

TEC 154 2014S, Class 06: Stone Tools (Discussion)

Overview

- Preliminaries.
 - Note takers.
 - Admin.
- Wrapup of Whittaker.
- Small group discussions
 - New perspectives.
 - Review of other perspectives.
 - Applying perspectives to flintlocks.
 - Symbolic meaning.
- Large group reporting.

Preliminaries

Note Takers

- Friday: EG and ZS
 - You might include a few notes about your small group discussion, too.
- Monday: LG and CC
- Please make a summary of the main points of the day's class.

Admin

- Starting next week, I'll do my best to send comments on your questions to you as well as to the page.
 - I was asking you to find my responses on the questions page as a way to get you to read criticisms a bit more broadly.
- Looking ahead at readings (see the schedule)
- Today's class: Small groups (four groups of 3-4), then "big" group.
 - Handout with questions
 - One additional question (see below)
- Extra credit:
 - Convocation next Wednesday (February 5)
 - Why you should attend Convo
 - Why you should attend Rosenfield symposia
 - Friday's CS table: The ACM Code of Ethics
 - Swim meet tonight.
 - Basketball a week from Saturday.
 - Others?

Wrapup of Whittaker

[As long as it takes.]

- Are there questions you have left unanswered that I might be able to answer?

Small Group Assignment

[Until 8:35/8:40 or steam runs out]

- Identify two new questions that this week's readings/lectures suggest you ask about technologies.
- Remind yourself about the questions that Marx, Pool, and Winner want you to ask about technologies.
 - I don't care whether or not you agree with these authors.
I just want you to remember the questions they imply one should ask.
- Apply these perspectives to the flintlock gun.
- If you still have time, think about how Weinberg, Florman, and Berry might talk about flintlocks.
- If you'd like, think about a technology (other than the phone) that has symbolic meaning in your life.

Large Group Assignment

[Until 8:50]

Notes from ZS

Questions Regarding Prof. John Whittaker's Presentation

What did we find out [during the previous class] by using tools? (Ethan)

- We used stone tools. (flints)
- One was given to every student to make fire.
- Prof. Whittaker demonstrated using flint and steel, as well.
- The usage of flint and steel was central to the flintlock for a gun.

Small-Group Discussion

The task at hand: Split into groups of 3-4 and identify 2-3 new questions that this week's readings/lectures suggest you ask about technologies that we wish to study.

Discussion from the group on the right side of the room:

Question: What would some of the things that we can infer from stone tools that show evolutionary changes over time? (Sadhana)

- Response: Washburn stressed points about simple tools that led to the creation of more complex tools. (Luke)

Question: Did stone tools imply progress [like with Marx's question from his reading]? (Sadhana)

- Group consensus: Everyone agrees that they meant progress.

Question: Did steel tools imply progress? (Sadhana)

- Group consensus: Everyone agrees that they meant progress.
- However, the Sharp article makes it clear that advancements with technology sometimes disrupted cultures and how they function. [Example: the introduction of the steel axe in the Yir Yoront reading] (Cody)

Question: Did these artifacts have politics? (Sadhana)

- Response: Whittaker was talking about finding the remnants of the tools. But how much can you actually find out about the culture of the people who used these tools from their remnants? (Cody)
- The flintlock gun also raises questions about the future consequences of a piece of technology (Cody)

Statement: I think certain technologies were big leaps in advancements. It seems now that a lot of technologies don't represent such large leaps. (Cody)

- Reply: In the case of the flintlock gun, I feel like technology shaped society more than the opposite. (Sadhana)

Question: In relation to the gun and Marx, does improved technology mean progress?

- Response: I don't think it does in situations like the flintlock gun. It took thousands of years to create that. I don't think it really means progress that there are better guns now, I don't think it was ever established that guns are a good advancement for society. (Cody)
- After Cody's response, it is weighed whether killing people would constitute progress. No definitive conclusion is reached.

Question: Were there any indirect effects of the technology of flintlock guns? (Sadhana)

- Response: Nobody feels like they know enough about flintlock guns to discuss it properly.
- Afterwards, the potential for flintlock guns malfunctioning and injuring their users is hypothesized about; several members feel that if the flintlock guns indeed frequently malfunctioned and injured their users, then the flintlock guns would not necessarily mean progress.

Topic up for discussion: Technology is a force not entirely under human control. [from the Florman reading]

- Response: I think the flintlock gun represented the beginning of man not really being in control of technology and its evolution. (Sadhana) Topic up for discussion: Winner's reading Do Artifacts Have Politics?
- Response: What political implications did the flintlock gun have? Did only certain people have access

to the flintlock guns? [like with the situation with the buses and bridges in the reading] (Cody)

Full-Class Discussion

Question from Prof. Rebelsky: Did we get some interesting new lenses for viewing technology?

- Group at the front of the room: What is in the mind of the user of a technology when they are using it? What was in the mind of the creator of a technology? How do they differ? [re: Whittaker's reading.]
- Group on the right side of the room: We questioned about whether or not the flintlock gun represented progress. (Luke also questions how progress can actually be defined.)
- Group at the back-right part of the room: How does technology affect power dynamics? [re: Sharp's Yir Yoront reading, and how women had to ask men to use the technology.] Is there anything like that now?
- Group at the back-left part of the room: What is lost when a technology becomes/is made obsolete? [re: Whittaker, Berry readings]
- Group at the front of the room: In the context of Sharp: Should technology be imposed or acquired? [In the example of the Yir Yoront, it seems that the missionaries imposed the steel axe on the Yir Yoront; it was given to them by outside forces and had disastrous social consequences.]
- Group on the right side of the room: What are similar technologies, and what are their consequences? (Cody)
- Group at the back-right part of the room: On a developmental level, did the human development as a species advance the technology they were developing, or vice-versa? (Michael) [Response: It was argued that humans becoming a bipedal species came from their usage of tools.]
- Group at the back-left part of the room: Why do some technologies still persist after their obsolescence? (Chaya) [An example is made regarding how analog recording techniques are still popular among independent musicians (among others) today, as opposed to the more widely-accepted practice of using modern digital techniques.]

Final Thoughts

Prof. Rebelsky posits a related question from Whittaker to mull over: What is the niche that technology fills? [I intended this more as one of the lenses we should use when we see a new technology.]

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