these books as consideration, not as endorsements for everything they say. This is not a complete list, and you will likely think of ones that you would add. The focus however is not just on "great" books, but ones that highlight the negative impact of technology on what it means to be a person, the importance of digital minimalism, or something that metaphorically expresses the dangers of technology as one of its primary themes.

We arranged the lists into four categories:

- **Non-fiction - Modern**
- **Non-fiction - Classic**
- **Social Media / Tech - Impact and Management**
- **Fiction - Modern & Classic**

The books are alphabetized according to author and we also included the publication dates (which range from 1854 to 2024!). You can find these books listed below or you can browse them in our brand-new [Unconformed Bookshop](#), as far as we know, the only one dedicated to books on unmaking.

## Non-Fiction - Modern

Carr, Nicholas. [\*The Glass Cage: How Our Computers Are Changing Us\*](#) (2015)

Coperthwaite, William. [\*A Handmade Life: In Search of Simplicity\*](#) (2007)

[Crawford](#), Matthew B. [\*Shop Class as Soulcraft\*](#) (2010)

Crawford, Matthew B. [\*The World Beyond Your Head\*](#) (2016)

Gatto, John Taylor. [\*Weapons of Mass Instruction\*](#) (2010)

Desmet, Mattias. [\*The Psychology of Totalitarianism\*](#) (2022)

Fleming., David. [\*Lean Logic: A Dictionary for the Future and How to Survive It\*](#) (2016)

Fukuoka, Masanobu. [\*The One-Straw Revolution\*](#) (2009)

Haidt, Jonathan and Greg Lukianoff<sup>2</sup>. [\*The Coddling of the American Mind\*](#) (2019)

[Harrington](#), Mary. [\*Feminism Against Progress\*](#) (2023)

Langlands, Alexander. [\*Cræft: An Inquiry Into the Origins and True Meaning of Traditional Crafts\*](#) (2019)

McGilchrist, Iain. [\*The Master and His Emissary\*](#) (2009) and *The Matter With Things* (2021)

Morozov, Evgeny. [\*To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism\*](#) (2014)

Naydler, Jeremy. [\*In the Shadow of the Machine\*](#) (2018)

Norton, Albert Jr. [\*The Mountain and the River: Genesis, Postmodernism, and the Machine\*](#) (2023)

Lanier, Jaron. [\*You Are Not a Gadget\*](#) (2011)

Sax, David. [\*The Revenge of Analog\*](#) (2017)

Smaje, Chris. [\*A Small Farm Future: Making the Case for a Society Built Around Local Economies, Self-Provisioning, Agricultural Diversity and a Shared Ear\*](#) (2020)

Solnit, Rebecca. [\*River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West\*](#) (2004)

## Non-Fiction - Classic

Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935)

Berry, Wendell. [\*The Unsettling of America\*](#) (1977)

Berry, Wendell. [\*The World Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry\*](#) (2019)

Burnham, James. [\*The Managerial Revolution\*](#) (1941)

Chesterton, G.K. [\*The Outline of Sanity\*](#) (Ch.IV "Some Aspects of Machinery") (1926)

Ellul, Jacques. [\*The Technological Society\*](#) (1967) and [\*Propaganda\*](#) (1962)

Guénon, René. *The Crisis of the Modern World* (1927)

Heidegger, Martin. [\*The Question Concerning Technology\*](#) (1954)

Illich, Ivan. [\*Deschooling Society\*](#) (1971)

Jünger, Georg Friedrich. *The Failure of Technology: Perfection Without Purpose* (1946)

Kohák, Erazim. [\*The Embers and the Stars\*](#) (1987)

Leopold, Aldo. [\*A Sand County Almanac\*](#) (1949)

Lewis, C.S. [\*The Abolition of Man\*](#) (1943)

Macintyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue* (1981)

Marx, Karl. [\*Das Kapital\*](#) ch.15 "Machinery and Large-Scale Industry" (1867)

McLuhan, Marshall. [\*Understanding Media\*](#) ch. 1-3 (1964) and [\*The Medium is the Massage\*](#) (1967)

Mumford, Lewis. [\*The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Development\*](#) (1967)

Mumford, Lewis. [\*The Myth of the Machine: The Pentagon of Power\*](#) (1970)

Ong, Walter J. [\*Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word\*](#) (1982)

Polanyi, Karl. [\*The Great Transformation\*](#), ch. 3, 4 (1944)

Postman, Neil. [\*Amusing Ourselves to Death\*](#) (1985) and [\*Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology\*](#) (1992)

Schmitt, Carl. *The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations* (1929) and [\*The Concept of the Political\*](#) (1932)

Weizenbaum, Joseph. *Computer Power and Human Reason* (1976) and [\*Islands in the Cyberstream: Seeking Havens of Reason in a Programmed Society\*](#) (2006)

# Social Media / Tech - Impact and Management

Barba-Kay, Anton. [\*A Web of Our Own Making: The Nature of Digital Formation\*](#) (2023)

Brende, Eric. [\*Better Off: Flipping the Switch on Technology\*](#) (2005)

Carr, Nicholas. [\*The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains\*](#) (2020)

Crouch, Andy. [\*The Life We Are Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World\*](#) (2022)

Crouch, Amy and Andy Crouch. [\*My Tech-Wise Life: Growing Up and Making Choices in a World of Devices\*](#) (2020)

Crouch, Andy. [\*The Tech-Wise Family\*](#) (2017)

Gazzaley, Adam and Larry Rosen. [\*The Distracted Mind: Ancient Brains in a High-Tech World\*](#) (2017)

Haidt, Jonathan. [\*The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness\*](#) (2024)

Hari, Johann. [\*Stolen Focus\*](#) (2023)

Lanier, Jaron. [\*Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now\*](#) (2019)

Newport, Cal. [\*Slow Productivity: The Lost Art of Accomplishment Without Burnout\*](#) (2024)

Newport, Cal. [\*Digital Minimalism\*](#) (2019)

Turkle, Sherry. [\*Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other\*](#) (2012)

Turkle, Sherry. [\*Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age\*](#) (2016)

Wu Song, Felicia. [\*Restless Devices: Recovering Personhood, Presence, and Place in the Digital Age\*](#) (2021)

## Fiction - Modern & Classic

Berry, Wendell. [\*Jayber Crow\*](#) (2001)

Bradbury, Ray. [\*Fahrenheit 451\*](#) (1953)

Chesterton, G.K. [\*The Napoleon of Notting Hill\*](#) (written in 1904, set in 1984)

Dick, Philip K. [\*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?\*](#) (1968)

Dickens, Charles. [\*Hard Times\*](#) (1854)

Eggers, Dave. [\*The Circle\*](#) (2014) and sequel [\*The Every\*](#) (2021)

Forster, E.M. [\*The Machine Stops\*](#) (1909)

Gaskovski, Peco. [\*Exogenesis\*](#) (2023)

Huxley, Aldous. [\*Brave New World\*](#) (1932)

James, P.D. [\*Children of Men\*](#) (1992)

Jünger, Ernst. [\*The Glass Bees\*](#) (1957)

Kingsnorth, Paul. [\*Alexandria\*](#) (2020)

Lewis, C.S. *Cosmic Trilogy*, esp. [\*That Hideous Strength\*](#) (1945)

McCarthy, Cormac. [\*The Road\*](#) (2007)

Miller, Walter M. [\*A Canticle for Leibowitz\*](#) (1959)

Morris, William. [\*News from Nowhere\*](#) (1890)

O'Brien, Michael D. [\*Voyage to Alpha Centauri\*](#) (2017)

Orwell, George. [\*1984\*](#) (1949)

Shelley, Mary. [\*Frankenstein\*](#) (1818)

Tolkien, J.R.R. [\*The Lord of the Rings\*](#) (1954) and *On Fairy-Stories*

Zamyatin, Yevgeny. [\*We\*](#) (1924)

## Unmachining Words on Substack

Both [School of the Unconformed](#) and [Pilgrims in the Machine](#) focus on navigating life in the machine age. If you are not yet familiar with our writings, take a dip into the archives [here](#) and [here](#). Some particularly notable posts include, [The 3Rs of Unmachining: Guideposts for an Age of Technological Upheaval](#), [Sowing Anachronism: How to be Weird in Public, and Private](#), [From Blackboards to Black Vestments: Where Do We Put Our Trust?](#), and [Build a Songbird Compass: Agency, Communion, and Tech](#).

- [The Abbey of Misrule](#) by [Paul Kingsnorth](#) - You can find a guide to Kingsnorth's Machine writings in his post [The Tale of the Machine](#). Some of the essays free to all readers include: [What Progress Wants](#), [The Fourth Revolution](#), [Watch the Great Fall](#), [The Universal](#), and [The Neon God](#). His writings are well worth your time and support.

- [The Convivial Society](#) by [L. M. Sacasas](#) explores “the relationship between technology and society. It’s grounded in the history and philosophy of technology, with more than a sprinkling of media ecology. No hot takes, only shamelessly deliberate considerations of the meaning of technology for human experience.” Always a deep and thoughtful read.
  - [After Babel](#) by [Jonathan Haidt](#) offers research focused on social media and invites feedback to help make sense of the “momentous sociological, cultural, and epistemological changes that occurred in many nations in the early 2010s, which gave us the chaos, fragmentation, and outrage that began to set in by the mid-2010s.”
  - [Reactionary Feminist](#) by [Mary Harrington](#) “documents the collision between the values we carried over from previous eras, and the technologies we’re unleashing in the current one.”
  - [Over the Field](#) by [Hadden Turner](#) has been dubbed Substack’s very own young version of Wendell Berry.
  - [Archedelia](#) by [Matthew B. Crawford](#). He describes his writings as having “archaeological character, drawing on intellectual and political history to understand the present, in all of its weirdness.” Always worth your time.
  - [The McLuhan Newsletter](#) by Marshall McLuhan’s grandson [Andrew McLuhan](#), which aims to “provide access to McLuhan work, particularly in culture and technology and media studies, and specifically to highlight lesser-known work and that which is relevant and useful today”.
  - Also see [The Examine](#) by [Seth Haines](#) and [The Absent-Minded Professor](#) by [Josh Brake](#)
- 

**Are there any books that you would add to our lists?**

**Which ones have you found particularly insightful?**

**Which ones could you not connect with at all?**

**Please share your reflections in the comments section!**

*If you found this post helpful (or hopeful), and if you would like to support our work of putting together a book on “The Making of UnMachine Minds”, please consider supporting our work by becoming a paid subscriber, or simply show your appreciation with a like, restack, or share.*