

# STS.464 :: The Intellectual History of Technology

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The Enlightenment and the Belief in Progress

15 February 2005

## Initial Discussion

- binary distinction of use/misuse of the term “technology”
- how do you define a “misuse” / “misusage”?
  - verbal usage, meaning
  - use for purposes

It is a misusage to apply the term “technology” anachronistically; however, the course is set up anachronistically...

Intertwined nature of the terms **technology** and **progress**. They are closely bound in origins.

“Technology” as part of a constellation of terminology:

- knowledge
- power
- control
- comfort
- progress
- history
- science
- nature

History, science, technology → emerge almost as entities with trajectories, the “vast collective projects”

→ **reification**: ascribing agency to an abstraction

Discussion of technology is different in different languages.

The term “scientist” (a practitioner of science, as opposed to science itself) emerges, curiously enough, around the same time as the term “technology.”

## The Education of Henry Adams

Adams family → mercantile aristocracy

Henry Adams finds himself drawn to the Southern scene: pastoral, classical. Why is he drawn to a slave culture? Didn't like businessmen! Class issue, debate over manufactures = “State Street”

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Sees himself as outside, the other; outside the dualities to which he constantly alludes (Brooks versus Adams, Boston versus Quincy, &c.)? Washington perhaps offers him a third path, apart from (rejecting?) the Adams and Brooks sides.

Adams is full of this inner conflict. Continual use of this linguistic device: “—and yet...” Third person voice creates an aesthetic distance, a nineteenth-century mood well-put by Matthew Arnold as “wandering between two worlds: one dead, one waiting to be born.”

Relation between identity and place → Who am I as mapped against the world? Globalization...

## **The Debate over Manufactures**

Morality and values woven into political/economic debate.

Where is “technology” in these readings? → factories, manufactures, industry, agriculture

Land and geography as they relate to technology, seeds of the “American character,” prefiguring “frontier” discourse → technology as frontier. Speaks to an American discourse and aesthetic that Tench Coxe understood.

## **Kant, Comte, and Rousseau**

→ technologies of production

→ technologies of communication

→ technologies of infrastructure

The Enlightenment → systems of communication and transportation. Highest value placed on systems of *thought*.

Belief in ability to create the kind of society you want.