

Reading Questions for *The Organic Machine* and *Fire in America*

STS.038 Class Discussion: Wednesday, September 13, 2006

- 1) What are the characteristics of pre-industrial energy sources? How do they or do they not resemble energy from fossil fuels?
- 2) Should fire properly be considered an energy source? Why or why not?
- 3) White talks about different kinds of geographies (of energy, of labor, etc.). What does he mean by this, and how is the energy of the Columbia River geographically situated? Is fire?
- 4) Is an “organic machine” a helpful metaphor? Why or why not?
- 5) How did Native Americans (“fire from Asia”) use fire differently than white colonists (“fire from Europe”)? How were they similar? Likewise, how did colonists and Natives experience the Columbia?
- 6) Do White and Pyne approach energy the same way?
- 7) How do human relationships with Nature change over time in these accounts?
- 8) How does Nature itself change over time?
- 9) Both White and Pyne try to give the river and fire “agency”—a role in historical developments. Are their accounts persuasive? Why or why not?
- 10) What is the role of technology in these histories?