

St. Francis Xavier University
Department of Sociology

TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY (SOC 242.10)

Winter 2023
Lecture Room: AX 124
Wednesdays 12:45 – 2:00pm; Fridays 11:15 – 12:30am

Instructor: Dr. Stephen Marmura
Email: smarmura@stfx.ca
Office Hours (NT 603): Tuesdays 10:00am – 12:00pm; Thursdays 12:00pm –
3:00pm; Fridays 1:00pm – 2:00pm
(or by appointment)

Required Course Material:

All reading material for this course is available on the course Moodle site and/or via class email.

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, the relationship between technology and science, and the nature of technological diffusion. The latter part of the course addresses the context of post-industrial 'information societies', the related development of digital technologies, and accompanying changes to the character of social interaction, popular culture, and social control.

Evaluation

Quiz: **10%**

Test (in class) = **20%**

Final Exam: **40%**

Course Assignment (see description at end of syllabus): **30%**

Final drop date for this course: March 10, 2023

COURSE OUTLINE

Jan. (4, 6); (11, 13) Introduction: What is technology?

The Technological Society
Anabel Quan-Hasse

The Original Affluent Society
Marshall Sahlins

Jan. (18) **Quiz 10%**

Jan. (20, 25, 27) Technology and Social Change

Contemporary Evolutionism
Kaplan & Manners

The Second Revolution: Printing
Irving Fang

Film: print transforms knowledge

Feb. (1, 3) Technological 'Neutrality' and the Problem of Determinism

The Medium is the Message
Marshall McLuhan

Review of Mark Poster's 'four levels of technological inscription'
(no reading)

Feb. (8, 10, 15) cont. Questioning 'Progress'

The Posthistorical Period and the Technological Environment
Jacques Ellul

Engaging with Luddism
Robins & Webster

Feb. (17) **Test 20%**

Feb. (22, 24) **Reading Week**

Mar. (1, 3) The Social Construction of Technology

The material of male power
Cynthia Cockburn

The American Army and the M-16 rifle
James Fallows

Mar. (8, 10) Technological Diffusion

Should the AF Retire the A-10?
Chuck Spinney

The Adoption and Diffusion of Technological Innovations
Anabel Quan-Hasse

Mar. (15, 17) (22, 24) The Rise of 'Information Societies'

"I've Got Nothing to Hide" and Other Misunderstandings of Privacy
Daniel Solove

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

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

How social media took us from Tahrir Square to Donald Trump
Zeynep Tufekci (recommended)

(Mar. 29, 31); Apr. (5) Technology, State Power, and Social Dissent

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

Course Assignment: (30%)

Critical response paper (regarding two articles): *The Impact of the Internet on Society: A Global Perspective* by Manuel Castells; *Selfie Culture at the Intersection of the Corporate and the Surveillance States* by Henry Giroux

Length: 6 – 8 pages (double-spaced; 12 pt. font)

Due: Thursday, April 5 (in class)

Manuel Castells and Henry Giroux provide contrasting views of the internet (and digital technology more generally) in terms of its capacity to empower or disempower the individual, and to encourage or enable corresponding expressions of culture. At the same time neither analyst appraises the internet in isolation but rather as part and parcel of broader social, economic, and political trends.

This assignment requires that you formulate a thesis and provide a critical appraisal concerning which author you believe presents the most pertinent commentary when considering the role of the internet and/or social media in relation to contemporary North American or global culture and why. Alternatively, you may argue that the two articles are at least somewhat complementary, with one providing qualifiers or correctives for the other. Regardless of your stance, consider the general line(s) of reasoning pursued in each case and how they may extend to examples beyond those mentioned in the two articles.

While the two articles correspond to course readings for late March, you are encouraged to familiarize yourself with them early in the term. Neither article is very long.

At least four other academic sources should be cited in your response. These may include but are not limited to other readings from this course.

Late policy: As a general policy (barring exceptional circumstances), there is a 5% deduction from the final assignment grade per day late including weekends – with no assignments accepted more than one week after the deadline.

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