

Paul Josephson
Luddite Rantings: A Historical Critique of Big Technology
Colby College, 2003

Description of Course

Ubiquitous technology. Labor-saving technology. Technology that improves the quality of life. Americans and technology. Americans accept technological innovation without a second thought. We stand in awe of the technological achievements of the modern world: the factory, the internal combustion engine, electronic communications, jet airplanes, and genetically engineered plants and animals. Yet Americans rarely think about the changes that technology requires in the way we organize our lives, their economic and political institutions. We never consider the ethical and moral implications of technology because we are so enamored of the consumer goods the modern world gives us. Americans willingly change their lives to adapt to technology, not the other way around, and the quality of life has declined. Adopting a technologically determinist argument, the instructor will subject to withering criticism the way in which westerners, and in particular Americans, have embraced such technologies as automobiles, computers, reproductive devices, rockets, and reactors, with nary a thought about their ethical, moral, political, or environmental consequences. Students will be encouraged to argue.

Course Requirements

Attendance and class participation:	15%
exam:	15%
Two 1 to 2 page thought pieces:	15%
Final exam:	25%
Two essays, 15% each:	30%
TOTAL (not surprisingly)	100%

A term paper may be substituted for one thought piece and the final exam if you make arrangements with me before March 5, 2002.

Reading

Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man
Dalton Trumbo, Johnny Got his Gun
Keith Bradsher, High and Mighty: SUVs
Clifford Stoll, Silicon Snake Oil
John Hersey, Hiroshima
Paul Josephson, Red Atom (optional)
Eric Schlosser, Fast Food Nation
Lewis Mumford, From the Ground Up

Reading and Schedule of Lectures: All reading should be completed before class time in the week it is assigned

Week 1: February 5

Introductory Rantings

Theories of Technology: Republicanism, Mediocratization, Technology as Social Force

Reading: Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, 1-83.

Week 2: February 12

More Theories of Technology: Marx, Winner, Ellul

Capitalism, Technology, Engineering

Reading: Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, 1-83, 123-169.

First thought piece due Feb. 19

Week 3: February 19

Automobility I: Ford As Racist Patriarch, Automobiles as Determinist Technology

The Military and Technology

Reading: Dalton Trumbo, Johnny Got his Gun. Entire. You'll have a hard time putting this book down. It should lead to depression.

Week 4: February 26:

Dystopian Visions

Fordism, Taylorism and Technocracy

Reading: Keith Bradsher, High and Mighty: SUVs, 3-60.

Lewis Mumford, From the Ground Up, 3-19.

First essay due March 5.

Week 5: March 5

Atomic Foundations: Value-neutral Technology? Use-Abuse?

Atomic Foundations: Bombs

Reading: John Hersey, Hiroshima, entire.

Week 6: March 12

Atomic Futures: Nuclear Airplanes, Nuclear Chickens and Nuclear Wyoming

Film: Atomic Café

Reading: Paul Josephson, Red Atom, 81-146. On reserve; optional for purchase.

Midterm

March 14: STS Talk on Luddism, 4 p. m.. You must attend.

Week 7: March 19

Automobility II: From Henry Ford to the Bushes's Gulf War
Sewers and Garbage

Reading: Bradsher, High and Mighty, 61-92.
Lewis Mumford, From the Ground Up, 108-155.

Second thought piece due April 2.

Week 8: April 2

Suburbanization: Guardrails, SUVs, MickeyDs, Race, Gender, You Name It
Computers Can Think, What About Humans? Webs, Mice, Motherboards, Repetitive Use Injuries

Reading: Eric Schlosser, Fast Food Nation, 59-88, 169-190.

Clifford Stoll, Silicon Snake Oil , 60-69, 155-173.

Week 9: April 9

Computers and Privacy
Gigantomania, Display Value, and Missile Envy

Reading: Clifford Stoll, Silicon Snake Oil, 15-42.
Paul Josephson, Red Atom, 6-46.

Second essay due April 16.

Week 10: April 16

Humans and Technology: V-Chips, Viagra and Videos
Humans and Technology: HGI and Stemcells

Reading: Eric Schlosser, Fast Food Nation, 32-57.
Sheldon Krimsky, Biotechnics and Society, 21-42, 113-132, 155, 180.
Clifford Stoll, Silicon Snake Oil, 42-59.

Week 11: April 23

Diatribes I: Alphabet Soup: Elk Snowmobile Syndrome
The Space Station Reconsidered: "To boldly go..." and Other Split Infinitives

Reading: Eric Schlosser, Fast Food Nation, 133-166, 193-222.
Clifford Stoll, Silicon Snake Oil, 69-89.
Handouts from congressional testimony and the press, on space, pro, con, and con-game.

Week 12: April 30

Technological Failure: TMI, Chernobyl, the Shuttle Disaster
Film: "Suicide Mission to Chernobyl"

Reading: Ralph Nader, Unsafe at Any Speed, hand out..

Bradsher, High and Mighty, 149-237

Paul Josephson, Red Atom, 243-71.

Week 13: May 7

Diatribes II: Ode to a Weedwacker

Oh, For a Society Based on Neo-Luddite Values

Lewis Mumford, From the Ground Up, 201-18.

Clifford Stoll, Silicon Snake Oil, 174-216.

Eric Schlosser, Fast Food Nation 111-132.

Take home final exam due May 14, 2003, at 10 am at my office.