

MEDIA, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY

MCC-UE 1034.001.SP14

Spring 2014

Department of Media, Culture, and Communication

Instructor: Luke Stark (luke.stark@nyu.edu)

Tuesday & Thursday, 11am – 12:15pm

Silver 621

Office: 212 East Building, 239 Greene Street

Office hours: By appointment

Course Description and Overview

This course will introduce undergraduates to a range of theories and approaches to studying the co-construction of societies and technologies. The course is premised on the fact that technology is not merely a set of material artifacts with a straightforward impact on our world, but represents a complex set of practices, norms, and values reflecting *and* shaping our convictions about time, space, class, gender, labor, politics and the self. Further, because technologies often depend on the broader socio-economic, legal, and political contexts in which they are invented, adopted and stabilized, ample attention will be paid to these contextual conditions and the hidden assumptions that drive popular understandings of technologies and their effects.

The course primarily concentrates on mediating technologies of the last 150 years (the telegraph, telephone, computers, and the Internet) and is roughly chronological, starting with the telegraph and ending with our digital present. However, we will consider a number of other technologies (the railway, farming technologies and others) that will help sharpen our theoretical frameworks and which 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 of the course is not to arrive at the “right” theory of technology, but have students come away with a firm understanding of multiple methods and approaches by which to assess different technologies 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. We therefore 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 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, followed by class discussion and student-led conversation about the various readings. Because active participation in discussion is the cornerstone of the class, you should come prepared for discussion and with copies of the reading.

To aid our discussion and to improve their writing skills, you be required to turn in one weekly writing assignment where you will (1) provide a summary of the thesis and argument of each reading (2) pose at least one conceptual question about the readings and/or topics under discussion. A short in-class mid-term and a take-home final exam will also be given. Because this is a seminar course, regular class attendance is required. Three or more 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. Mutual trust, respect and responsibility are foundational requirements for learning. Thus, how you learn is as important as what you learn. A University education aims not only to produce high quality scholars, but to also cultivate honorable citizens.

"Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do.... You violate the principle when you: cheat on an exam; submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors; receive help on a take-home that calls for independent work; or plagiarize. Plagiarism, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following: copy verbatim from a book, article, or other media; download documents from the Internet; purchase documents; paraphrase or restate someone else's facts, analysis, and/or conclusions; copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy form you. " (See School of Education Bulletin, 2006/8, p. 172)

For a full statement of the Academic Integrity Policy governing this course see: [http:// http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity).

Readings And Other Materials

All course readings will be available electronically via NYU Classes.

Grading

Attendance and Class Participation: 15%

Please see above.

Weekly Writing Assignments: 25%

Each week, you will submit a writing assignment (1-page, single-spaced, 350-500 words). This assignment will (1) provide a summary of the thesis and argument of each reading being discussed on the day you hand the piece in, and (2) pose at least one conceptual question about the readings and/or topics under discussion. You may submit your weekly assignment on either Tuesday or Thursday; your piece must summarize and engage with **all** the assigned readings for the day on which it is submitted. **Assignments will be due at the beginning of class in paper copy – I will not accept assignments submitted electronically, nor will I accept assignments handed in late.** Each response will be marked on whether it fulfills both assigned criteria.

In-Class Mid-Term Exam: 25%

The in-class exam will take place on **Tuesday, March 4th**, for the entirety of the class. The exam will have two components: short answer questions in which you will identify and state the historical significance of a concept, person or artifact; and a choice of long-form essay questions.

Final Exam: 35%

The final exam will be scheduled during the May exam period, and will be similar in format to the mid-term.

Evaluation

Grade Appeals

Any grade appeals should be submitted via e-mail with “a short note explaining your concerns about the grade in question.” Please wait **AT LEAST 24 HOURS** before contacting me with your concern, and please refer to the evaluation criteria when submitting an appeal.

Grading Rubric

(Plus and minus grades indicate the standing within the above grades)

A = Excellent (numerical equivalent: 90 – 100%)

Outstanding work in all respects: comprehensive understanding, thoughtful and

creative interpretations, well-focused and original insights, well-reasoned commentary and analysis. Writing is clear, analytical, and organized. Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Class participation is consistent, insightful, and respectful of others.

B = Good (numerical equivalent: 80 – 89%)

Work demonstrates complete and accurate understanding of course materials, presenting a reasonable degree of insight and a competent level of analysis with proper evidence. Writing is easy to follow and well structured. Class participation is consistent and respectful of others.

C = Adequate (numerical equivalent: 70 – 79%)

Work demonstrates adequate understanding but may be incomplete, vague or contains some important errors or weaknesses. Work may lack concrete, specific examples and illustration. Writing may be awkward or hard to follow. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Class participation is unreliable, off-topic, and/ or disrespectful of others.

D = Unsatisfactory (numerical equivalent: 60 – 69%)

Work demonstrates a lack of understanding and fails to express basic aspects of the course. This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Class participation is spotty, superficial, and/or disrespectful of others

F = Failed. Work was not submitted or completed according to assigned parameters or completely failed to express the most basic and elementary aspects of the course.

Miscellaneous

Student Resources

Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to register with the [Moses Center for Students with Disabilities](#), 719 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212-998-4980) and are required to present a letter from the Center to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation. In addition, if you're finding consistent problems with your writing I urge you to contact the **Writing Center**: 269 Mercer Street, Room 233. You can schedule an appointment online at www.rich15.com/nyu/ or just walk in.

Style Manuals

Students are strongly urged to purchase at least one style manual. A good style manual will help to improve the organization and composition of your written work

and, used properly, should help ensure proper citation of sources. Please be consistent with the style you use.

Religious Observance

Students who observe religious holidays that may interfere with the class schedule should inform the course instructors well in advance of anticipated absences to ensure that appropriate arrangements are made for the completion of course work. See NYU's Policy on Religious Holidays at www.nyu.edu/student-affairs/students-guide/policies.html, for more information.

Special Circumstances, Considerations, Needs

If you have any special circumstances, considerations, or needs that you feel will either affect your ability to complete assignments or participate in recitation discussions, please let me know as soon as possible. Documentation is critical to processing special requests, and I will help facilitate this to the best of my abilities.

A Final Note

Ideas are important things, and people often feel passionately about them. This being said, please treat your fellow classmates, and your instructor, with respect, good humor and empathy. Trust is vital to a thoughtful, open and intelligent discussion – I hope we'll all be able to share a mutual trust this term.

Course Schedule

Please note that in addition to the readings below, short pieces on topical subjects may be added throughout the term.

Tuesday, January 28 – Introduction

Short Film Clip: "The Gorilla Detector"

Thursday, January 30 – Thinking Historically and Conceptually

Marx, L. (2010). Technology: The Emergence of a Hazardous Concept. *Technology and Culture*, 51(3), 561–577.

Williams, R. (2005). A Historian's View. In M. Castells (Ed.), *The Network Society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.

Tuesday, February 4 – Space-Time Compression & The Telegraph

Cowan, R. S. (1997). American Ideas about Technology. In *A Social History of American Technology* (pp. 201–219). New York: Oxford University Press.

Kielbowicz, R. B. (1987). News Gathering by Mail in the Age of the Telegraph: Adapting to a New Technology. *Technology and Culture*, 28(1), 26–41.

Standage, T. (1998). The Mother of All Networks & A Strange Fierce Fire. In *The Victorian Internet* (pp. 1–40). New York: Walker and Co.

Thursday, February 6 – The Telegraph and the Railway

Schivelbusch, W. (1986). Railroad Space and Railroad Time. In *The Railway Journey* (pp. 33–44). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Standage, T. (1998). Steam-Powered Messages & Decline and Fall. In *The Victorian Internet* (pp. 92–104, 181–200). New York: Walker and Co.

Tuesday, February 11 – Technology Reshaping our World: Political Logics

Feenberg, A. (2004). Democratic Rationalization: Technology, Power and Freedom. In D. M. Kaplan (Ed.), *Readings in the Philosophy of Technology* (pp. 209–225). Oxford, UK.

Winner, L. (1988). Do Artifacts Have Politics? In *The Whale and the Reactor* (pp. 19–39). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Thursday, February 13 – Sounds that Travel: The Telephone and Gender

Fischer, C. S. (1988). Gender and the Residential Telephone, 1890-1940: Technologies of Sociability. *Sociological Forum*, 3(2), 211–233.

“Your Own Wireless Telephone” (Washington Post, 1910):

<http://paleo-future.blogspot.com/2007/05/your-own-wireless-telephone-1910.html>

Tuesday, February 18 – The Cellular Telephone and . . .

Horst, H., & Miller, D. (2005). From Kinship to Link-up: Cell Phones and Social Networking in Jamaica. *Current Anthropology*, 46(5), 755–778.

Licoppe, C. (2008). The Mobile Phone's Ring. In *Handbook of Mobile Communication Studies* (pp. 139–152). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Rafael, V. L. (2003). The Cell Phone and the Crowd: Messianic Politics in the Contemporary Philippines. *Public Culture*, 15(3), 399–425.

Thursday, February 20 – Big Ag: A Large-Scale Technological System

Hughes, T. P. (1987). The Evolution of Large Technological Systems. In W. E. Bijker, T. P. Hughes, & T. Pinch (Eds.), *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology* (pp. 51–82). Cambridge, MA.

Pollan, M. (2006). The Plant: Corn's Conquest & The Feedlot: Making Meat. In *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (pp. 15–31, 65–84). New York: Penguin.

Tuesday, February 25 – Technology, Imperialism, and Colonialism

Philip, K. (2007). Nature, Culture Capital, Empire. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 18(1), 5–12.

Salvatore, R. D. (2006). Imperial Mechanics: South America's Hemispheric Integration in the Machine Age. *American Quarterly*, 58(3), 662–691.

Thursday, February 27 – Networks and/of Labor: Then and Now

Downey, G. (2001). Virtual Webs, Physical Technologies, and Hidden Workers: The Spaces of Labor in Information Internetworks. *Technology and Culture*, 42(2), 209–235.

Silberman, M. S., Irani, L., & Ross, J. (2010). Ethics and Tactics of Professional Crowdsourcing. *XRDS: Crossroads, the ACM Magazine for Students*, 17(2), 39–43.

Review for Mid-Term

Tuesday, March 4 – In-class midterm

Thursday, March 6 – No Class

Tuesday, March 11 – Technologies of the Self: Body Modification

Elliot, C. (2003). Amputees by Choice. In *Better Than Well: American Medicine Meets the American Dream* (pp. 208–236). New York: W.W. Norton.

Hacking, I. (1999). Making Up People (1986). In M. Biagioli (Ed.), *The Science Studies Reader* (pp. 161–171). New York: Routledge.

Tenner, E. (2003). Technology, Technique, and the Body. In *Our Own Devices: The Past and Future of Body Technology* (pp. 3–29). New York: Knopf.

Thursday, March 13 – The Technical Politics of Autonomy

Kunreuther, L. (2006). Technologies of the Voice: FM Radio, Telephone, and the Nepali Diaspora in Kathmandu. *Cultural Anthropology*, 21(3), 323–353.

SPRING BREAK

Tuesday, March 25 – Computers: Omissions and Unforeseen Applications

Ceruzzi, P. (1988). An Unforeseen Revolution: Computers and Expectations, 1935-1985. In J. J. Corn (Ed.), *Imagining Tomorrow History, Technology, and the American Future* (pp. 188–201). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Edwards, P. N. (1994). From “Impact” to Social Process: Computers in Society and Culture. In S. Jasanoff, G. E. Markle, J. C. Peterson, & T. Pinch (Eds.), *Handbook of Science and Technology Studies* (pp. 257–285). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Light, J. S. (1999). When Computers Were Women. *Technology and Culture*, 40(3), 455–483.

Thursday, March 27 – Society Seeps into Networking, Networking Seeps into Society

Pfaffenberger, B. (1996). “If I Want It, It's OK”: Usenet and the (Outer) Limits of Free Speech. *The Information Society*, 12(4), 365–386.

Turner, F. (2005). Where the Counterculture Met the New Economy: The WELL and the Origins of Virtual Community. *Technology and Culture*, 46(3), 485–512.

Tuesday, April 1 – Information Privacy, Online and Off

boyd, D. (2010, March 13). “Making Sense of Privacy and Publicity.” SXSW. Austin, Texas.

Solove, D. J. (2011, May 15). Why Privacy Matters Even if You Have “Nothing to Hide.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved June 10 2013, from <https://chronicle.com/article/Why-Privacy-Matters-Even-if/127461/>

Warren, S. D., & Brandeis, L. D. (1984). The right to privacy [The implicit made explicit]. In *Philosophical Dimensions of Privacy: An Anthology* (pp. 75–103). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Thursday, April 3 – Privacy, Security and Surveillance

Cohen, J. E. (2013). What Privacy Is For. *Harvard Law Review*, 126, 1904–1933.

Gangadharan, S., & Sprague, A. (2013, December 11). Poor People Deserve Digital Privacy, Too. *Slate*. Slate. Retrieved December 12, 2013, from http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2013/12/11/low_income_privacy.html

Morozov, E. (2013, October 22). The Real Privacy Problem. *MIT Technology Review*. Retrieved January 3, 2014, from <http://www.technologyreview.com/featuredstory/520426/the-real-privacy-problem/>

Tuesday, April 8 – Intellectual Property and Technology

Gillespie, T. (2007). A Heroic Tale of Devilish Piracy and Glorious Progress, by Jack Valenti. In *Wired Shut: Copyright and the Shape of Digital Culture* (pp. 105–136). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Helprin, M. (2007, May 20). A Great Idea Lives Forever. Shouldn't Its Copyright? *NYTimes.com*. Retrieved January 27, 2014, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/20/opinion/20helprin.html?pagewanted=all>

Hesse, C. (2002). The Rise of Intellectual Property, 700 B.C.-A.D. 2000: An Idea in the Balance. *Daedalus*, 131(2), 26–45.

Mann, C. (1998, September). Who Will Own Your Next Good Idea? *Atlantic Monthly*. Retrieved January 27, 2014, from <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/issues/98sep/copy.htm>

Thursday, April 10 – Digital Poetics

Hughes, W. (1994). In the Empire of the Beat: Discipline and Disco. In *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music, Youth Culture* (pp. 147–157). New York & London: Routledge.

Montfort, N. (2011). Narrative and digital media. In D. Herman (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (pp. 172–186). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Wing, J. M. (2006). Computational Thinking. *Communications of the ACM*, 49(3), 33–35.

Tuesday, April 15 – Technological Tinkering: Objects and Identities

Haraway, D. J. (1991). A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (pp. 149–181). New York: Routledge.

Oudshoorn, N., Rommes, E., & Stienstra, M. (2004). Configuring the User as Everybody: Gender and Design Cultures in Information and Communication Technologies. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 29(1), 30–63.

Turkle, S. (2007). What Makes an Object Evocative? In *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (pp. 307–327). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Thursday, April 17 – Technological Tinkering: Hackers and Makers

Coleman, G. (2011). Hacker Politics and Publics. *Public Culture*, 23(3), 511–516.

Lindtner, S. (2014). Making Subjectivities. *The Journal of China Information*.

Wall, D. S. (2008). Cybercrime and the Culture of Fear. *Information, Communication & Society*, 11(6), 861–884.

Tuesday, April 22 – Blogs, Genre and Medium

boyd, d. (2006). A Blogger's Blog: Exploring the Definition of a Medium. *Reconstruction* 6(4). <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/064/boyd.shtml>.

Cohen, K. R. (2005). What does the photoblog want? *Media, Culture & Society*, 27(6), 883–901.

Jenkins, H. (2007) Nine Propositions Towards a Cultural Theory of YouTube. Retrieved from http://www.henryjenkins.org/2007/05/9_propositions_towards_a_cultu.html

Lemann, N. (2006, August 7). Amateur Hour. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved January 27, 2014, from http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/08/07/060807fa_fact1

Thursday, April 24 – The Politics of Social Media

Gillespie, T. (2010). The politics of “platforms.” *New Media & Society*, 12(3), 347–364.

Sunstein, C. R. (2001, June 1). The Daily We. *Boston Review*. Retrieved January 27, 2014, from <http://bostonreview.net/cass-sunstein-internet-democracy-daily-we>

Tuesday, April 29 – Computer Graphics, Digital Games

Guest Lecture, readings TBD

Thursday, May 1 – NO CLASS

Tuesday, May 6 – Digital Games, Real Lives

Dibbell, J. (1999). A Rape in Cyberspace. *Imaginary Realities*, 2(4). Retrieved from http://imaginaryrealities.imaginary.com/volume2/issue4/rape_cyberspace.html

Grimmelmann, J. (2006). Virtual Power Politics. In J. M. Balkin & B. S. Noveck (Eds.), *State of Play: Law, Games, and Virtual Worlds* (pp. 146–157). New York: New York University Press.

Taylor, T. L. (2006). Whose Game Is This Anyway? In *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture* (pp. 125–150). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Thursday, May 8 – Gamification and the Quantified Self

Dror, O. E. (2001). Counting the Affects: Discoursing in Numbers. *Social Research*, 68(2), 357–378.

Jagoda, P. (2013). Gamification and Other Forms of Play. *Boundary 2*, 40(2), 113–144.

O'Connor, M. (2013, December 2). Heartbreak and the Quantified Selfie. *New York Magazine*. Retrieved December 2, 2013, from <http://nymag.com/thecut/2013/12/heartbreak-and-the-quantified-selfie.html>

Singer, E. (2011, June 9). Is “Self-tracking” the Secret to Living Better? *MIT Technology Review*. Retrieved December 8, 2013, from <http://www.technologyreview.com/view/424252/is-self-tracking-the-secret-to-living-better.html>

Review for Final Exam