Introduction

This class is designed to constitute a philosophically, historically, and sociologically robust introduction to reflection on the theory and practice of technology, both in the abstract and by an analysis of some of its concrete forms. The class will first involve readings concerning the history of philosophy and the history of scientific knowledge production in general as they relate to technology, and will subsequently turn to readings that analyze specific technologies that are highly pertinent in contemporary social reality, from nuclear power and endocrinology to racialized toxic waste management and theories about the economic consequences of automation.

In general, the thesis of the course is that particular technologies are intelligible and valuable only in response to historically determinate social and political problems, and that their power and value is a function of their relation to and concrete usage within that socio-political context.

The two polemical targets of the course are the techno-magical optimism or solutionism that believes that technology is inherently valuable, providing technical solutions to problems that consequently do not need to be treated politically; and the techno-pessimism or antimodernism that believes that technology is inherently bad, usually on the basis of a theory of a natural human essence from which technology alienates us, or of scientific rationality itself as being inevitably violent and dominating.

Through our readings, we will instead attempt to come to understand technology as something that opens the doors both for genuinely novel forms of human liberation and vibrant possibilities of living well, as well as for new forms of domination, violence, and subjection. To this end we will concern ourselves with the ways in which particular technologies can shape, and historically have shaped, concrete forms of lived human reality as they are mediated by capitalist relations of production and exchange, dominant paradigms of scientific knowledge production, modes of production of racial and gendered subjects, the afterlives of technoscientific products as waste, ideals of democratic participation, and the like.

This course is reading and writing intensive, and is designed in accordance with the DePaul Philosophy Department’s Stated learning outcomes.
Course Schedule
This schedule of readings and assignments is tentative and subject to change.

1. April 1. Technē and the History of Philosophy

2. April 8. Modernity, Science, Knowledge
   a. Mitcham, “Philosophy and the History of Technology”
   b. Daston, “The History of Science and the History of Knowledge”

3. April 15. Technology and Society
   b. Winner, “Do Artifacts Have Politics?”

4. April 22. Production and Automation
   a. Marx, “The Fragment on Machines”
   b. Srnicek and Williams, “The Future Isn’t Working”

5. April 29. Nuclear Power
   a. Erickson et. al., “Saving the Planet from Nuclear Weapons and the Human Mind”
   b. Anders, “Theses for an Atomic Age”
      (recommended: van Munster and Sylvest, “Reclaiming nuclear politics?”

Wednesday, May 1. Response Paper Due

6. May 6. Media and Mediation
   a. Kellner, “Media Culture and the Triumph of the Spectacle”
   b. Morozov, “Internet Freedoms and Their Consequences”

   a. Uricchio, “Data, Culture and the Ambivalence of Algorithms”
      Black Boxes”

   a. Magnet, “Representing Biometrics”
   b. Preciado, “Phamaco-pornographic Politics: Towards a New Gender Ecology”
      (recommended: Haraway, “Gene: Maps and Portraits of Life Itself”)
9. **May 27. Waste and Toxicity**
   a. Pasquletti, “Landscape Permanence and Nuclear Warnings”
   b. Van Loon, “Cultivating waste: excessive risks in an economy of opportunities”
   c. Gabrielson, “The Enactment of Intention and Exception through Poisoned Corpses and Toxic Bodies”

**June 1. Final Paper Topic Due**

10. **June 3. Cyberfeminism, Technoscience, Futurism**
    a. Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto”
    b. Halberstam, “Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminism in the Age of the Intelligent Machine”

**June 14. Final Paper Due**

---

**Course Mechanics**

1. **Presentation (25%).** You will give a brief presentation on one of the assigned readings. In your presentation, you should articulate at least one of the main lines of argumentation from the reading, and then raise some critical questions in response to the text. Your presentation should take about ten minutes, fifteen at most. The presentation must be written out (around 1,000 words; that is, somewhere in the range of 3 to 4 pages long in double spaced, 12-point Times New Roman or comparable serif font) and posted online in the appropriate Discussion thread in our course’s D2L page, by the Friday prior the class in which you present. (E.g.: if you are presenting on Uricchio’s ‘Data, Culture and the Ambivalence of Algorithms’, you must post your presentation online on Friday, May 10th.) I will circulate a signup sheet on the first day of class, which will be made available online.

2. **Online discussion (10%).** You must read and respond to two other presentations in our course’s online discussion threads. In these responses you should try to answer the questions raised by the original presenter, note any significant points of agreement or disagreement, bring up relevant connections to other texts we have read, and so on. There will be no strict word count for this; a good response can be quite short. The key is that you make a good faith effort to push the discussion forward. Again, you will sign up for your official commentary assignments on the first day of class, and this schedule will be made available on our D2L page. — You can receive up to five extra credit points for participating in these threads apart from your assigned responses.

3. **Response Paper (20%).** You will write a very brief (2-3 pages) response to a contemporary piece of journalism about some technology or political issue involving technology. In your paper, you should explain the technology and critically analyze the technology or political situation, how these are being presented and discussed in the article, or both. The paper is due by online submission to the appropriate dropbox folder of our course’s D2L page on Wednesday, May 1st.

4. **Final Paper (35%).** One final paper will be due on Friday, June 14th by online submission to the appropriate dropbox folder of our course’s D2L page. In the paper you will articulate and defend a clear thesis of your own construction by referring to the concepts and arguments made by at
least two of the thinkers we read during the course. All thesis topics must be submitted to me for approval by June 1st. Final papers should be between 5 and 7 pages long in 12-point, Times New Roman or a comparable serif font (that is, approximately 1300 to 1800 words).

5. **Attendance and Participation** (10%). You must come to each class having read the assigned materials and prepared to regularly participate in ongoing discussions to whatever extent you are physically and mentally capable. You will not receive full credit simply for showing up; active participation is mandatory.

Late papers will not be accepted unless I explicitly grant you an extension in advance.

**Classroom Rules**

Please come to class on time. Bring the assigned readings with you, having read them carefully and prepared for discussion. Please have your phones set to silent for the duration of our session and refrain from texting. Laptops may be used for taking notes, but please do not abuse that privilege.

Always be respectful toward all your fellow classmates, attentive when they speak, and charitable in interpreting and responding to their stated positions. The classroom is a complex space in which people of diverse ethnic backgrounds, economic situations, genders, sexualities, abilities, ages, and beliefs come together to learn collectively.

Be mindful of the way in which you interact with others, and know that you are responsible for helping to maintain an atmosphere for learning that is respectful and welcoming. If you fail to adhere to these guidelines, I reserve the right to lower your participation grade.

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity**

The DePaul University Undergraduate Student Handbook explicitly prohibits plagiarism. This includes directly copying any source without proper acknowledgment, copying any source with minor alterations without proper acknowledgment, submitting as your own work the efforts of another person, and paraphrasing another’s work without proper acknowledgment.

I have a non-negotiable zero tolerance policy for plagiarism in this class. Any instance of plagiarism will result in an automatic failure for the entire course. I am being honest with you when I say that nobody ever gets away with plagiarism; please don’t even try.

If you think you will be unable to make a paper’s deadline, you are much better off contacting me and requesting an extension than trying to plagiarize your way to a completed assignment. If you don’t know how to cite a work, I will be happy to help you.
Student Resources
DePaul University offers many resources for students that you may want to take advantage of. This list is not exhaustive.

DePaul University Center for Writing-Based Learning
http://condor.depaul.edu/writing
Schmitt Academic Center, Room 212; 773-325-4272

DePaul Office of Multicultural Student Success
https://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/about/departments/Pages/omss.aspx
Student Center, Suite 304; 773-325-7325

DePaul Center for Students with Disabilities
https://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/about/departments/Pages/csd.aspx
Student Center, Room 370; 773-325-1677

Office Hours and Availability
I hold regular office hours in the philosophy department on the Lincoln Park campus: 2352 N Clifton Ave, Room 150.28. I am planning on being there most days of the week other than Monday; please send me an email if you would like to schedule a meeting.

Please know that our discussions in office hours do not need to be strictly limited to the themes or material from our class; you have a standing offer to speak with me about any issues you may be having, or any ideas you would like to discuss.

Texts

I. Required Texts
All of the required texts for this class are available as PDFs in the Content page of our course’s D2L page. Their bibliographic information is as follows.


II. Recommended Reading


Ellul, Jacques. *The Technological Condition*


