DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA, CULTURE, AND COMMUNICATION

Media, Technology and Society
MCC-UE 1034

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OVERVIEW

This course will introduce you to a range of theories and approaches to the study of technology so as to provide various perspectives on the co-construction of society and technology, and the role of media in that dynamic. Technology is not merely a set of material artifacts with a straightforward impact on our world. Instead, technology represents a complex set of practices, norms, and values that both reflect and shape our convictions about personhood, time, class, gender, space, labor, race, and politics. Further, because technology often depends on the broader socio-economic, legal, and political context from which it is invented, adopted and stabilized, ample attention will be placed on these contextual conditions and the hidden assumptions that drive its popular understandings. Overall we will look at how different scholars have examined the following broad questions:

How does technology interact with different systems of power? (economic, political, social, etc)
How does technology interact with systems of meaning? (identity, tradition, culture & subculture)
How does technology interact with systems of authority and knowledge?

The course primarily concentrates on communication technologies of the last 150 years (telegraph, telephone, radio, computers, Internet) and is roughly chronological, starting with the telegraph and ending with our digital present. However, we will consider other technologies that will help sharpen our theoretical frameworks and will provide a comparative touchstone to discuss the intersection of communication technologies with other technological systems as well as what may be unique about communication technologies.

COURSE GOALS

The goal is not to arrive at the “right” theory of technology, but have students come away with a firm understanding of methods and approaches by which to assess technology in various social and political terms. As such, we will be studying the ways in which scholars from different disciplines—history, sociology, philosophy, media studies, anthropology, for example—have approached questions about technology, society, and politics. This means that we will also learn about the different ways in which different disciplines weigh the value of different types of data. By the end of the course, students should be able to understand various ways by which to assess the mutual relationship between society and technology; to identify different theoretical approaches to the study of technology; and finally, begin to decide which questions and approaches they find most useful for analyzing contemporary issues and debates as they concern technology and society.

COURSE FORMAT, GENERAL REQUIREMENTS, ATTENDANCE & ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I will begin each class with a short introductory lecture that examines the themes and readings for the week, on occasion adding supplemental information not available in the readings. The rest of the class will be class discussion, exercises and student-led conversation about the various readings. Because active participation in discussion is the cornerstone of the class, you must come prepared for discussion and with copies of the reading.

To aid our discussion, each week, you are required to post a reading response on Blackboard the midnight before the relevant class. I will divide the class into two sections, each one responsible primarily for writing on Sunday night or Wednesday night. You can always write on both if you wish, the more the merrier.

In addition, four times over the semester (twice in the first half and twice in the second), you will be required to write a blog post for the class blog: In this piece you will both provide a summary of the thesis and argument of one reading and post an example
of a news article, advertisement, youtube video, or other item of media that illustrates, contradicts, or otherwise engages with the week’s readings, and write at least two paragraphs explaining how the piece does this.

A 5-page mid-term paper and a 10-page final research paper will also be given. More information on these assignments and grading criteria will be provided.

Regular class attendance is required. Three missed classes without prior notices or excuse will result in your grade being dropped by one half letter.

Plagiarism or cheating on any assignment will not be tolerated under any circumstances and will result in a failure of the assignment and possibly failure of this class. For further information, please consult the Steinhardt policy on academic integrity:
http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/dcc/undergraduate/Statement_On_Academic_Integrity.php

GRADING

1.  Attendance and Class Participation (including discussion questions): 20%
2.  Blog post: 10%
3.  Writing Assignments: 15%
4.  Mid-Term paper: 25%
5.  Final paper: 30%

READINGS AND OTHER MATERIALS:

Most readings are available on Blackboard. The following texts are required and are available for purchase at the NYU Bookstore:

Standage, Tom. (1996) The Victorian Internet


ON CLASS PARTICIPATION

Please turn off your cell phones before class, and do not text or tweet in class. We will discuss and set a laptop policy together in the first week. I respect that different students have different means of taking notes, and also that some find laptops distracting (whether theirs or other people’s). Although internet use can occasionally enrich class participation, if I find you writing personal emails, playing games, shopping or conducting other non-class-related activity on an electronic device I will ask that you stop, and repeated occurrences will affect your participation grade. In-class participation and active engagement with the readings is very important, and we will work together to find a way to facilitate these activities whether mediated by technology or not.

COURSE SCHEDULE

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<th>Week 1</th>
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1.  (Weds) 9/5: Introduction

Film Clips: “The Gorilla Detector” “Modern Times”

During the first meeting we will discuss the syllabus, goals and requirements of the course.
Week 2:

1. **(Mon) 9/10: Thinking Historically and Conceptually**


   **Suggested Reading**

2. **(Weds) 9/12: How Can Technology Communicate and Reshape our World?**

Week 3:

1. **9/17: Space-Time Compression: The Railway and the Telegraph**


   **Suggested Reading**

2. **9/19: Layers of Development: The News by Telegraph and Mail**

Week 4: **Other Side of Technology/ Telephone pt. 1**

1. **9/24: The other side of new technology, pt. 1**
   MacDougall (2006) “The Wire Devils: Pulp Thrillers, the Telephone, and Action at a Distance in the Wiring of a Nation” American Quarterly 58 (3)

   **Suggested reading**

2. **9/26: Sounds that Travel 1: The Telephone**

Week 5: **Telephone, cont’d**

1. **10/1: Working the technology : the telephone and labor**
2. The Cellular Telephone and global networks
   Your Own Wireless Telephone (Washington Post, 1910):

   Vicente L. Rafael.
   2003 The Cell Phone and the Crowd: Messianic Politics in the Contemporary
   OR
   Horst, Heather and Daniel Miller
   2005 From Kinship to Link-up: Cell Phones and Social Networking in Jamaica. Current Anthropology

Week 6: radio and music

1. 10/8: Technology and Culture case study – music technology
   TBD
   Manuel, Peter. “Cassette Culture Technology and popular music in North India”

2. 10/10: Sounds That Travel 2: Radio
   219

   Suggested reading
   Kraidy, Eds., Global Media Studies: Ethnographic perspectives p. 183-207

Week 7: Computers

1. 10/15: NO Class, read for wednesday – Computers: Omissions and Unforeseen Applications
   Ceruzzi, Paul

   Suggested Reading
   Handbook of Science and Technology Studies. Sheila Jasanoff, Gerald Markle, James Petersen and

2. 10/17: Computers discussion + Workshop midterm paper drafts

Week 8: Hacking

1. 10/22: MIDTERM DUE Technological Tinkering: hackers
   In Class Film: Necrocam

2. 10/24: Back to the Telephone: Phreakers and Hackers
   Rosenbaum, Ron 1971 "Secrets of the Little Blue Box." Esquire Magazine
   An early Phreaker made a comic of his life, read some here: http://www.edpiskor.com/wizzy.html
Week 9: Networking.

3. 10/29: Society Seeps into Networking, Networking Seeps into Society

4. 10/31: Anxiety in Networked societies
   Film: The Conversation & Enemy of the state
   Watch one before class, one we will watch part of in class (TBD)

Week 10:

1. 11/5: Technology, Imperialism, and Colonialism

2. 11/7: Is Technology White?

Week 11:

1. 11/12: Technical Politics of Autonomy

2. 11/14 If not autonomy, integration/independence
   Reading on Ushahidi and kenyan politics/ disaster response tech and its failures TBC

Week 12: Tech, law and ownership: IP and Open Source

law governing the creation and use of computer software affects the distribution of wealth, power, and freedom in society.

1. 11/19: Intellectual Property and Technology
   Further reading TBA
   Suggested Reading

2. 11/21: Cultures of new technology: The Case of Free and Open Source Software
   Meet the Geeks: Q & A with F/OSS Developers
   Readings:
### Week 13: Technology and Authority

1. **11/26: Technology and the crowd: Wiki Politics**
   - Schiff, Stacey (2006)  
     *Know it All: Can Wikipedia Conquer Expertise?* New Yorker. July 31, 2006,  
     http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/07/31/060731fa_fact
   - Lemann, Nicholas (2006)  
     *Amateur Hour: Journalism without Journalists.* New Yorker. August 7.  
     http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/08/07/060807fa_fact?printable=true
   - Bossewitch, Jonah (2007)  
     *The Zyprexa Kills campaign: Peer production and the frontiers of radical pedagogy.* Re-public: Reimagining Democracy.  

2. **11/28: Blogs, Genre and Medium**
   - Cohn, Kris (2005)  
   - boyd, danah (2006)  
     *A Blogger's Blog: Exploring the Definition of a Medium.* Reconstruction.  
     http://reconstruction.eserver.org/064/boyd.shtml

### Week 14: Technology Mediating Politics

1. **12/3: Independence and political mobilization**
   - Barlow, John Perry.  
     *“A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace”*  
     https://projects.eff.org/~barlow/Declaration-Final.html
   - Susstein, Cass (2001)  
     *The Daily We: Is the Internet really a blessing for Democracy?*  
     http://www.bostonreview.net/BR26.3/susstein.html

2. **12/5: The Politics of Web-Artifacts**
     Bring to class an example of a choice a website forced you to make about identifying yourself that you felt did not reflect you or were unhappy with.

### Week 15: Games

1. **12/10: Games**
   - Levy, Steven (2006)  
     *Living a Virtual Life: Is World of Warcraft a game, or is it a harbinger of virtual realities that we all might inhabit. Only a Night Elf knows for sure.* September.  
     http://james.grimmelmann.net/files/VirtualPowerPolitics.pdf
   - Dibbel 2006  
     *Play Money, Or, How I Quit My Day Job and Made Millions Trading Virtual Loot.* New York: Basic Books. (selections, TBD)

2. **12/12: Games, Continued**
   - Dibbel, Julian (2006)  
     *Play Money, Or, How I Quit My Day Job and Made Millions Trading Virtual Loot.*
New York: Basic Books. (selections, TBD)

Doctorow – listen to excerpt from For The Win