Technology and Society (SOCI171)

Winter 2025. MWF 6-6:50pm in CSB 004

Professor Jon Ruiz: jjr026@ucsd.edu

 Office hours: M/W 3-4pm in SSB 474

**Overview**

In the span of ten weeks, it is all but impossible to provide a thorough overview of the study of technology and society. Instead, this course will narrowly focus on two questions. First, how do social processes underpin technological development? Second, how do technological artifacts help shape society? To address these questions, we will cover a range of theoretical and substantive themes, including the politics of facial recognition software, pharmaceuticals, genetics, the synthesizer and food production. By the end of the course, students should be able to critically reflect on the technological world we live in by understanding that technologies are not objective artifacts. Rather, they are heavily influenced by social forces.

**Assessment**

Assessment for the class will consist of attendance, memos, a midterm exam, and a final exam. The breakdown of final grades will be as follows:

Attendance: 10% of your grade.

Memos: 30% of your grade. Each student will submit a total of five reading response memos. You can choose which weeks to write on (the only week you cannot select is week 5). Memos must be submitted by 11:59pm the Friday of the week you are writing on. Memos are 300-500 words, will be graded pass/fail, and are to be submitted via the Assignments page in Canvas. All memos must summarize at least one reading in the syllabus for that week and present a question, criticism, or comment for further discussion. You may also engage with other readings.

Midterm Essay: 5-7 pages, double-spaced. Due Friday of week 5.

Final exam: 40% of your grade. The final exam will take a similar form to the midterm, but with two essay responses.

**Readings**

All texts are available on Canvas. I recommend setting up a VPN to access online readings off campus. See instructions [here](https://blink.ucsd.edu/technology/network/connections/off-campus/remote-desktop/index.html) Please let me know if you have trouble accessing the readings.

Some readings will contain technical genetics terms. I strongly recommend that you consult publicly available resources like Wikipedia.

**Course policies**

Cheating and plagiarism:

Students are expected to do their own work and to cite sources according to established norms as outlined in the UCSD Policy on Academic Integrity. The policy can be found here: h: http://senate.ucsd.edu/Operating-Procedures/Senate-Manual/Appendices/2. A FAQs page on what counts as cheating can be found here: [http://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/faq/index.html](http://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/faq/index.html%20).

Cheaters will receive a failing grade on the assignment or exam and/or the entire course. They may also be referred for additional disciplinary action elsewhere at UCSD. If you are unsure about what is considered either plagiarism or cheating, please ask.

Missing/late exams and assignments:

Failure to turn in your take-home exams on time without a valid excuse will result in the deduction of one half-letter grade for every day (or part thereof) after the deadline. Excuses communicated after the deadline will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances.

Contesting grades:

You may contest any grades by sending the assignment or exam to me. However, please be

aware that this may result in a lower grade than the one given by the course TA.

Struggles with the class:

If you are having trouble with any aspect of the class, including deadlines, it is always best to contact me as soon as possible. That way we can address the problem before you have fallen too far behind or lost too many points from your final grade.

Disability accommodations:

Students requesting accommodation for this course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD). Students are required to present their AFA letters to Faculty (please contact me privately) and to the OSD Liaisons in the Sociology Department in advance so that accommodation may be arranged.

**Week 1: Introduction and What it Means to Say that Technology is Social**

*Monday (1/6)*

Introduction, no reading

*Wednesday (1/8)*

Pinch, T. and W.E. Bijker, ‘The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts: Or How the Sociology of Science and the Sociology of Technology might Benefit Each Other,’ pp. 11-44 in Bijker, W., Hughes, T. and T. Pinch (eds*) The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*

*Friday (1/10)*

Latour, B. (2020) ‘Is This a Dress Rehearsal?’ *Critical Inquiry*

**Week 2: Actor Network Theory and Cybernetics**

*Monday (1/13)*

Latour, B. (1982) “Give me a laboratory and I will raise the world.” Pp. 141-170 in Knorr, K. and M. Mulkay (eds) *Science Observed*. Sage: Thousand Oaks.

*Wednesday (1/15)*

Latour, cont.

*Friday (1/17)*

Pickering, A. (2002) Cybernetics and the mangle: Ashby, Beer, and Pask.” *Social Studies of Science* 32(3): 413-437.

**Week 3: The Question Concerning Technology**

*Monday (1/20)*

MLK, Jr. holiday, no class!

*Wednesday (1/22)*

Heidegger, M. (1977) The Question Concerning Technology,’ pp. 3-35 in Heidegger, M. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York: Harper & Row.

*Friday (1/24)*

Heidegger, cont.

**Week 4: Sound, Music, Technology, and Culture**

*Monday (1/27)*

Pinch, T. and Frank Trocco. (2002) *Analog Days: The Invention and Impact of the Moog Synthesizer*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 1-11, 53-70 (Introduction and Chapter 3).

*Wednesday (1/29)*

Pinch, T. and Frank Trocco. (2002) *Analog Days: The Invention and Impact of the Moog Synthesizer*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 89-106, pp. 302-324 (Chapter 5 and Conclusion).

*Friday (1/31)*

Pinch and Trocco, cont.

**Week 5: Review and Midterm Exam**

*Monday (2/3)*

Review, no reading

*Wednesday (2/5)*

Review, no reading

*Friday (2/7)*

Midterm Exam

**Week 6: The Politics of Technology**

*Monday (2/10)*

Winner, L. (1980) ‘Do Artifacts Have Politics?’ Daedalus, 109(1): 121-136.

Ivanova, I. (2020) ‘Why Face Recognition Technology Has a Bias Problem,’ CBS News, June 12.

*Wednesday (2/12)*

Nadler, Anthony, and Joan Donovan. 2018. “Weaponizing the Digital Influence Machine.” Data & Society. Data & Society Research Institute. October 17, 2018.

*Friday (2/14)*

Murphy, Hannah. 2023. “The rising AI threat to democracy.” Financial Timese

**Week 7: Medicalization and Biomedicalization**

*Monday (2/17)*

Conrad, P. (2005) ‘The Shifting Engines of Medicalization,’ Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 46: 3- 14.

*Wednesday (2/19)*

Clarke, A.E., Shim, J.K., Mamo, L., Fosket, J.R. and Jennifer R. Fishman. (2003) ‘Biomedicalization: Technoscientific Transformations of Health, Illness, and U.S. Biomedicine,’ *American Sociological Review*, 68(2): 161-194.

*Friday (2/21)*

Clarke et al., cont.

**Week 8: Drugs and Genes**

*Monday (2/24)*

Dumit, J. (2015) ‘Pharmaceutical Witnessing: Drugs for Life in an Era of Direct-to-Consumer Advertising,’ pp. 33-48 in Sismondo, S. and J. Greene (eds*.) The Pharmaceutical Studies Reader*, Oxford: John Wiley & Sons

*Wednesday (2/26)*

Navon, D. and Gil Eyal. (2016) ‘Looping Genomes: Diagnostic Change and the Genetic Makeup of the Autism Population.’ *American Journal of Sociology* 121(5): 1416-1471.

*Friday (2/28)*

Navon & Eyal, cont.

**Week 9: Time, Acceleration, and Technology**

*Monday (3/3)*

Wajcman, J. (2015) *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism*, pp. 1-11, 37-59 (Introduction and Chapter 2), Chicago: Chicago University Press.

*Wednesday (3/5)*

Wajcman, J. (2014) ‘Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism,’ Lecture at the London School of Economics, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uR1xDyh2oXY

*Friday (3/7)*

Wajcman, J. (2015) *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism*, pp. 87-109 (Chapter 4), Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Burg, N. (2013) ‘How Technology Has Changed Workplace Communication,’ *Forbes*, December 10.

**Week 10: Food Production and Final Review**

*Monday (3/10)*

Landaecker, H. (2019) ‘A Metabolic History of Manufacturing Waste: Food Commodities and Their Outsides,’ *Food, Culture & Society*, 22(5): 530-547.

*Wednesday (3/12)*

Review, no reading

*Friday (3/14)*

Review, no reading