among those of a certain status. Wilson makes his study into an investigation of bad taste rather than an inquiry into the production of distinction. The payoff of looking at debased culture is not so different from that of scholarship on legitimation. It invites a new appreciation of the function of taste to reinforce social identities and distinctions among them. Wilson makes this argument by connecting particular elements of Dion's music, such as its schmaltz, with the social phenomenon of hating her recordings, prevalent among consumers of a certain hip milieu.

In attending to matters of taste, media studies is connected to an interdisciplinary constellation of ideas about social power and media's role in its workings. That this critical perspective has made the field itself possible is but one reason why taste is a key concept for media studies.

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Technology
Jennifer Daryl Slack

"Technology" is a widely used term that provokes an almost predictable affective response, closes off the possibility of argument, and promises appropriate solutions for whatever problem is at hand. With the addition of "new," the affect multiplies. "New technology" has become a largely unquestioned goal, measure of progress, and promise of the good life. However, the work performed by the term "technology" depends on its mundane, polysemic, and opportunistic recruitment to variable projects and intentions, always with conceptions of reality and relations of power at stake. Interrogating its uses reveals a lot more about what matters in contemporary society than what it "really" means.

The more or less agreed upon definitions of technology typically fail to make visible the tensions, contradictions, and struggles entailed in its use. Technology has roots in the ancient Greek term *techné*, which was used differently by Plato and Aristotle to distinguish between knowledge (universal form for Plato, *epistémé* for Aristotle) and the transformation of that knowledge (*techné* or craft) into some form of practice or practical application. When first used in English in the seventeenth century, technology suggested, in addition to disclosing, a transforming of the natural, eternal, and divine into a discourse (or treatise) that is lesser or degraded. Casaubon (1875, v) wrote in 1612, "Men, void of Gods spirit, commonly and promiscuously did dispute of spirituall things, and convert Theologie into technology." His

characterization of technology as something degraded and in opposition to religion appears at the moment when the arts and sciences were developing apart from the church and threatening the hegemony of the religious knowledge. These uses suggest that from the very earliest Greek and English usages, technology has been caught up in philosophical debates about the nature of and relationships between knowledge and embodiment, in the establishment of hierarchies of knowledge, and in the gradual ascendance of science and technology as secular knowledge practices in competition with religion (see Heidegger 1977). The articulation of technology with a sense of ultimate or degraded knowledge and religious or quasi-religious significance has thus had a long history.

From the seventeenth century on, technology has become more narrowly focused on the transformation of scientific knowledge in the service of craft and later industrial production. As this happened, the term became more closely identified with the products—the embodied forms of knowledge—that result from the transformative process of science-based industrial production. It became commonplace to refer to these "things" as technologies: machines, automobiles, televisions, computers, and so on. This shift has been so thorough that when most people use the term "technology" today, they typically seem to be referring to the "things" produced. Transformation remains extant more as affective residue, a sense that valuable things are produced in technological processes. For example, those who attend a technological university expect a STEM education to provide the knowledge and skills that will allow them to produce or manage technological "things," which are inherently valuable. Links to religious or quasi-religious commitments also continue to function, again largely affectively. As David Noble (1997, 3) explains, "the present enchantment with things technological—the very

measure of modern enlightenment—is rooted in religious myths and ancient imaginings." So deeply held are these convictions that even to suggest that the development of new technology might be something other than progress is "to run the risk of being dismissed without hearing as a heretic, a Luddite, a fool" (Noble 1982, xiii). In contemporary culture, the constructions "technological progress" and the "technological sublime" are essentially redundant.

We live this legacy with multiple meanings of technology as (1) the disclosing of order, (2) a transformational process, (3) the embodiment of knowledge, and (4) a certain kind of object. Each of these "meanings" is further articulated to cultural "truths": (1) the development of new technology is synonymous with progress and the good life, and (2) technology is the result of scientific and industrial processes. All of these meanings and valences feature a range of debate, difference, and nuance, such that any particular use will—replete with tension and contradiction—enact a complex relationship among them. A single speaker may use the term in mutually exclusive and even contradictory ways, but rarely is that ever even noticed, so powerful is the affect its use conveys.

In the face of such complexity, it is challenging to pass on knowledge about technology both intentionally and thoughtfully, and the choices made in doing so tend to oversimplify and reinforce dominant conceptions of reality and relations of power. Typically, students are taught a version that emphasizes the superiority of science, the link between technology and progress, and an emphasis on things. For example, a recent third grade version of *Scholastic News* (2015) teaches this definition in its "Words to Know" segment: "technology: the use of science to make life easier or solve a problem." Technology as object is hived off to the next entry: "devices: machines that do a specific job." Yet, if you google

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technology and look past the first Wikipedia-style explanations that link technology to Greek meanings of *techné* and *logia*, you encounter primarily things: facial recognition technologies, patents on technologies, distance education technologies, surveillance technologies, media, robots, and so on. This "thingness" is pervasive, learned through everyday encounters. For example, almost every media outlet has a "technology" segment that usually features the newest gizmos: drones, hoverboards, and so on. Young people memorize great inventions and their inventors, a construction that privileges the production of things as responsible for making the world a better place and entails ideological, economic, political, and environmental assumptions and effects left largely unexamined.

Nowhere is the potency of this mixture of meaning and mattering more evident than in the "technological fix," the pervasive belief that any problem, whether produced by technology or not, can be solved with a technological solution, which does not require any change in culture generally or individual behavior specifically. For example, the widely held belief that new technology will solve the problem of global warming precludes the possibility that we might have to "sacrifice" any of our ways of life. In a mirror image of the fundamental optimism about technology, resistance to technologies based on beliefs in their ill effects has been exercised throughout history; but resistance is currently far less influential than the particular pro-technology formation that operates materially and ideologically. These positions typically rely on technological determinism—a belief that technology is the fundamental foundation of social life and that technological change is the primary determinant of social change (Winner 1977, 76)—which entails largely unexamined assumptions about the technological character of social and cultural life. It is difficult to conscientiously develop, implement,

resist, or even justify resisting particular technologies without a sophisticated understanding of the complex role of technology in everyday life. After all, there is no human life without technology, however it has been defined.

More helpful approaches to understanding technology recognize that technologies are not mere "things" and are better understood as being developed, implemented, and effective as integral to the complex ideological, political, economic, and environmental arrangements that constitute social and cultural life. For example, instead of studying the effects of clocks, Sarah Sharma (2014) addresses the question of culture and temporality, how time is constructed, and how different forms of keeping and marking time intersect in an organization of multiple temporalities. J. Macgregor Wise and I foreground the technological assemblage: an arrangement of humans, nonhumans, actions, and passions that intermingle and connect "practices, representations, experiences, and affects" with particular kinds of effects (Slack and Wise 2015, 157). Shifts such as these radically reformulate the concern for technology away from a fascination and awe of technological "things" to the more difficult but useful interrogation of technological culture.