I was assigned this reading in another class and I remember that back then it did challenge my perspective on the idea of what technology is, something I hadn’t thought too much about before. After reading it then, I came to the conclusion that technology is really any man-made tool that we use to make life easier in some way, shape or form.

After reading this a second time, I found myself thinking about the knee-jerk associations we have with words. Ursula talks about the associations we have when it comes to the terms “high-tech” vs. “low-tech”, and how we can often think of low-tech items as less impressive than high-tech items, such as a computer. But I agree with her in that low-tech items are not necessarily “simple”, even if they appear to be.

I am thinking of pursuing Accessibility Testing as a career path and I am currently trying to familiarize myself with different forms of assistive technology. If you look into what are considered to be different forms of assistive technology, you see all sorts of different devices- both high-tech and low-tech.

A screen reader or a speech-generating device are examples of assistive technology, but you could also consider noise-reducing/canceling earplugs to be assistive technology. I use those myself, actually, and they are just little objects made of either plastic or silicone, etc. and all I have to do is put them in my ears. No buttons or wires or electricity, just a little plastic/silicone object that I put in my ear. But they could be considered forms of assistive technology, and I think this is not irrelevant when it comes to the theme of this essay.

One line that stood out to me was “As if linen were the same thing as flax”. This made me think about the process of the development of technology and the human’s role within that.

In that paragraph, she talks about tools such as paper or wheels, which have been around for a very long time but even when you think about modern-day technology, humans are still pretty necessary parts of the development of technology (I don’t know how AI will evolve in the future and if, at any point, this will not always be true but that’s a can of worms that I’m not going to open right now).

I will say (even though I just said I wasn’t going to talk about AI), I recently watched a video where someone was talking about AI in the context of how it can help disabled folks and she kept talking about the fact that humans are tool-using creatures. Ultimately, technology is a tool and since humans have the ability to think critically, we can and should think about the tools we use (especially when it comes to new forms of technology) and the cultural/societal impact those tools may have.

~~I noticed how Ursula K. Le Guin was defending herself from having her work be categorized as soft science fiction, and I haven’t read a lot of science fiction so I don’t really know much about the difference between hard and soft science fiction (although I know she goes on to explain that hard science fiction is thought to incorporate technology and soft science fiction is considered to not incorporate technology, which she later goes on to challenge this notion).~~

~~But I didn’t know if she felt the need to defend herself because the reviewer was just wrong and she wanted to set the record straight, or if there was something else going on. Because of the implications/associations that come from the words “hard” and “soft”, I found myself wondering if maybe hard science fiction is possibly taken a bit more seriously than soft science fiction and if maybe there was some sexism going on by the reviewer calling all of Ursula’s work “soft” science fiction. Because that just seems pretty typical, to put a female writer in the category that has the word “soft” in it. Like I said, I’m coming at this with really no knowledge of that world, so I have no idea if I’m onto something or not, but those are thoughts I had.~~