

Spring 2022 Course Syllabus

FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR:

THE CULTURE OF TECHNOLOGY (GEOG 062)

M/W/F 11:15-12:05 CH 204

course homepage: via <https://sakai.unc.edu/>

Prof. Scott Kirsch

Department of Geography, UNC-Chapel Hill

Office hours (remote): M 4-5; Th 2-4; and by appointment:

via <https://unc.zoom.us/my/kirsch.geography>

email: kirsch@email.unc.edu

Overview

Cell phones; global positioning systems; genetically-modified organisms; microchips; the internet; steam engines; automobiles, passenger jets; x-rays; nuclear bombs; satellites; magnetic resonance imaging; the printing press. The list goes on. Technological systems and artifacts seem to have shaped our world in critical ways, from our means of dealing with nature to our modes of dealing with each other; even the dimensions of space and time, as we understand them, have been remade through innovation and technological change. And yet, though technology is among the most distinctly *human* of social processes, its profound effects on humanity, social relations, everyday life, and the environment are often left unexamined.

This seminar uses the lens of culture to explore the codes of meaning and values, and relations of social power, that are 'hard-wired' in our technologies. Focusing on reflections of technology in film, art, literature, media, and built environments, while introducing students to interdisciplinary *cultural studies of technology* and *human geography* perspectives, the course encourages critical thinking and writing about the place of technology in past, present, and future worlds.

Format

As a First-Year Seminar, *The Culture of Technology* is an exercise in active learning. This begins with the seminar format itself. Whereas a traditional lecture course is built mainly around models of 'one-way' transmission of knowledge, *from professor to students*, a seminar is designed as a more collective experience of engagement with ideas and texts, with the instructor helping mainly to provide context, set the terms of debate, and mediate class discussion. Hence, even more than in a lecture course, the success of a seminar depends on YOU, and the hard work of reading and writing in preparation for class so that you can participate fully in class discussions.

Expect reading assignments to range from ~20-40 pages per week, with some material more challenging than others – and set aside time accordingly. Many weeks will include informal written response assignments focusing on one of the course readings that week to be followed by in-class discussion the next day. By working through some of the course texts collectively, our purpose is to create an environment for critical reflection and debate that allows us to engage with ideas more deeply, or in more unexpected ways, than might be possible when engaging with the ideas, issues, and creative works only on our own. Along with occasional short lectures, slideshows, and curated film and video clips, small group and partner participation exercises and student-lead seminar discussion in class will provide a key component of how the class works.*

All students are expected to stay tuned in to the course *sakai* site for updated course information, announcements, power points, and pdfs or links to non-textbook readings. Many of the participation & response assignments will be run through the sakai: assignments page.

A Note on COVID-19 Accommodations:

- Geog 062 is designed as an in-person learning experience in which all participants must observe UNC’s [community standards](#) requiring use of masks (covering both nose and mouth!) in the classroom.
- There will be out-of-class accommodations for any in-class exercises and assignments that students may miss due to health, isolation, and quarantine requirements (note that it is not necessary to ask my permission to miss class, and your concerns not to put others at risk are also appreciated). Beginning with the first week, some class sessions may be recorded and posted (via sakai) after class (not livestreamed). Students are encouraged to keep me informed of any conditions that will prevent their participation in the course or require accommodation to do so.
- While I hope for this class to continue to meet in person this semester, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic may require changes to this plan as conditions change. If I need to change the format of the course temporarily due to outbreaks of illness, I will announce this via email and the course sakai site.

Requirements*

25%	Participation/classwork
20%	Seminar and response assignments
20%	Mid-term exam
15%	Story-mapping projects
20%	Final exam
100	

**All assignments will be discussed in class and posted to sakai*

Assigned Texts

Hughes, Thomas P. 2004. *Human-Built World: How to Think about Technology and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Available at Student Stores)

Jensen, Bruce, and DeHaven, Tom. 1989. ***William Gibson’s Neuromancer: The Graphic Novel ... Volume 1***. New York: Epic Comics. (Available on sakai: resources)

Additional required readings, to be provided as pdf files or links via sakai, are listed by author in the provisional schedule, with full bibliographic references below

PROVISIONAL SCHEDULE & KEY DATES

Dates	Topics	Required Reading
Jan 10-21	1. Introduction: Cultures of Technology --The first-year seminar program --Slippery terms: technology, culture, and the ‘culture of technology’	❖ Williams (from <i>Keywords</i>) ❖ Hughes, “Introduction” ❖ Gibson, “Chiba City Blues”

	--Cyberspace, geographies of technology, & histories of the future	❖ Bowler “How we’ll live”
Jan. 17	*No Classes – MLK holiday*	
Jan 24- Feb 4	<p>2. Cultures of Progress & Innovation</p> <p>--World’s Fairs and expositions --Technology and spectacle --Future stories</p>	<p>❖ Wilson “Technological utopias” ❖ Hughes, ch. 2 ❖ https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/past-future-a-short-history-of-the-future ❖ “Drones to Ploughshares” podcast</p>
Feb 7-25	<p>3. Machines</p> <p>--Industrial life: machines and work --The city as machine --Industry and art --I, robot?</p>	<p>❖ Hughes, ch. 3 ❖ Pihet ❖ Asimov</p>

Feb 23/ Mar 2	Mid-Term exam [‘take-home’ assigned/due]	
--------------------------	---	--

Feb 28 – Mar 11	<p>4. Geographies of Infrastructure</p> <p>--Spaces of connectivity --Roads not travelled? --Infrastructures of war</p>	<p>❖ Carse, “Keyword: infrastructure” ❖ Hughes, ch. 4 ❖ <i>Neuromancer</i> graphic novel</p>
Mar 14- 18	NO CLASSES – SPRING BREAK	
Mar 21- Apr 13	<p>5. Living Technology</p> <p>--Genetic futures --Eco-technic interventions --GeoEngineering imaginaries --ArcGIS story mapping*</p>	<p>❖ “Mother of Invention” podcast (Part 1*) ❖ Hughes, ch. 6 ❖ Koch, “Whose apocalypse?” ❖ “Biosphere 2” podcast</p>
Apr 15	*No Classes – Holiday*	
Apr 18- 27	<p>6. Workshops</p> <p>--Story map presentations --Teknologirådet*</p>	<p>❖ “Mother of Invention” podcast (Parts 2 & 3) *or* Gibson, <i>Neuromancer</i></p>
May 6 @ noon	Final Exams due (‘take-home’ exam)	

Additional Texts

*These will be available as links and downloads through **sakai: resources**.*

Asimov, Isaac. 2000. *I, Robot: short stories*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Selections)

- Bowler**, Peter J. 2017. "Bowler "How we'll live" in *A History of the Future: Prophets of Progress from H.G. Wells to Isaac Asimov*, pp. 40-54. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carse**, Ashley. 2017. "Keyword: infrastructure. How a humble French engineering term shaped the modern world" in P. Harvey, C. Jensen, and A. Morita (eds.), *Infrastructures and Social Complexity: A Companion*, pp. 27–39 London: Routledge, 2017.
- Gibson**, William. 1984. "Chiba City Blues" from *Neuromancer*, pp. 3-25. New York: Ace Books
- Koch**, Natalie. 2021. *Whose apocalypse? Biosphere 2 and the spectacle of settler science in the desert. Geoforum* 124: 36-45.
- Pihet**, Valérie. 2005. "The Detroit Industry Murals. Diego Rivera (1886-1957)" in B. Latour and P. Weibel (eds), *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, pp 504-511. Cambridge, Mass, and London: ZKM, Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe and MIT Press.
- Schlenoff, D. 2016. A short history of the future: Forward-looking stories from *Scientific American*, 1845-2016. **Scientific American**, September 1, 2016.
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/past-future-a-short-history-of-the-future>
- Williams**, Raymond. 1983. "Culture" and "Technology" in *Keywords*, pp. 87-93; 315-316. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson**, A. 1992. "Technological Utopias: World's Fairs and Theme Parks" in *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Podcasts

Levar Burton Reads, "**Drones to Ploughshares**" by Sarah Gailey, December 28, 2021

Levar Burton Reads, "**Mother of Invention**" by Nnedi Okorafor (3 parts), November 17 & 24, December 1, 2020

Nice Try!, "**Biosphere 2: The Theater of Utopia**" 2019

- Please inform the instructor if you have **special needs** which require accommodations in or out of the classroom in order for you to fully participate in this course.
- Your full participation and observance of the **Honor Code** is expected in this course.
<http://studentconduct.unc.edu/>
- Changes to the syllabus and class schedule are occasionally required. Any key changes will be announced in class lectures and via sakai: announcements
- Carolina community standards, including facemasks worn over the nose and mouth, will be upheld in the course: <https://carolinatogether.unc.edu/community-standards/>
- For additional information and university policies see the UNC-Chapel Hill "**Information for Undergraduate Classes, Spring 2022**" (posted under sakai: resources: syllabus and course information)