

Anth 367: Technology and Culture

Professor Lisa Messeri

Time: Wednesday, 9:25-11:15am

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****The readings are subject to change. Always consult Canvas for updated assignments****

Description

This class examines how technology matters in our daily lives. How do technologies shape understandings of ourselves, the worlds we inhabit, and each other? How do the values and assumptions of engineers and innovators shape our behaviors? How do technologies change over time and between cultures? Students will learn to think about technology and culture as co-constituted. We will read and discuss texts from history and anthropology of science, as well as fictional explorations relevant to course topics.

Learning objectives

- Identify historical shifts in our definitions and understandings of what technology is
- Identify social norms embedded in technology
- Examine how technology and our lived experiences of the world mutually shape each other
- Analyze the ways in which technology is socially situated and culturally different
- Evaluate the social impact of current technological trends

Assessments

[Further instructions will be provided in class]

- “Technology fieldnotes” journal. Twice a week, write about a personal interaction with a technology. Incorporate readings and ideas from class as appropriate. Each entry should be 200-400 words. Journals will be collected three times a semester. (Week 4, 10, 13) (15%)
- Mid-Term Essay: Technology redesign project. Select a technology and propose how it can be redesigned to be more inclusive. Consider what new norms the technology might embed. Present an argument for why this new design is needed based on readings from the first half of the semester. (Due Week 7) (25%) (5 pages)
- In class presentation. Select a popular news article discussing a technology. Share the article on Canvas in advance of class and lead a class discussion analyzing the social/cultural aspects of this article. (once during the semester) (10%)

- Final Research Project. Students will propose a research topic at the intersection of technology and culture. This can be a study of an individual technology and how it changes over time and/or culture or a more holistic investigation on the complex relationship between technology and how we live in the world. Topics will be proposed in advance and subject to instructor approval. (40%) (10-15 pages)
- Participation. I expect you to come to class having read the material and prepared to discuss and ask questions. (10%)

Expectations and Course Policies

- Each week has about 100 pages of reading. They are presented on the syllabus in the order I think it makes most sense to read them. You will learn to use your judgement as to which pieces can be skimmed and which need more of your attention. In general, I want you to read for big ideas. When you've completed an article, I suggest you write down in 2-3 sentences what the argument or main points are. You may also want to take notes on pages you particularly liked or found challenging so we can discuss them in class.
- All readings are available on Canvas or online (where links are provided) with the exception of our final text, *Uberland* by Alex Rosenblat. You can purchase this from Amazon or read it for free online through Yale Libraries.
- Attendance at all sessions is mandatory. If you will be missing class, please let me know by email at least 24 hours in advance. I do not need a detailed explanation.
- Late assignments will be docked 1/3 of a grade for each day it is late (an A- will become a B+). If you need an extension, please request one 48 hours in advance to avoid being penalized.
- In class, you may use electronic devices for note-taking or accessing readings, but I request that you turn off the wi-fi and refrain from checking social media/texts/emails/etc. This not only takes you out of the conversation but potentially distracts your neighbors as well.

A Word About Academic Honesty

Plagiarism is the use of someone else's ideas or words as if they were your own. To avoid this, you must document all of your source material. If you take any text from somebody else, you must make it clear the text is being quoted and where the text comes from. You must also cite any sources from which you obtain numbers, ideas, or other material. If you have any questions about what does or does not constitute plagiarism, ask! Plagiarism is a serious offense and will not be treated lightly. Fortunately, it is also easy to avoid and if you are the least bit careful about giving credit where credit is due you should not run into any problems. For further information, please consult the Center for Teaching and Learning's website on citation practices:

<https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/undergraduates/writing-advice/using-sources>

Enrollment

This seminar is capped at 18 participants. Preference will be given first to Anthropology Majors and Minors (any year), followed by Seniors. The remaining slots will be randomly assigned, with distribution across first year students, sophomores, and juniors. Exceptions to this policy will be

considered, however my intention is to provide a transparent and fair process for all interested students.

READINGS AND COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (August 28) - Intro

No readings

UNIT 1: TECHNOLOGY AND THE SELF

How do technologies make us think about ourselves, our bodies, and the social groups we belong to?

Week 2 (September 4) - What is Technology? What is Culture?

Monaghan, John and Peter Just (2000). Bee Larvae and Onion Soup: Culture. In *Social and Cultural Anthropology: A Very Short Introduction*. 34-52.

Marx, Leo. (2010). Technology: The emergence of a hazardous concept. *Technology and Culture*, 51(3), 561-577.

Pfaffenberger, Bryan. (1988). Fetishised Objects and Humanised Nature. *Man* 23(2), 236-252.

Turkle, Sherry. Personal Computers with Personal Meanings. In *The Second Self*. 155-182.

Duffy, Brooke and Ngai Chan (2019). “You never really know who’s looking”: Imagined surveillance across social media platforms. *New Media and Society* 21(1): 119-138.

Week 3 (September 11) – Bodies and Identity

Glabau, Danya (2018). Sins of the Mother. *Real Life*. <https://reallifemag.com/sins-of-the-mother/>

Schüll, Natasha Dow (2016). Data for life: Wearable technology and the design of self-care. *BioSocieties*, 11(3), 317-333.

Turkle, Sherry (2017). Empathy Machines: Forgetting the Body. In *A psychoanalytic exploration of the body in today's world: on the body* edited by V. Tsolas and C. Anzieu-Premmereur. Routledge.

Nelson, Mallory, Ashely Shew and Bethany Stevens (2019). Transmobility: Rethinking the possibilities in Cyborg (Crypborg) Bodies. *Catalyst* 5(1):1-20.

Nalo Hopkinson. A Habit of Waste. In *Skin Folk*. 183-202

Week 4 (September 18) – Labor and Social Roles

Wajcman, Judy (2010). Feminist theories of technology. *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34: 143-162

Lagesen, Vivian (2008). A Cyberfeminist Utopia? *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 33(1): 5-27

Amrute, Sareeta. (2016). Imagining the Indian IT Body. In *Encoding race, encoding class: Indian IT workers in Berlin*. Duke University Press. 29-53

Nakamura, Lisa. (2014). Indigenous circuits: Navajo women and the racialization of early electronic manufacture. *American Quarterly*, 66(4), 919-941.

****Journal Due September 20****

UNIT 2: INNOVATORS, INNOVATIONS, AND LIVING IN THE BUILT WORLD Who builds things and how do things structure our lives?

Week 5 (September 25) – Engineering Culture

Irani, Lily (2019). *Chasing Innovation*. Chapters 1, 6, 7. Pg 1-22; 141-204

Csikszentmihályi, Chris. (2012) Engineering Collectives: Technology from the Coop. *Limn* Issue 2. <https://limn.it/articles/engineering-collectives-technology-from-the-coop/>

Turner, Fred (2009). Burning Man at Google. *New Media and Society* 11(1&2): 73-94

Chang, Emily (2019). Google: When Good Intentions Aren't Enough. In *Brotopia*. Pg. 68-105.

Week 6 (October 2) – Everyday Politics of Ordinary Things

Winner, Langdon (1980). Do Artefacts have Politics. *Daedalus* 109(1): 121-136.

David, Paul (1985). Clio and the Economics of QWERTY. *The American Economic Review* 7(2): 332-337.

Sclove, Richard (1997). Technology Politics as if Democracy Really Mattered. In *Technology and the Future* edited by Albert Teich. 223-245.

Cross, Jamie (2017). Solar Basics. *Limn* Issue 9. <https://limn.it/articles/solar-basics/>

Hendren, Sara (2018). All Technology is Assistive. In *Making Things and Drawing Boundaries* edited by J. Sayers. 139-145.

Week 7 (October 9)

CLASS DOES NOT MEET – Yom Kippur

****Mid-term essay due October 11****

Week 8 (October 16)

FALL BREAK

Week 9 (October 23) – Upending Urban Experience

Kern, Stephen. (2003). The Nature of Time. In *The culture of time and space*. Harvard University Press. 10-35

Thompson, Emily. (2004). Noise and Modern Culture, 1900-1933. In *The Soundscape of Modernity*. MIT Press. 115-168.

Mattern, Shannon (2016). Instrumental City: The View from Hudson Yards, circa 2019. *Places Journal*.

Barker, Joshua (2008). Playing with Publics: Technology, talk, and sociability in Indonesia. *Language and Communication* 28(2): 127-142.

Barthelme, Donald. (1981). The Balloon. *Sixty stories*, 46-51.

UNIT 3: LIVING IN A NON-MATERIAL WORLD

How do the invisible worlds of bits and data shape our reality? Are they really immaterial?

Week 10 (October 30) – Is the Virtual Real?

Dibbell, Julian (1998). A Rape in Cyberspace. In *My Tiny Life*. Pg 11-32.

<http://www.juliandibbell.com/articles/a-rape-in-cyberspace/>

****As the title suggests, this essay is about an online rape. Please do not read if this will cause you distress. Let me know if you'd like to be excused from class (without penalty) as we will be discussing the reading, though not in any graphic detail****

Boellstorff, Tom (2008). Personhood. In *Coming of Age in Second Life*. Pg 118-150

Fluri, Jennifer (2006). 'Our Website was Revolutionary': Virtual Spaces of Representation and Resistance. *ACME* 5(1): 89-111.

Roanhorse, Rebecca (2017). Welcome to your Authentic Indian Experience™. *Apex Magazine*. <https://www.apex-magazine.com/welcome-to-your-authentic-indian-experience/>

****Journal Due November 1****

Week 11 (November 6) – Big Data's Long Shadow

Zuckerman, Ethan (2014). The Internet's Original Sin. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/08/advertising-is-the-internets-original-sin/376041/>

Burrell, Jenna (2016). How the machine "thinks." *Big Data and Society*. 1-12.

Hogan, Mél (2015). Data Flows and Water Woes. *Big Data and Society*. 1-12.

Loukissas, Yanni (2019). Models of Local Practice. In *All Data are Local*. 161-188.

WATCH Nosedive, *Black Mirror* Season 3 Ep. 1.

UNIT 4: TECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE

Can anthropology help us understand the future? How do we study technology that isn't yet here?

Week 12 (November 13) – Anthropology and/of/for the future

Nardi, Bonnie. (2016). Designing for the future: but which one? *Interactions*, 23(1), 26-33.

Mattern, Shannon (2019). Networked Dream. *Real Life Magazine*

Benjamin, Ruha (2016). Racial Fictions, Biological Facts: Expanding the Sociological Imagination through Speculative Methods. *Catalyst* 2(2): 1-28.

Benjamin, Ruha (2019). Retooling Solidarity, Reimagining Justice. In *Race After Technology*. Pg. 160-197

Forester, E. M. (1909). The Machine Stops. *Oxford and Cambridge Review*.

Week 13 (November 20) – Crypto and Robo and Auto, Oh My

Jeong, Sarah. (2017). Dogecoin. In *Paid: Tales of Dongles, Checks, and Other Money Stuff* ed. Bill Maurer and Lana Swartz, 52-67.

Günel, Gökçe. (2016). An 'Expensive Toy.' *Limn* Issue 7. <https://limn.it/articles/an-expensive-toy/>

Collins, Samuel. (2018). Working for the Robocracy: Critical Ethnography of Robot Futures. *Anthropology of Work Review* 39(1): 5-9

Gailey, Sarah (2018). STET. *Fireside Magazine*. <https://firesidefiction.com/stet#fourteen>

****Journal Due November 22****

Week 14 (November 27)

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 15 (December 4) – Conclusion: Tech Culture

Rosenblat, Alex (2018). *Uberland*. Focus on Intro, Chapters 1, 2, 5, Conclusion