



## Course Information



### SM2007 Culture, Society, and New Technologies

It has been widely observed that the world we live in today seems simultaneously more expansive and more compressed. In fact, there is a good deal of truth in both of these apparently mutually exclusive observations. We live, that is, in a time when what was once contradictory now constitutes a significant aspect of normal, everyday experience.

The world feels more expansive, more *available* to our senses, minds, and emotions because we can gain access to more places, people, events, information, and ideas than any previous generation even dreamed of. It feels more compressed both because geographic distance has become irrelevant in many forms of communication, and because—if we link the idea of compression with the psychological state of claustrophobia—the sheer quantity of information available to us at any given moment can be frankly overwhelming.

It is quite clear that a key catalyst for these fundamental transformations in the nature of human experience involves developments in the field of communication technology. This is a subset, of course, of much broader and deeper trends in all areas of technology. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and into the 21<sup>st</sup>, the pace of technological development has accelerated well beyond any precedent, to the point that most of the people who have ever "invented" anything in recorded history are alive today.

The development of economically feasible digital technologies, which have proved adaptable to a staggering array of commercial, artistic, personal, and practical needs, has been crucial here. As computational power has increased (approximately according to the exponential development curve predicted by Intel's Gordon Moore in the 1960s), computers have become ubiquitous in our lives. Among many other usually invisible roles, they keep our cars running, make sure our toast doesn't burn, and keep an eye on our soybean harvests from outer space. And they underpin virtually all of the most widely used forms of personal and mediated communication available to us today.

We live, that is, in a media-saturated world made possible by the digital transformation. New communication technologies have changed and are changing the ways in which information can be gathered, stored, exchanged, distributed, exhibited, received, and interacted with. New technologies are helping to change the types of information we can get access to and the formats through which information is processed.

And these changes have affected not just end users of the various media. The organization and function of previously existing media industries all over the world have been transformed by the introduction and spread of new technologies, and entirely new industries have developed within a remarkably short time frame.

The digital transformation also has fostered a logic of industrial and technological convergence, through which media sectors that were once comparatively discrete now find themselves using multiple production interfaces and marketing to an array of audiences through multiple distribution platforms.

"Culture, Society, and New Technologies," then, is intended to address some of the major implications of this set of circumstances, and to deepen your critical understanding of the relationship among new technologies, culture, and yourself. Through this course, you should develop a more thorough comprehension of the social and cultural roles of new technologies, and of the ways in which new technologies are introduced and diffused within different social and cultural situations.

 **Weekly schedule**  
**Week 1 (Sept 1-5): Technology and culture--basic concepts**

Reading: Murphie & Potts, *Culture & Technology*, Introduction & Chapter 1 ("Theoretical Frameworks")

  
**Week 2 (Sept 8-12): Technological futures of the past, pt. 1**

Screening: *Metropolis* (Germany, 1927)


Reading: Telotte, "The Seductive Text of *Metropolis*"

  
**Week 3 (Sept 15-19): Technological futures of the past, pt. 2**

Reading: Murphie & Potts, *Culture & Technology*, Chapter 4 ("Science Fictions"), pp. 95-109; Telotte, "The Seductive Text of *Metropolis*"

  
**Week 4 (Sept 22-26): Art, technology, modern, postmodern**

Reading: Murphie & Potts, *Culture & Technology*, Chapter 2 ("Art & Technology")

  
**Week 5 (Sept 29-Oct 3): Thinking about audiences and end users**

Reading: Ang, "The Nature of the Audience"

  
**SHORT CRITICAL RESPONSE DUE IN TUTORIALS**  
**Week 6 (Oct 6-10): Science fiction & the digital self, pt. 1**

Screening: *eXistenZ* (Canada, 1999)

Reading: Hotchkiss, "'Still in the Game': Cybertransformations of the 'New Flesh' in David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*"

**Week 7 (Oct 13-17): Science fiction & the digital self, pt. 2**



Reading: Murphie & Potts, *Culture & Technology*, Chapter 4 ("Science Fictions"), pp. 109-114, & Chapter 5 ("Cyborgs")

**Week 8 (Oct 20-24): Digital languages, pt. 1**



Reading: Gere, *Digital Culture*, Chapter 1 ("The Beginnings of Digital Culture")

**Week 9 (Oct 27-31): Digital languages, pt. 2**



**MEDIA DIARY & ANALYSIS DUE IN TUTORIALS**



**Week 10 (Nov 3-7): Issues in digital aesthetics--copyright**



Reading: Murphie & Potts, *Culture & Technology*, Chapter 3 ("Digital Aesthetics: Cultural Effects of New Media Technologies"), pp. 66-75



**ORAL PRESENTATIONS BEGIN IN TUTORIALS**



**Week 11 (Nov 10-14): Issues in digital aesthetics--surveillance and digital culture**



Reading: David Lyon, "The Watched World Today" and "Spreading Surveillance Sites"



**Week 12 (Nov 17-21): Issues in digital aesthetics--technology & consciousness**



Reading: Murphie & Potts, *Culture & Technology*, Chapter 6 ("Technology, Thought, and Consciousness")



**Week 13 (Nov 24-28): Artists & new technologies**



Reading: Murphie & Potts, *Culture & Technology*, Chapter 3 ("Digital Aesthetics: Cultural Effects of New Media Technologies"), pp. 75-94