

# The Shock of the Old

David Edgerton

2007

# Kitty Hawk to X43 in 100 years

- NASA X-43A space airplane
  - From 7 mph to Mach seven
  - Based on scramjet technology 1950s!
- Steam power more important in 1900 than 1800
- US still uses some 50-year old bombers
- What 'old' technology do you use??
- Hammers;electric drills
- Since 1960, more bicycles produced than cars

- New technologies of poverty
  - They know what helps them- cell phones
  - Fewer labor saving devices
  - Spreading unplanned shantytowns
  - Famous innovators (Gates) are lionized, but not IKEA founder
- Communications technology brings people together, but would technology of destruction do the same?
- Would nuclear weapons force peace?
- New technologies could emancipate downtrodden; capitalist and socialist could merge

- What are the most significant technologies of 20th century?
- Has the world become a Global Village?
- Has culture been swamped by technology?
- Are effects of tech, revolutionary or conservative?
- Has technology transformed war?
- Think of technology as ‘things’; more direct connection to our world, rather than tech world

- Our future-oriented rhetoric underestimates past
- Each successive decade is less productive than previous
- Past 30 years, economies declined as some grew
- Sub-Saharan 1980 \$700 p/cap; \$500 in 2000
- Malaria more common, AIDS ravaging

- Spinning wheels, churns, etc phased out,
- 2001, reverted to ‘old’ ways, to re-employ people!
- When USSR left, Cuba expanded use of oxen; why?
- Author argues both for importance of ‘old’, but also new ways of looking at tech
- Most countries rely on others to invent, and then imitate

- Be critical of hype
- More ideas fail, but key is to stop projects at the right time.
- US Air Force continues with aircraft that have never flown, and cost over 1 billion each! Why were they not stopped?
- Thinking of the past, should inform the future with questions about
  - What is it? From is it? What does it do?

- “If we are interested in a historical relationship between technology and society, we need a new account of the technology we have used, and the society in which we have lived”
- Should we assume that new technology created globalization?
- The idea that culture lagged behind technology is ‘old’
- Technology is not a revolutionary force; technology keeps things the same, and for changing them
- History is made when we include great and simple technologies