

Technologies in Context



A bibliography and index to the works of

David E. Nye

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Essay, bibliography, and index

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Preface

People sometimes ask whether (or where) I have written about a particular subject. Each is looking for a valuable needle in the haystack of my work. This bibliography and index is my reply. The title emphasizes my conviction that technologies are best understood as being invented, developed, and used in cultural contexts.

The bibliography and index provide more details and better organization than one can get from search engines. They often present misleading or incomplete references to my work, pointing to only one or two publications, and not necessarily the most important ones on a topic. The index here lists more than 30 sub-headings under automobile, pollution, or tourism, and more than 50 under city, General Electric, photography, railroad, or technology. There are also headings for theoretical topics such as aesthetics, determinism, landscape, narrative, nature, second creation, social construction of reality, space, technological momentum, and unintended consequences. I hope this guide will save researchers time and trouble and that it will make my research more accessible.

The index covers 14 books, 38 journal articles, and 63 book contributions, or roughly 5,500 pages. The bibliography seeks to be comprehensive, and it includes additional items: 8 edited scholarly books (c. 2,000 pages), 7 textbooks (c. 1,200 pages), 6 translations of my work into other languages, 8 encyclopedia articles, 66 book reviews, 3 teaching materials, 2 interviews, 7 minor works that are difficult to obtain, and non-academic writings. These c. 4,000 pages are not indexed, except for articles I contributed to the 8 edited books.

I compiled this work while sequestered during the 2020-2021 coronavirus pandemic, when it was impossible to go out much or to travel. I was approaching my 75th birthday, and it seemed an appropriate moment to look back. I had not seen many works re-indexed here in decades. I saw what concerns persisted, what changed, and what had faded away. I have not imposed a retrospective pattern, as if I had a grand research plan and followed it for five decades. I learned by going where I had to go. The journey is not quite over. A few more publications are on the way, including *Seven Sublimes*, sent for copy editing to MIT Press in March 2021, and the biography of a nineteenth century doctor, James Dudley Gray, which is almost ready to be evaluated by a publisher.

By way of introduction, I have included the brief talk I gave when accepting the Leonardo da Vinci Medal from the Society for the History of Technology in 2005.

Odense, Denmark, March 26, 2021

Remarks on receiving the Leonardo da Vinci Medal, 2005

In 2005 I was surprised and gratified to learn that I had been selected to receive the Leonardo da Vinci Medal, the highest award one can receive from the Society for the History of Technology. I made the following remarks when receiving the award in Minneapolis, at the annual meeting of the Society for the History of Technology. There is no possibility of false humility in such a situation, for no one can measure up to the great da Vinci. Make a list of all the many things he could do, and there is not one that I can perform even remotely as well. Leonardo da Vinci mastered so many things and was so interdisciplinary that he could work with a wide range of people to realize diverse projects. Today scholars are pressured to specialize, but in his era there was an easier flow of ideas and people, a mixing of artisans and the fine arts, of church and state, of military and civilian life, of science, medicine, and technology. One finds Leonardo at one time or another involved in all of these areas.

For a modern scholar to receive a prize named after the person who embodied the ideal of the Renaissance man seems preposterous. If a historian manages to connect just a few fields, this is not remotely in the same league with what Leonardo achieved. I will never produce anything with the iconic status of the Mona Lisa, The Last Supper, or his drawing of Vitruvian Man, nor will I invent new devices, nor devise new military technologies, nor design bridges, or any of the rest of it. It is a humbling distinction to receive the Leonardo da Vinci Medal, because the more a recipient thinks about it, the less worthy one feels compared to the man for whom the prize is named. One almost longs for an award named after a less famous person, in order to withstand the comparison. Gradually, however, I have seen that it is an advantage to realize how impossible it is to live up to the name engraved on this medal. Since it is entirely hopeless to demonstrate, either before or after receiving it, that one really deserves the award, I felt released to go on doing my bumbling best. At least one can never receive an award named after an even more famous person. Leonardo puts one so completely in the shade that any other distinctions or awards cannot stir up immodest delusions. In its way, that is quite a benefit.

* * * *

I thank the prize committee and the Executive Board for this honor. There can be few places more wonderfully appropriate than Minneapolis for me to receive the Leonardo da Vinci medal. I studied for my MA and PhD at the University of Minnesota, a few miles down the Mississippi from where we are now. When I began my graduate studies here 36 years ago, I did not know that one could do a degree in the history of technology. Instead, I began a degree in American Studies. Yet, I had often browsed issues of *Technology and Culture*, because my father subscribed to that journal. A mechanical engineer, he taught

thermodynamics at Penn State and later Trinity College, Hartford. He also attended many early SHOT conferences and spent a sabbatical year in Scotland studying the history of steam engines. However, I was drawn to the humanities, and I inherited his interests without quite realizing it. The other early and lasting influence was Leo Marx, who taught me as an Amherst undergraduate. As he has done for so many other scholars, Leo showed me entirely new ways to think about technology as part of the humanities.

Yet, a life is made of accidents as well as influences. Even when a graduate student, my interests seemed elsewhere. Had you asked me then, I expected to focus on the culture of the 1920s. However, in the summer of 1970, I drove from Minneapolis to the East coast in an ancient Ford Falcon, along with Dieter, a German exchange student who was studying engineering and lived in the same building. He had purchased the Falcon as a near wreck and restored it. We took a meandering route that went through Iowa, Wisconsin, Chicago, and Montreal. When we reached Detroit, I was all for pushing on into Canada, but Dieter stubbornly insisted we stop and see a museum I had never heard of. I eventually agreed, and we went to see Henry Ford's Dearborn Village. In 1970 Ford was hardly a cultural icon for graduate students, especially students in American studies. I was interested in the New Left not the Old Right, in workers not capitalists, in the anti-war movement not the assembly line. But when we went to Ford's curious supermarket of history, I became deeply absorbed. I did not then recognize that I was destined to become a historian of technology, but the seed had been planted. When I told friends about the trip, I recalled what a good time we had in Montreal and how US immigration tore the Ford Falcon apart at the Vermont border looking for non-existent drugs. I had a lot more hair then.

Perhaps I was fated to become a historian of technology regardless of where Dieter and I went. But what if we had gone to a Tiger baseball game? Suppose that on that fateful summer day we had visited a brewery? A zoo? A department store? After my PhD on Ford, I went on to Thomas Edison, to General Electric, and to the process of electrification. There was nothing formulaic about these first four books, as each adopted a different method. Where did that methodological restlessness come from? In good part, from a wonderful professor of political science at the University of Minnesota, Mulford Q. Sibley. One president of The American Council of Learned Societies told me that Sibley was the closest thing to a living saint that he had ever run across. Sibley's specialty was the history of political thought, from ancient times to the present. He seemed to have read all the philosophers in the original. He was the greatest master of the Socratic method I have ever known, genial yet relentless, peeling away assumptions, opening up the student's mind to new thoughts. He also had a particular interest in technology and politics, and he became my PhD supervisor. There is also a connection to SHOT: Mulford Sibley and Leo Marx were colleagues at the University of Minnesota in the 1950s, and they once taught an intensive summer course together.

I do not want to suggest that my career was a series of easy steps. In retrospect, each book apparently led to the next, but my early career was fraught with near disasters in

employment. That I survived is due in good part to a special relationship forged with MIT Press. It was extraordinarily fortunate that my editor, Larry Cohen, was there for two uninterrupted decades, for he understood and encouraged my work. Starting in 1983, I wrote five books with him and signed a contract for one more. My subsequent editors were equally supportive. The faculty at MIT was crucial in shifting my focus from American Studies to the History of Technology. During a year spent there on an NEH grant in 1980-81, I first got to know Roe Smith, Roz Williams, Lindy Biggs, and many others. My old mentor, Leo Marx, also facilitated that year of change and renewal.

Finally, there was another essential ingredient in my career, again one I had not foreseen. I took a job in Denmark, where I learned to see the United States from the outside. Arriving in 1982, I expected to stay just two or three years. Instead, I became an expatriate. Why did I remain? It was more than beer, lovely furniture, and open-faced sandwiches. I wrote books to ensure my return to the US, but instead the Danes kept promoting me. And I met a wonderful Danish woman, my wife, who is here with me tonight. I owe her more than I can express.

In Denmark, my interests continued to diverge from American Studies and to converge with SHOT. My intellectual life literally found a new focus through this organization. By the late 1980s I was writing with SHOT's membership in mind as my primary audience. I found SHOT's conferences more congenial than any others, and I gradually stopped going to the American Studies meetings. Later, serving on the Executive Committee showed me in detail how special this organization is. I know of no other professional body that is as decent, caring, and humane while fostering the highest standards.

I tried to make a list of people to thank, yet it kept getting longer and was still incomplete. To be fair it would have to include helpful archivists, museum curators, my teachers, my students, and not least my readers and critics. Instead, let me thank all the members of SHOT, present and absent, especially my father. Had it not been for SHOT's conferences and journal my intellectual life would have been much impoverished. My father predisposed me to the subject, Leo Marx kindled the spark, Dieter dragged me into Greenfield Village, and Mulford Sibley challenged me to think theoretically about technology and culture. But SHOT created the intellectual milieu and encouraged the scholarship. You have given me this honor, but it belongs as well to the members who nurtured me, educated me, encouraged me and read my work. As I receive this honor, I hope I can help do for the next generation what you have done for me. I am proud to receive The Leonardo da Vinci Medal, but it is not so much the token of my achievement, as it is a symbol of SHOT's supportive culture and capacity for renewal. Thank you.

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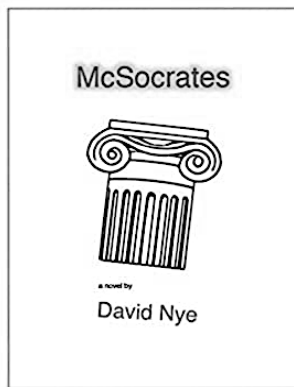
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Book reviews for the *Minnesota Daily* while a graduate student, 1969–1974

Newspaper articles in Danish. These usually dealt with US current affairs and are of little lasting interest.

More than four hundred blog posts, available at *After the American Century*
<http://aftertheamericancentury.blogspot.com/>



McSocrates is a satirical novel about a small college in upstate New York, during autumn 1999. Available at <https://www.amazon.com/McSocrates-Socrates-College-David-Nye/dp/1717921574>

When Michelle Jensen gets her first teaching position at Socrates College in upstate New York, she is not looking for love or excitement, but quiet research time. But life is what happens while you are making other plans. The college plans a \$100 million digital transformation, which many faculty and students resist, and she is drawn into the conflict. Michelle meets Ricardo Ghee, a glamorous consultant; Simon Meintz, an émigré Austrian professor who reportedly speaks Belgian; Betty Thayer, a savvy social worker; Mad Zilo, a student who wears only black and white clothes and can fix any device; autocratic President Holloway, bent on transforming the college; Alvin Brator, dazzling billionaire college donor, and many more. As the conflict intensifies, Michelle finds herself at the center of a national media event, and she is drawn to someone she ought to detest.

Additional volumes concerning Michelle and the college are in preparation.

Index

This is an index to 101 articles and book contributions and to fourteen books, in all about 5500 pages. Because index classification systems used in these works varied, the categories had to be harmonized, and some re-indexing was necessary. Subjects with many page references, such as Energy or Nature, had to be subdivided, as they otherwise would have been long, unhelpful lists.

References to books refer to pagination, but references to essays do not. Instead, they use the numbers assigned to **articles** and **book contributions** in the bibliography that precedes this index, prefixed by “**abc.**” Thus, **abc24** refers to:

24. “Path Insistence: Comparing European and American Attitudes Toward Energy.” 1999. *Journal of International Affairs*. 53:1, 129–148.

Book title abbreviations are in the list below. For example, the following example shows where Henry Adams was cited in eight works.

Adams, Henry, **A2C** 261–270, 273–282, 292; **Illu** 117, 123, 173; **TMat** 99; **ATSu** 172, 148; **N&S** viii, 76, 83, 120; **Frd** 39, 85; **EIAm** 143, 166, 284, 346; **CAL** 70

Abbreviations used for book titles in the index

Abbreviation	Title and year of publication
A2C	America as Second Creation (2003)
AAL	America's Assembly Line (2013)
ATSu	American Technological Subline (1994)
CAL	Conflicted American Landscapes (2021)
CPow	Consuming Power (1998)
Edsn	The Invented Self (1983)
Elam	Electrifying America (1990)
Env	The Environment Humanities (2017)
Frd	Henry Ford: Ignorant Idealist (1979)
Illu	American Illuminations (2018)
IWor	Image Worlds (1985)
LgtO	When the Lights Went Out (2010)
N&S	Narratives and Spaces (1997)
TMat	Technology Matters (2006)

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Abbreviations used in the index

Abbreviation	Title and year of publication
A2C	America as Second Creation (2003)
AAL	America's Assembly Line (2013)
ATSu	American Technological Subline (1994)
CPow	Consuming Power (1998)
CAL	Conflicted American Landscapes (2021)
Edsn	The Invented Self (1983)
Elam	Electrifying America (1990)
Env	The Environment Humanities (2017)
Frd	Henry Ford: Ignorant Idealist (1979)
Illu	American Illuminations (2018)
IWor	Image Worlds (1985)
LgtO	When the Lights Went Out (2010)
N&S	Narratives and Spaces (1997)
TMat	Technology Matters (2006)

