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STS.464 Technology and the Literary Imagination  
Spring 2008

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Program in Science, Technology, and Society  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

STS.464: Technology and the Literary Imagination

Spring 2008

Professors Rosalind Williams and Leo Marx

Student responses to the question:

**“What do you think about when you think about technology?”**

Newness

Change

Physical mechanism

Transformative power

Warfare

Infrastructure

“progress”

open

“dystopian” – where progress goes awry

Value-laden; polarizing

Imaginative

Entrepreneurship

The market

Efficiency

Modern/urban expansion

Speed as pace of life

Biotechnology

Collapsing human--non-human binary

Playing God

Communications

Mobility

Data-mining and representation

Miniaturization

Comfort / ease

Efficiency

Sustainability

Electronic

McLuhan – extensions of man

Extensions of man’s abilities

Amplification of human reach

Ability to sense and act on the world

Enlargement of “foot print” of the individual, and in aggregate, of the group.

Tools, but tools that amplify sensory reach, more than physical strength (like water wheel, mills, etc.)

Reductions of human/environmental bonding.

Human-built

Mechanical

Functional (utilitarian?)

Acting on

Innovation

Evolving

Complicates/simplifies

Performative

Customizable

Systems

Recording

Communication

Wires

Tools

Fast

Computer

Typewriter

Storage

Preservatives

Refrigeration

Weapons

Invention

Entertainment

IT

Novelty

Upwards and onwards. Technology (almost) never drops.

Tools – but this is sort of quaint and retro.

Techno-cheerleading

It's sort of like motherhood; nobody's against it except \_\_\_\_\_ [illegible].

Inscrutability; it's not a technology if you can figure it out. Then it just is \_\_\_\_\_

[illegible].

Where is your baseline? An upgrade to my parents' \_\_\_\_\_ [illegible] is different than

\_\_\_\_\_ [illegible] a computer to me.

Device

Progress

Making our lives easier

Expertly designed

Manipulation – ways in which humans can manipulate the world, as well as each other.

Fancy tools

Calculators / black boxes

Engineered things

Robots