Turning Away from Technology: A New Vision for the 21st Century
Stephanie Mills, editor

Reviewed by David W. Gill  www.ethixbiz.com

Stephanie Mills, Michigan-based ecological activist and author, did a magnificent job turning a 750-page transcript of 40 hours of discussion into this 250-page book. The forty hours was spread over a 1993 event in San Francisco on "Megatechnology and Development" and a 1994 sequel in Devon (UK) on "Megatechnology and Economic Globalization." Perhaps 15 of the 46 invited participants were at both conferences.

Inevitably, such discussions (and the books that result) have an eclectic, rambling character. Breadth wins over depth. The value of this book is mainly in giving outsiders a generous sampling of a certain kind of technology criticism. The participants included two or three formidable intellectuals (e.g., Langdon Winner), some important prophets (e.g., Wendell Berry, Kirkpatrick Sale, Jeremy Rifkin), filmmaker Godfrey Reggio, ecofeminist Maria Mies, and a variety of other activists, thinkers, farmers, and eccentric (e.g., Ralph Metzner: "From psychedelics my interests have changed to sacred plants and their uses in shamanism..." p. 132) from around the world.

While there are some flashes of insight and the concluding list of "78 reasonable questions to ask about any technology" is pretty good, the book as a whole is disappointing. Too often the "discussion" careens between rants against television, global business, Western civilization, Modernity, and males---and self-congratulatory testimonies to one's virtuously alternative, New Age lifestyle. What the enemy is---or the alternative---is never very clear. This sort of discussion makes its participants feel better, but communicates far too much ignorance and arrogance to those not already insiders in the club.