

Technologies of Memory

Syllabus

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Contact

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Class Details

T/Th 12:30-1:45

Williams 209

Overview

This course is a meditation on questions of how technology shapes our knowing the past, present, and future. As digital technologies permeate every aspect of our lives, questions of how technology impacts society, individuals, and even our physical selves are more pressing than ever. Our work will be comparative in nature, pairing ancient and medieval perspectives with contemporary concerns both to gain perspective on the technological world in which we are enmeshed and to illuminate the past from the vantage of the 21st century.

Requirements

This course is designed as a seminar. The basic activities are therefore those of reading, writing, class activities and discussion, and a series of projects. All of these assignments have as a basic goal deepening your understanding of the past, literature, culture, and history; however, well beyond that basic goal, the primary aim of this course is to involve students in an ongoing conversation about the nature of memory and technology and to equip students with the ability to think about “big ideas”, both past and present, in an informed and critical way.

The course workflow is straightforward: 1. Read or view some stuff in preparation for each class. (This can take anywhere from 30 minutes to a few hours, depending on the length of the reading). 2. Produce a small amount of verbiage in response to a prompt or other form of assignment connected to what you’ve viewed. (Typically, no more than 10 minutes.) 3. Come to class prepared to work with the material you read/viewed/thought about. 4. Do stuff during class. 5. At least once per week, add an entry to your portfolio. (See below) 6. Every third

week, do the memtech lab assignment. 7. In the final weeks of the class, revise and augment one of your portfolio entries or labs into a more substantial online project (or research “paper”).

Each of these parts will be explained below. For now, note that this is a class that requires regular but not extensively time-consuming attention. The works at the end of the term are fairly substantial; you have plenty of lead time to read them, so please plan accordingly. There are, therefore, no high stakes tests. There is no midterm and no final exam.

Assignments (aka “stuff you need to do”)

Each type of class assignment is detailed below.

For each class session:

Regular Readings: This is the bread and butter of the course. Preparation is straightforward. Complete the entirety of the reading assignment in advance of class. Write a small amount in response to the prompt for that reading. Bring that bit of writing (usually a very short paragraph) to class with you and be prepared to discuss.

Readings are given at the page for each individual class session below. These pages will also contain brief notes or links of interest related to each class session.

Note that for the weeks with movies, you just need to show up. No preparation necessary.

For each week:

Add an entry to your portfolio: This is a distinctive feature of this course where we get to experiment a bit with the effects of technology in our own lives. The basic assignment is for you to spend 30-40 minutes each week doing something (usually writing) in response to what you have read/viewed/discussed in class. This is a chance, vis-a-vis content, to process what you’ve been looking at all week. For the first few weeks, you are asked to find some preferred mode of writing. This can be on the computer, or with pencil/pen and paper. Then, in subsequent weeks, you will vary the technology with which you record your thoughts about the week’s reading. The options include, but are not limited to variations in technology (e.g. typewriter, 1980s computer, phone), writing implement and medium (pen, pencil, quill, parchment, papyrus), style or format (letter, memoir, comic strip, dialogue, philosophical essay, poem, computer program), and communication technology (voice recording, video, interpretive dance, musical composition). You will be invited to reflect in particular on what difference, if any, the variation in technology makes to the way you think about the topics at hand.

We will work with these for a short time during class, so make sure to bring with you.

Every three weeks (more or less):

Complete the “Labs”: There are three “labs” spread throughout the term, typically during weeks where we will focus in particular on contemporary discourse about technology and its effects. These will follow up on activities that we hold in the Innovation Hub during that week. You will need to submit for each a brief analysis (approximately 2-3 pages) based on the activity and what we have been reading/discussing in the course

End of the term:

Revise and expand on a previous assignment. In place of a final paper, this is a form of a project which has maximum flexibility. You are asked simply to expand substantially and revise some bit of your previous work. This may take the form of a paper or traditional research exercise if you wish. But it may also be based in or utilize any technology (e.g. a website, a film, etc.), depending on your interests. Each student will meet with me at some point in or around week 11 of the course in order to discuss the possibilities.

Grading

Full disclosure: I hate grading. Unfortunately, I am required to assign grades for your work in this class. This is, in many ways, antithetical to what matters to me. My interest is primarily in having this conversation and exploring this material together, in the hope that this material interests you and feeds your questioning and exploration of the world. To the extent that grades are useful, I see them 1) as a way to apply a little bit of pressure to make sure assignments get done (we are, after all, all human and distractions are always tempting us away from anything we label “work”) and 2) a form of feedback about expectations for the course. That second is the one where grading “schemes” are an unfortunate necessity.

My expectations are fairly straightforward: do all the readings, show up to class, be engaged in our class time together, and complete the writing. Do that well and consistently and the grade is an A.

Officially, the quantification of this basic principle is that each component of the course counts equally towards the total. I will assign a letter grade in each area based on both quantity (did you do it, did you show up etc.) and quality (did you engage in the class regularly, etc.)

1. Show up: Attendance and engagement is the foundation. If you’re not in class then there is no course. 20% of the final grade
2. Do the readings: Do the readings in full, answer the prompts in full. 20% of the final grade
3. Weekly portfolio (13): 20%
4. Labs (3): 20%

5. Revision/Expansion: 20%

Late Assignments: In general, an occasional late assignment is not a problem. Similarly, an occasional absence is not a problem. However, for patterns of behavior, there are consequences. Therefore, the deduction for late assignments or missed classes is exponential. The first late assignment is .25% off the *final* grade, the second .50% off, the third 1% off, and so forth. Thus a pattern of weeks' worth of late assignments will result in very significant grade deductions.

In cases of occasional lateness, I do not need to know reasons, causes, etc. However, in cases of chronic illness or chronic issues, you should get in touch with me so that we can make sure you succeed in the class.

Schedule of Topics

Week 1: Introduction, Technology, Memory

Tuesday 8/27: Introduction

Thursday 8/29: Technology

Week 2: The Craft of Memory

Tuesday, 9/3: Medieval Memory and Walks with Einstein

Thursday, 9/5: Mnemonists

Week 3: Metaphors for Memory

Tuesday 9/10: Brains are computers

Thursday 9/12: Brains are not computers

Lab 1 due before next class: UX/UI and your brain on the internet

Week 4: Memory and the Self

Tuesday 9/17: The Year of Magical Thinking

Thursday 9/19: Further Magical Thinking

Week 5: The Origins of Autobiography

Tuesday 9/24: Augustine, Confessions

Thursday 9/26: Memory and Philosophy

Week 6: The Digital Self

Tuesday 10/1: The Social Self

Thursday 10/3: A Right to be forgotten

Lab 2 due before next class: Computing and the Body

Week 7: Cinematic interlude I

Tuesday, 10/8: Memento, part 1

Thursday, 10/10: Memento, part 2

Week 8: Collective Memory

Tuesday, 10/15: Maus, part 1

Thursday, 10/17: Maus, part 2

Week 9: How do we Know the Past?

Tuesday, 10/22: Aeschylus, Persians

Thursday, 10/24: Aeschylus, Persians

Week 10: Memorialization

Tuesday, 10/29: Museology

Thursday, 10/31: Digital Exhibitions

Lab 3 Due before next class: Memorialization Report

Week 11: Cinematic Interlude II

Tuesday, 11/5: Arrival, part 1

Thursday, 11/7: Arrival, part 2

Week 12:

Tuesday, 11/12: The Road, part 1

Thursday, 11/14: The Road, part 2

Week 13: Poetic Memory

Tuesday, 11/19: The Odyssey, part 1

Thursday 11/21: The Odyssey, part 2

Week 14 NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK

[Tuesday 26, Thursday 28]

Week 15: Technology and Memory

Tuesday 12/3: Technological Utopias

Thursday 12/5: Technological Dystopias

Project revision due 12/6

Policies

See the policies sheet on Canvas for required FSU policy details. These include the university policies on documented illness, the ADA policy, and various other policies as related to this course.