

Tech giants get lecture on perils of gadget worship

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An image released by NASA shows the space shuttle Atlantis on its way home on July 21, 2011, seen from the International Space Station. Silicon Valley giants at the prestigious TED innovation conference on Tuesday were warned that the worship of technology will ruin the world before it saves it.

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Activist and author Paul Gilding made a case for the peril of obsession with [modern technology](#) and how lust for the latest gadgets is distracting people from acting to stop global disasters such as climate change.

"The Earth is full," argued Gilding, author of "The Great [Disruption](#)," in which he reasons that as technology drives efficiency and economic

growth it powers breakneck consumption that the planet cannot endure.

"It is full of us. It is full of our stuff, full of our waste, and full of our demands," he said. "We have created too much stuff. This is not a philosophical statement, this is just science."

The world's population has topped seven billion people and resources are being devoured faster than they can be replenished, he said.

"Our approach is simply unsustainable," said Gilding, the former director of [Greenpeace](#) International. "Thanks to those pesky [laws of physics](#), it will stop. The system will break."

On a TED stage famous for presentations from leading entrepreneurs developing ways to make the world a better place, Gilding argued that technology was making matters worse.



Protesters affiliated with Occupy Wall Street demonstrate outside Thurgood Marshall U.S. Courthouse on January 20 in New York City. Activist and author Paul Gilding made a case Tuesday for the peril of obsession with modern technology and how lust for gadgets is distracting people from acting to stop global disasters. He cited the Occupy movement as a sign of the collapse of modern life.

With China and other developing countries booming, in many cases thanks to technology, the world's resources are being rapidly devoured, the author argued.

"The Earth doesn't care what we need," Gilding said. "[Mother Nature](#) doesn't negotiate; she just sets rules and administers consequences."

He cited [national debt](#) crises, the Occupy Wall Street movement and rising [global temperatures](#) as signs the breakdown of modern life is underway.

"We've had 50 years of warnings and pretty much done nothing to change course," he lamented, his eyes watering with tears.

"Those people who think technology will get us through are right; they are only missing that it takes a crisis to get us going... We really do love a good crisis and this one is a master."

The head of the nonprofit X Prize Foundation, which is devoted to technology breakthroughs for the good of mankind, was then brought on stage to provide a counter-point to Gilding's dark vision.



Peter Diamandis, founder and chairman of X Prize Foundation, speaks at a 2010 press conference. Diamandis argued at the prestigious TED innovation

conference Tuesday that rapidly improving sensors, robotics, digital medicine, synthetic biology and computing power in the Internet "cloud" provided hope for a better future.

"I'm not saying that we don't have our share of problems -- [climate change](#), species extinction, resource shortage -- but ultimately we have the ability to see problems way in advance and knock them down," Peter Diamandis said.

He argued that rapidly improving sensors, robotics, digital medicine, synthetic biology and computing power in the Internet "cloud" provided hope for a better future.

He added that a Slingshot device about the size of a college dorm room refrigerator and capable of cheaply making drinking water from even the most tainted of sources was being tested with the backing of a beverage company.

Diamandis also heads Singularity University in [Silicon Valley](#), which serves as a training ground and academic boot camp for entrepreneurs, inventors and technology industry executives.

The strongest defense against overpopulation is making people educated and healthy, he said, adding: "I have extraordinary confidence in the innovators who are out there."

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