In my mind, digital image sensing is the most significant post-1960 technology. Digital imaging has enabled detailed documentation of the world and humanity through the mediums of photography and video, and it has allowed this documentation to be rapidly and widely distributed through various means of digital communication.

Prior to the digital image sensor, images could only be captured on film, which attached a definite cost to each image and limited the distribution of images. With digital imaging, photographs and videos can be taken without any cost (once a camera is already owned). This availability encourages the greater use of cameras by more people to document the world around them. The digital camera has led to the democratization of photography and film. As digital image sensors have become smaller and cheaper, almost anyone has become able to afford a digital camera.

The ease of distributing digital images, as a result of supporting communications and storage technologies, further encourages amateur photographers to take and disseminate pictures. Digitizing pictures and videos has allowed them to be easily transmitted by other digital technologies. The internet has been an important supporting technology for digital photography and video. Social media in particular has provided a convenient means for people to share a photograph or video with tens, hundreds, or thousands of people. The ease of disseminating digital photographs, in addition to the low-cost of taking them, encourages the widespread use of digital photography.

The significant effects of digital photography lie primarily in the widespread use of the medium. Digital imaging continued the trend of increasing amateur photography. By enabling almost everyone to take pictures or videos and easily distribute them, digital imaging has vastly increased the documentation of our present era compared to that of all other eras. Just about every event from the mundane to the extraordinary is documented first-hand from multiple perspectives.

Jeremiah, I think your argument for lasers is pretty interesting. I think a lot of people would view lasers as more of a future technology that has not really come into widespread use yet. However, you make a compelling argument for why they are already becoming effective and used in a variety of industries. I suppose many people don’t consider how important lasers are because they don’t experience them in their everyday lives. Rather, their use is mostly reserved for advanced industries such as manufacturing and the medical field. As a result, the effects of lasers on the average person are largely secondary and unrecognized.

Tyler, I think GPS is a popular choice for young adults. One asked one of my friends what she would say for this question, she replied, “GPS, but I couldn’t get anywhere without it.” This argument is a little silly in the same way that Dr. Adams dismissed the hypothetical argument for cell phones based on *we could not live without them*. However, I like how you talk about GPS’ importance to industries such as the military, shipping, and tourism. The ability to coordinate the locations of numerous objects, places, vehicles, people, etc. is perhaps the most significant aspect of GPS technology.

Ian, I was intrigued by your choice of satellites. I certainly wouldn’t agree that they are an example of modern high-technology and that they have been a topic of active research for the last half century. However, my immediate reaction was one of skepticism because I didn’t see how many people are directly affected by satellites. They are used for research of outer space, but that research does not have a direct impact on the majority of people. Moreover, while they are used for communication, we still rely on wired and land-based communication networks for most things and presumably will for some time yet to come. That being said, I think you do make an interesting argument for satellites’ significance.

Robert, I was intrigued by the title of your post because you chose a material as the most significant technology. As you point out, while most people immediately think of communications technologies, which have become defining aspects of our era, you instead went to something that might seem rather simple when compared to electronics. However, I like your choice, and agree that carbon fiber is and will continue becoming an important material, perhaps to rival the importance of materials such as bronze, iron, or steel in previous eras. In the manufacturing class I took last fall, the professor talked about how composite materials, such as carbon fiber, are replacing conventional metals in high-performance applications, much like how you describe their use in aircrafts.

Jordan, I agree with your argument that CAD is a significant technology of the last half century. Considering that almost every object that gets manufactured or structure that is built, just about every new creation, is first designed using CAD it is hard to argue otherwise. While CAD is largely a niche technology that only engineers will likely ever interact with, it indirectly affects everyone through all of the products, structures, and vehicles that are modeled in CAD. I think it is very interesting that even today some schools still teach drafting by hand to engineering students in addition to CAD.

Delong, I enjoyed your analysis of the Three Gorges Dam; I think you did a very good job of discussing both the benefits of and problems with the dam. I am honestly not sure that I had ever heard of that dam prior to this assignment, but I now see how it is an important issue for China. Regarding the opening and closing of the dam during the different rain seasons, I wonder why they can’t let the water flow at a steadier rate throughout the year and let the dam’s reservoir go up and down rather than having such inconsistencies in the downstream flow. Perhaps the reservoir is not large enough and the rains are too intense to do this. Or maybe the constant water level in the dam is important for some reason.