# Anth 367: Technology and Culture
# Professor Lisa Messeri

# COVID EDITION

**Time:** Wednesday, 1:30-3:20
**Office Hours**: lisamesseri.youcanbook.me
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****The readings are subject to change. Always consult Canvas for updated assignments****

**Description**

To state the obvious, this semester is going to be different. This class will provide an opportunity to reflect on one major difference of this new world order: the intensification of living our lives and socializing online. Anthropologists have studied not only how culture and sociality occur in the digital realm, but they have reflected on how technology more broadly shapes and is shaped by different cultures.

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? We will learn to think about technology and culture as co-constituted by reading and discussing texts from history and anthropology of science, as well as fictional explorations relevant to course topics. The course will involve a semester long project in which we apply the method of anthropology and its theories to the study of an online world.

**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**

- Participation. I expect you to come to class having read the material and prepared to discuss and ask questions. (15%)
- Technology fieldnotes -> digital ethnography journal. In the first half of the semester, you will twice weekly write about a personal interaction with or observation of others with a technology. Incorporate readings and ideas from class as appropriate. Each entry should be 200-400 words. Following the mid-term essay, this practice will evolve into recording fieldnotes for your digital ethnography final project. More instructions will be provided. (Week 4, 8, 12, Finals Week) (20%)
- Online Discussion Contribution. At least once during the semester, I'd like you to post a link to an article you read that made you think about the themes of this class to the "Discussion" section of Canvas. Briefly (a paragraph or less) explain the connection you see with the class concepts. Several times a semester, post a reply (again, brief, a few sentences) to someone else's post. If you post 1 or 2 times and comment 3 or 4 times, you will receive full credit. (5%)
- Mid-Term Essay: Technology redesign project. In small groups, 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. More instructions will be provided. (Due Week 7) (20%) (5-7 pages)
- Digital mini-Ethnography. Taking advantage of the fact that we are all at present Extremely Online, the final project will be to conduct a mini-ethnography of an online community. This will involve observing and potentially participating in a community for approximately a month and writing up an ethnographic paper that captures an aspect of the community and responds to themes of this class. More instructions will be provided. (40%) (10-15 pages)
  - Project Proposal due Week 9
  - Conduct ethnography and record fieldnotes, Week 10-14
  - Scholarship Review due Week 12 (3-4 pages)
  - Final Paper due December 11

**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 particular liked or found challenging so we can discuss them in class.
- All readings are available on Canvas or online (where links are provided). There are two books from which we will be reading several chapters. Both of these books are available as digital loans online through Yale Libraries. For the pleasure of reading from an actual book, you may wish to purchase these on bookshop.com or your preferred vendor.
  - Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, and Taylor, *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*
  - Alex Rosenblat, *Uberland*

- 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.
  - I anticipate that several of you will experience COVID related disruptions to your circumstances or health (or that of your family/community) during the semester. I am committed to accommodating these needs and request early and clear communication.
- 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.

**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 (September 2) - 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 9) - 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.

Fouché, Rayvon. (2006). Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud: African Americans, American Artifactual Culture, and Black Vernacular Technological Creativity. *American Quarterly*. 58(3): 639-661.

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

Abidin, Crystal (2016). 'Aren't These Just Young, Rich Women Doing Vain Things Online?': Influencer Selfies as Subversive Frivolity. *Social Media and Society* pg. 1-17.


**Week 3 (September 16) – 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 23) – 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 25\*\***

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

**Week 5 (September 30) – Engineering Culture**

Irani, Lily (2019). Chp 1 **(selections)** and Chp 6. *Chasing Innovation*. Pg **10-18**; 141-171

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

Ames, Morgan (2019). Selections. *The Charisma Machine*

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

**Week 6 (October 7) – Everyday Politics of Ordinary Things**

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

Braun, Lund (2014). Introduction. *Breathing Race into the Machine: The Surprising Career of the Spirometer from Plantation to Genetics*. Pg. 14-31.

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 14) – 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.

**\*\*Mid-Term Essay due October 16\*\***


**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 8 (October 21) – Anthropology and the Digital World**

Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, and Taylor (2012). Chp 1 and Chp 2. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method.* Pg. 1-28.

Boellstorff, Tom (2008). Community. In *Coming of Age in Second Life*. Pg 179-201 (or similar).

Brock, André (2013). From the Blackhand Side: Twitter as a Cultural Conversation. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 56(4): 529-549.

**\*\*Journal Due October 23\*\***


**Week 9 (October 28) – 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\*\*

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

Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, and Taylor (2012). Chp 5 and Chp 8. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method.* Pg. 65-91 and 125-150.

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

**\*\*Digital mini-ethnography project proposal due October 30\*\***


**Week 10 (November 4) – 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.

Halegoua, Germaine, Leavitt, Alex, and Gray, Mary (2016). Jumping for Fun? Negotiating Mobility and the Geopolitics of Foursquare. *Social Media and Society.* 1-12.

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 what isn't yet here?**

**Week 11 (November 11) – 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

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


**\*\*Fieldwork Journal Due November 12\*\***


**Week 12 (November 18) – The Future of your Final Projects**

No Reading
Informal sharing and feedback on digital mini-ethnographies.


**\*\*Scholarship Review due November 20\*\***

**Week 13 (November 27)**

**THANKSGIVING BREAK**

**Week 14 (December 2) – Conclusion: Tech Culture**

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