

Spring 2023 Course Syllabus
FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR:
THE CULTURE OF TECHNOLOGY (GEOG 062)
T/Th 3:30-4:45pm CH 204
course homepage: via <https://sakai.unc.edu/>



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

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; spaceflight; the printing press. The list goes on. The artifacts that we call “technology” seem to have shaped our world in critical ways, from our means of dealing with nature to our modes of dealing with each other. 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’ into our technologies. Focusing on reflections of technology in film, art, literature, media, landscapes 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 texts that week, to be followed by in-class discussion the next day. By working through some of the course texts collectively (including podcasts, videos, and graphic novels as well as written texts), our purpose is to create an environment that allows us to engage with ideas and creative works more deeply than might be possible when doing so on our own, or in unexpected ways. 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 be key components of how the class works. All students are expected to stay tuned to the course *sakai* site for updated course information, announcements, lecture power points, and pdfs or links to readings.

The course is designed as an in-class learning experience and attendance is expected. Some but not all lectures will be recorded via Panopto, with links posted to sakai. Participation/classwork grades, in particular, are based on occasional in-class (or post-class) activities, and exams will test students on both readings and lectures. **However**, this work can be made-up if you have good reasons for missing class, including health, isolation and quarantine requirements, and you are of course encouraged to do what you can to keep the classroom a healthy environment. Feel free to contact the instructor if you have questions or concerns.

Requirements*

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

Required Texts:

None.

Required reading? Yes! *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 10/12 Jan 17/19	1. Introduction: Cultures of Technology ❖ Slippery terms: technology, culture, and the ‘culture of technology’ ❖ History of the future ❖ technology out of control?	❖ Williams (from <i>Keywords</i>) ❖ Drones to Ploughshares podcast ❖ Bowler “How we’ll live”
Jan 24/26 Jan 31/Feb 2	2. Cultures of Progress & Innovation ❖ World’s Fairs and expositions ❖ Technology and spectacle ❖ Future stories: geographies of cyberspace	❖ Wilson “Technological utopias” ❖ LoC, “Introducing the telephone” ❖ <i>Scientific American</i> ❖ Gibson, “Chiba City Blues”
Feb 7/9 Feb xx/16	3. Machine • Machines and work • The city as machine Feb 14: No class – Well-being day • Industry and art	❖ Pihet ❖ Asimov

Feb 21/23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I, robot? 	
Feb 21/28	Mid-Term exam [assigned/due]	
Feb 28/Mar 2 Mar 07/09 Mar 21/23	4. Living Technology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart houses and genetic futures • Eco-technic interventions and geoengineering imaginaries • ArcGIS story mapping workshop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “Mother of Invention” podcast (Part 1*) ❖ <i>Neuromancer</i> graphic novel ❖ Koch, “<i>Whose apocalypse?</i>” ❖ “Biosphere 2” podcast
Mar 13-17	** ENJOY SPRING BREAK!**	
Mar 28/30 Apr 04/xx Apr 11/13	5. Welcome to the Anthropocene <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Age of man’? • Future remains Apr 6: No class – Well-being day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anthropocene landscapes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Future Remains</i> (selections)
Apr 18/20 Apr 25/27	6. Workshops <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story map presentations • Teknologirådet* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “Mother of Invention” podcast (Part 2) *or* Gibson, <i>Neuromancer</i>
May 8	Final Exams due 4pm (‘take-home’ exam)	

Course 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.

Gibson, William. 1984. “Chiba City Blues” from *Neuromancer*, pp. 3-25. New York: Ace Books

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

Koch, Natalie. 2021. *Whose apocalypse? Biosphere 2 and the spectacle of settler science in the desert*. *Geoforum* 124: 36-45.

Library of Congress [LoC] (no date). StoryMap: “Introducing the Telephone at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition: The world learns of Alexander Graham Bell’s invention”
<https://www.loc.gov/ghe/cascade/index.html?appid=44f7c2bf113b4560af3c20cdc556ecaa&bookmark=The%20Centennial>

Gregg Mitman, Marco Armiero, and Robert S. Emmett (eds), *Future Remains: A Cabinet of Curiosities for the Anthropocene* (University of Chicago Press, 2018), *selections*

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 (2 parts), November 17 & 24, December 1, 2020

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

CLASS POLICIES:

□ 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

□ For information on Covid-19 community standards please see:
<https://carolinatogether.unc.edu/community-standards>

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Image source: "The Prologue and the Promise" by Robert McCall (1983), 19' by 60' canvas commissioned by Disney's EPCOT Center.