Agenda
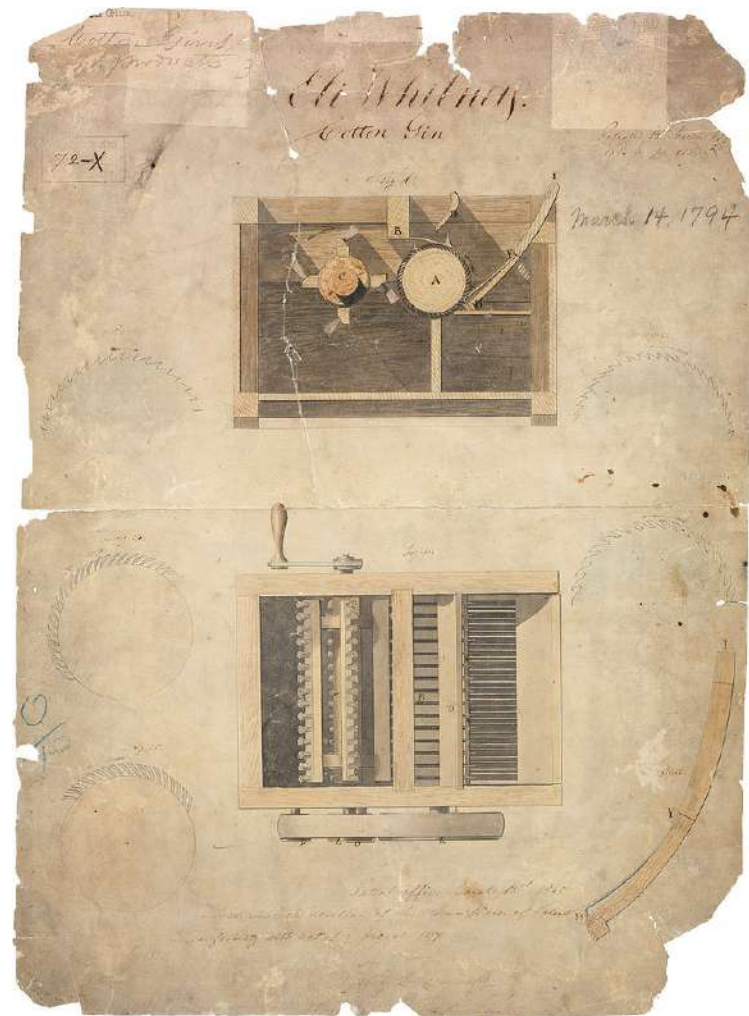Standardization, bodies, & society

1. Technology, society, and bodies
2. Group discussion

- *Technological determinism (TD)* is the idea that *technological change drives social change.*
- TD is fundamental to many *Marxist* analyses in which material conditions shape class relations.
- TD relies on the idea that technologies embody certain *essential features* (a positivist or realist stance)

Original 1794 patent for Eli Whitney's cotton gin, a device that maintained the profitability of chattel slavery in the United States

Social construction of technology (SCOT)

- ⋮ Trevor J. Pinch and Wiebe E. Bijker (1984)
- ⋮ All technology is subject to *interpretive flexibility*.
- ⋮ The use and inherent meaning of a technology depends on the *relevant social group(s)* that use the technology.
- ⋮ Existing 'problems' afford many different technical solutions.

  The 'best' solution depends on social/cultural/political context of the relevant social group.
- ⋮ Technologies can be used for different purposes.

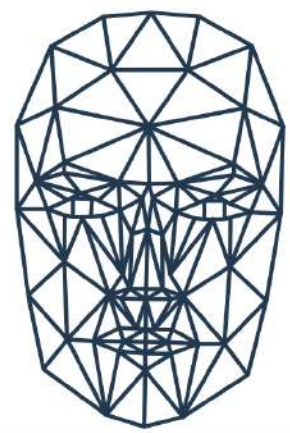 Can cause conflict over the 'appropriate' use of a technology.

Fig. 2. Bicycle (Hochrad) von 1880.   Fig. 3. Rover (Niederrad) von 1886.

SCOT: Technologies do not drive society

- If technology is completely flexible in its interpretation, then it cannot be a driving force of history

- Oppressive technologies (e.g.) are at most a *reflection* of underlying social and cultural patterns

- *(Contrast with this coming Thursday's reading (Winner 1980), who argues that technologies can have inherent political characteristics)*

Facial recognition technology

State surveillance
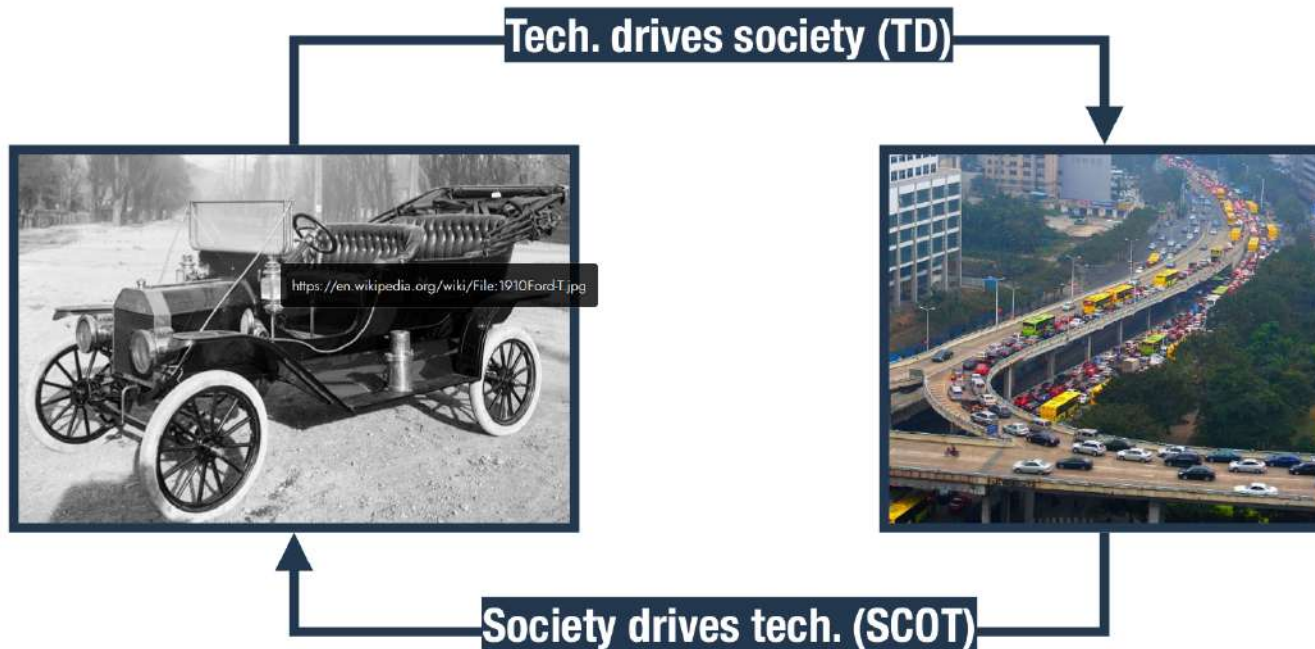
Consumer security

Entertain-ment

Technology and society *co-constitute* each other

- Technology conforms to social systems

  E.g. AI and race (Benjamin 2019)

- Social systems are influenced by technology.

  E.g. genetic testing on race and identity (TallBear 2013)

SCOT and standardization of bodies
⋮ Technology is tied fundamentally to how we understand our selves and our bodies.

Race and gender (Herzig 1999)
⋮ The meaning of human hair and its relationship with race and gender (and class) is *inextricable* from the technologies for the alteration, removal, and measurement of body hair.

Disability (Woods and Watson 2004)
⋮ What is understood as a 'normal' versus 'abnormal' body is bound to the existence *and implementation* of technologies. (e.g. glasses, wheelchairs)