

St. Francis Xavier University
Department of Sociology

TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY (SOC 242.10)

Fall 2018
Lecture Room: IM 202
Mondays 8:15 – 9:30am; Thursdays 9:45 – 11:00am

Instructor: Dr. Stephen Marmura
Office: Annex 111C
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Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:00am – 12:00pm;
Thursdays & Fridays 11:00am-12:00pm
(or by appointment)

Required Texts

CSPI Course Pack: available in bookstore

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces central issues and debates concerning technology and its relationship to other aspects of the social world including work, leisure, communication, social inequality, cultural identity, and social dissent. We begin by considering various perspectives on the nature of technological innovation and its relationship to social/cultural change. Attention is then directed to the great upheavals associated with the industrial revolution, and to the technological character of the modern, mass societies which subsequently took shape. We also consider debates about the social shaping of technology, and the relationship between technology and science. The latter part of the course addresses the context of post-industrial, information-based societies, the related development of digital networking technologies, and accompanying changes to the character of social interaction, popular culture, and social control.

Evaluation

Participation: **5%** of grade
Test: Oct. 11 (in class): **20%** of grade
Final Exam: **40%** of grade
Course Assignment (see description at end of syllabus): **35%** of grade

COURSE OUTLINE

Sept. (6) Introduction

Sept. (10, 13) What is technology?

The Technological Society
Anabel Quan-Hasse

Sept. (17, 20) Technological 'Revolutions': The Case of Print

The Second Revolution: Printing
Irving Fang

Film: print transforms knowledge

Sept. (24, 27) The Question of 'Neutrality' and the Problem of Determinism

The Medium is the Message
Marshall McLuhan

Oct. (1, 4) Technology and Social Change: some perspectives from anthropology

The Original Affluent Society
Marshall Sahlins

Contemporary Evolutionism
Kaplan & Manners

Oct (8) *Thanksgiving* – no class

Oct. (11) **Test** (20%)

(15, 18) The Question of 'Progress'

The Posthistorical Period and the Technological Environment
Jacques Ellul

Engaging with Luddism
Robins & Webster

Appliances and their impact: the ownership of domestic technology and time spent on household work
Michael Bittman, James Mahmud Rice and Judy Wajcman

Oct. (22, 25) The Social Construction of Technology

The American Army and the M-16 rifle
James Fallows

A Social Shaping perspective on the development of the World Wide Web
Edward Lemert

(Oct. 29; Nov. 1) Technological Diffusion and Social Change

The Adoption and Diffusion of Technological Innovations
Anabel Quan-Hasse

The Great Disruption
Francis Fukuyama

Nov. (5, 8) The Rise of 'Information Societies'

Information Society: Definitions
Frank Webster

The Rise of the Food Risk Society and the Changing Nature of the Technological Treadmill
Chatalova, et. al

Nov. (12) *Remembrance Day* – no class

Nov. (15, 19, 22) continued

The New Taylorism: Surveillance, Work and Discipline
Christian Parenti

The Impact of the Internet on Society: A Global Perspective
Manuel Castells

Selfie Culture at the Intersection of the Corporate and the Surveillance States
Henry Giroux

Nov. (26, 29) Technology, State Power and Social Dissent

Hacking the State: Hackers, technology, control, resistance and the state
Steinmetz & Gerber

Course Assignment: (35%)

Length: 7 – 10 pages

Due: End of term (date TBA)

For your course assignment you are required to select a technological artifact or innovation and examine it sociologically. To do this, you will need to consider your technology both with respect to its 'affordances' (what it enables) and along the lines of Mark Poster's *four levels of technological inscription* indicated below:

- the constraints of the technology, its material limits
- the pre-technological conditions for the introduction of the technology; perceived needs that inspire innovation
- the general cultural determinations of the technology
- the determinations of the medium through practices; how people symbolize their experience with the medium

Poster's criteria, and the assignment itself, will be discussed at length early in the course. Basically, Poster provides guidelines for avoiding the trap of technological determinism (a topic also covered early in the course) while outlining a means for appreciating how various social realities interact with the specific attributes of any given technology; affecting the ways it will be adopted and utilized by individuals and groups within society. Your thesis should concern what you think is most significant or unusual with respect to the adoption, diffusion, or changing social role(s) of the technology you selected. You will need to consult at least four academic resources (books or journal articles) beyond the readings utilized in the course, although the latter may be consulted as well.

Please Note: Students are expected to be familiar with the academic integrity policy concerning plagiarism as set out in the StFX Academic Calendar.