SESSION 9: TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM
Technological Determinism: What is it?

- Cultural Evolutionism?
- US “machinism” (see *The Machine Age in America, 1918–1941*, by Richard Guy Wilson)
- the innocence of the native
- “We could step in and out of different media worlds, different periods of time”; “It was possible with the greatest of ease, with just an outboard motor and a dug out, to go right up into prehistory where you actually saw stone axes being used, and not by choice”
- no Indigenous photography, *just photography*
- Technology determines the scale and pace of human interaction—technology alters time-space
- Technology produces social effects
- Technology produces cultural effects
- Technology produces psychological effects
Technological Determinism: Not a Theory of Cultural Imperialism

→ Carpenter: “I think media are so powerful they swallow cultures. I think of them as invisible environments, which surround and destroy old environments. Sensitivity to problems of culture conflict and conquest becomes meaningless here for media play no favorites; they conquer all cultures.”

Technological Determinism: A Theory of the Imperialization of Culture
Carpenter: “The results [of his experiments with putting cameras in the hands of Papua New Guinea natives who had never seen cameras before] generally tell more about the medium employed than about the cultural background of the author or cameraman. In each case, I had hoped the informant would present his own culture in a fresh way, and perhaps even use the medium itself in a new way. I was wrong. What I saw was literacy and film. These media swallow culture. The old culture was there all right, but no more than residue at the bottom of a barrel. I think it requires enormous sophistication—media sophistication—before anyone can use print or film to preserve and present one’s cultural heritage, even one’s cultural present. Sensitive autobiographies and films come from men of the utmost media sophistication, men un-housed in any single culture or medium.”
Where did the technology come from? Who made it? Why? What about agency?

→ “how they [technologies] are used that counts, is the numble stance of the technological idiot….The ‘content’ of writing or print is speech, but the reader is almost entirely unaware either of print or of speech”