

STS.464 :: The Intellectual History of Technology

Ecological Crisis

3 May 2005

Discussion of Readings and Papers

Hiroshima

- understatement
- the newness of the device
- the mystery to the victims (secrecy)
- the persistence of the effects
- no symbolism, no allegory

Adam's Paper

- anticipation and promise → dread
- phase shift
- "experiment" → world as laboratory?
- horror
- Christianity part → the horrific as close to the sublime (and therefore the divine?)
- bomb as "natural disaster"
 - technology as a way to mask the human aspect/effects
 - human technological events can feel like natural ones
 - imagination of catastrophe
 - George Steiner's "disaster utopia"
 - an awesomeness of scale → such powerful scope, it must be natural

Melissa's Paper

- Weber → we live in a cacophony of ideas; the only ones that matter are the ones that are seized upon by social groups, the ones that are politicized.
- Power → politics

More on Hiroshima

Novels that have led to action:

1. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* → energized abolitionist movement
2. Melville's *White Jacket*, which described the flogging of seamen → led to the outlawing of the practice
3. Sinclair's *The Jungle* → led to food & drug law

Why does this book not point to any imaginable action?

Association of technology with a sense of forces out of control.

There's no call to action here.

Need for history of medicine and history of technology to meet! Medicine & tangible evidence of progress, interfacing with technology in meaningful, magical, and transformative ways.

Kateb: Why are we all so obsessed with changing this planet? We have a fear of death.

Death-fear as motive for mindless action and constant transformation.

A fear of not controlling yourself?