

TechnoCulture
ANT 325L (31752) M&W 11:30-1pm SAC 4.174
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Office Hours (SAC 4.158): Mon. & Wed. 2:00-3:00pm (& by appointment)

Description: This inquiry-driven course proceeds via two trajectories: 1) an analysis of social groups using digital methods and 2) a process of self-reflection focused on technological mediations of experience. The goal is for students to develop and deploy techniques of observation and analysis for making sense of communities online, while also taking stock of how our self-identities are shaped by algorithms and various tracking technologies. We begin by thinking about attention—what do we focus on, for how long, and with what affects? Attention is more than a personal matter; it has many collective forms and dimensions. We'll consider how we value some forms of attention and deride others, depending on social contexts and cultural sensibilities. Then we'll sift through the layers of technological mediation that alternately facilitate, channel, or diffract our abilities to attend to relationships, objects, and the world around us. With these patterns and tendencies established, we'll analyze how media systems and technological infrastructures intentionally organize and mine collective forms of attention—online, certainly, but increasingly in real-world settings. We will sample various ethnographic techniques and methods—digital and traditional—then try these out in developing analytical accounts of the cultures of technologies (publics) that permeate social worlds today. We will conclude with some reflections on how the human and the social are being actively redefined today. The aim of this course is to encourage new forms of intellectual engagement; technological expertise is not required.

Procedure: Our core process will be to think by writing, so some form of writing through guided exercises will be due for each class session. Initially, these will take the form of lists and unstructured notes, but as the semester progresses the writing assignments will have greater focus and structure. There are *two basic modes of writing* in this course: journaling and field reporting. In the first, you will mainly engage in reflecting on your experiences online or in dealing with digital materials. In the second, you will progress through stages of social analysis by developing field notes, then working these into more coherent field reports, and finally into developed accounts of online publics or social worlds. Most of our in-class time will be spent on people reading aloud what they have written. I expect people to *listen attentively and politely*. Final projects will be presented to the class over our last three sessions.

Grading: These writings and in-class readings and presentations will all be recorded as completion grades that can only be submitted on the due date in class. Attendance is mandatory, though reasonable absences will be excused if you *notify me as soon as possible*. Journal exercises and entries = 20%; Field notes = 10%; Field reports = 30%; Final projects = 40% (10% for workshopping and 30% for finished presentation). There are no make-up work options in this course.

Schedule:

Week 1:

W 8-29: Introducing TechnoCulture: what is it? "[The Case for Hiring a Digital Anthropologist](#)"

Week 2: Self

W 9-5: Attention.

Readings: James, William. 1890. "Attention" (Chapter XI). In *The Principles of Psychology*. Henry Holt and Company, 402–458; Fernandez-Duque, Diego, and Mark L. Johnson. 1999. "Attention Metaphors: How Metaphors Guide the Cognitive Psychology of Attention." *Cognitive Science* 23 (1): 83–116. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/02/09/technology/the-addiction-wrought-by-techies.html> "Even the Tech Elite Are Worrying About Tech Addiction"
Journal exercise: Keep track of the distractions that arise as you read these articles. Everything, from your internal thoughts to friends contacting you or digital attention-grabbers. List these to discuss in class.

Week 3: Social

M 9-10: Ethnography

Readings: Stewart, Kathleen. 2007. *Ordinary Affects*, Duke University Press, 1–31 [UT Library]
Journal exercise: Go to a public place that you already frequent. Stay put for one hour and take notes on everything you can observe. Who's there; what patterns do you see; what implicit knowledge shapes interactions in this space?

W 9-12: Fieldnotes

Readings: Nelms, Taylor. 2014. "Immersion: Four Beginnings for an Anthropology of Big Data." Medium, June 19. <https://medium.com/@tnelms/immersion-4c103c0fcac5> ;
<https://www.epicpeople.org/data-science-and-ethnography/>
<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/08/entanglement/494930/> ;
<https://anthrodendum.org/2018/02/07/three-lies-of-digital-ethnography/> ;
<https://johnpostill.com/2015/01/16/13-six-ways-of-researching-new-social-worlds/> Boellstorff, Tom. 2008, Chapter 1 ("The Subject and Scope of this Inquiry: Arrivals and Departures, Everyday Second Life") and Chapter 4 ("Place and Time") in *Coming of Age in Second Life*. Princeton University Press. 3–31, 89–117 [UT Library] <https://splinternews.com/we-took-a-tour-of-the-abandoned-college-campuses-of-sec-1793849944>
Journal exercise: Repeat Monday's exercise but in an online "location"—site or place. Write about the differences and similarities in your capacity to observe.

Week 4: Self

M 9-17: The Self

Readings: Allen, Douglas, “Social Constructions of Self: Some Asian, Marxist, and Feminist Critiques of Dominant Western Views of the Self,” in *Culture and Self*; “Are We Puppets in a Wired World?” Sue Halpern, *New York Review of Books*.

Journal exercise: Engage in some form of unmediated self-reflection. Either observe your thoughts or try to detach from them through meditation. After 30 minutes, reflect on this experience.

W 9-19: The data-driven Self:

Readings: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2018/05/24/big-brother-goes-digital/> ; “[The Data-Driven Life](#),” By Gary Wolf, *New York Times* ;

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/09/download-your-facebook-data/565736/> ;

Journal exercise: List the various technological means by which data about you is generated. Track the way your self appears in various digital medium.

Week 5: Social

M 9-24: Publics & Guides.

Readings: *How The World Changes Social Media*, Miller et al;

<https://techcrunch.com/2018/07/10/in-the-public-sector-algorithms-need-a-conscience/> ;

[optional: “Publics and Counter Publics,” Michael Warner.] ; Shannon Mattern, “[Cloud and Field](#): On the Resurgence of ‘Field Guides in a Networked Age’”; Ingrid Burrington, “[Seeing Networks in New York City](#)”; J.R. Carpenter, “[The Gathering Cloud](#)”; Natasha Myers, “[Becoming Sensor](#)”.

Journal exercise: Identify publics in which you participate. Sketch the contours of belonging to these publics (boundaries and forms of inclusion or exclusion).

W 9-26: Digital Methods.

Readings: Shannon Mattern, [Designing Methodologies](#). Kirsten M. Kinsley, Dan Schoonover & Jasmine Spitler, “GoPro as an ethnographic tool: A wayfinding study in an academic library.” Nick Seaver, <https://culanth.org/articles/966-what-should-an-anthropology-of-algorithms-do> ; Beaulieu, Anne. “Mediating Ethnography: Objectivity and the Making of Ethnographies of the Internet.”

Exercise: Generate **field notes** on at least one public.

Week 6: Self

M 10-1: Addiction

Readings: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/02/09/technology/the-addiction-wrought-by-techies.html> ; <https://www.theguardian.com/science/head-quarters/2018/aug/09/three-problems-with-the-debate-around-screen-time> ;

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/05/magazine/the-return-of-the-techno-moral-panic.html>
<https://www.vox.com/2018/8/8/17664580/persuasive-technology-psychology> ; “Screen-addicted teens are unhappy.”
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2017/12/12/former-facebook-vp-says-social-media-is-destroying-society-with-dopamine-driven-feedback-loops/>
<https://www.theverge.com/2017/11/9/16627724/sean-parker-facebook-childrens-brains-feedback-loop> <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/may/02/facebook-executive-advertising-data-comment>

Journal exercise: write a page on how you think about addiction and digital mediums.

W 10-3: Digital Literacy

Readings: <http://www.publicbooks.org/invisible-algorithms-invisible-politics/> ;
<https://www.socialsciencespace.com/2018/02/nick-seaver-dissecting-algorithmic-organism/>
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/25/skim-reading-new-normal-maryanne-wolf>

Journal exercise: Write a page on what you don’t know about technology but wish you did.

Week 7: Social

M 10-8: Automation of Inequality

Readings: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/26/opinion/algorithm-compass-sentencing-bias.html>
<https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2018/02/19/586387119/automating-inequality-algorithms-in-public-services-often-fail-the-most-vulnerable>; <https://gizmodo.com/how-algorithmic-experiments-harm-people-living-in-pover-1822311248>;
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2018/07/10/rich-people-prefer-grey-poupon-white-people-own-pets-data-behind-cultural-divide/>
<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/01/virginia-eubanks-interview-automating-inequality-poverty>; <https://www.sciencenews.org/blog/science-public/are-computers-better-people-predicting-who-will-commit-another-crime>
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/07/books/review/reinventing-capitalism-in-the-age-of-big-data-mayer-schonberger-range.html>

Journal exercise: write one page thinking about digital reproductions of inequality.

W 10-10: Digital Hate

Readings: “Trolls for Trump,” Andrew Marantz, *The New Yorker*.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2018/04/25/inside-the-online-world-of-incels-the-dark-corner-of-the-internet-linked-to-the-toronto-suspect/>
; <https://www.salon.com/2018/04/22/how-the-u-s-became-troll-nation-from-gamergate-to-the-rise-of-trump/>
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/01/magazine/not-the-bots-we-were-looking-for.html>

Exercise: Generate **field notes** on the racial or gender boundaries of a public.

Week 8: Self

M 10-15: Thinking

Readings: <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/611808/the-neuropolitics-consultants-who-hack-voters-brains/> ; <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/what-your-facebook-network-reveals-about-how-you-use-your-brain/> ; <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-smartphones-hijack-our-minds-1507307811> ; <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/14/style/how-can-i-focus-better.html>

Journal exercise: Take an hour-long walk; observe your thought process, jotting down notes as you go.

W 10-17: Googling Stupidity

Readings: Nicholas Carr, “[Is Google Making us Stupid?](#)” David Auerbach, “[The Stupidity of Computers.](#)” Chad Wellmon, “Why Google Isn’t Making Us Stupid...or Smart.”; <https://now.tufts.edu/articles/slow-down-reader>

Exercise: Spend an hour online; observe your thought process, recording notes in whatever manner you choose.

Week 9: Social

M 10-22: **Field reports** on your public.

W 10-24: Surveillance

Readings: <http://www.businessinsider.com/china-emotional-surveillance-technology-2018-4> ; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/world/wp/2018/01/07/feature/in-china-facial-recognition-is-sharp-end-of-a-drive-for-total-surveillance/> ; <https://www.wsj.com/articles/want-to-spy-on-your-children-call-it-monitoringand-get-their-blessing-1504114131>

Journal exercise: Identify a tracking or monitoring technology and use it as a model to generate field observations.

Week 10: Social

M 10-29: Robots & AI

Readings: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/13/opinion/we-are-merging-with-robots-thats-a-good-thing.html> ; <https://aeon.co/essays/the-offloading-ape-the-human-is-the-beast-that-automates> ; <https://hackernoon.com/how-artificial-intelligence-will-change-the-human-experience-99d795ce84b8> ; <https://www.forbes.com/sites/daviddomzalski/2018/02/19/how-artificial-intelligence-will-soon-change-your-life/#603ff325b0ed>

Journal exercise: Write one page on how humanity may be *enhanced* by technological advancements.

W 10-31: The End of Humanity?

Readings: http://www.realcleartechnology.com/articles/2013/12/06/our_final_invention_how_the_human_race_goes_and_gets_itself_killed_816.html ; “Dark Factory,” Sheelah Kolhatkar, *New Yorker*.

Journal exercise: Write one page on how humanity may be *imperiled* by technological advancements.

Week 11: Social

M 11-5: **Field reports** on your public.

W 11-7: Interpreting Big Data

Readings: <https://thenewinquiry.com/view-from-nowhere/> <https://aeon.co/essays/why-big-data-is-actually-small-personal-and-very-human> ; <https://www.epicpeople.org/purity-and-data/> ; <https://www.epicpeople.org/domestication-data/> <https://thenewinquiry.com/the-anxieties-of-big-data/> ; <https://thenewinquiry.com/cloudy-logic/>

Journal exercise: list interpretive opportunities to interact with some form of data.

Week 12: Self

M 11-12: Privacy

Readings: “The Prism,” by Jill Lepore, *New Yorker*; “Nowhere to Hide,” by Louis Menand, *New Yorker*,

Journal exercise: Write on when and how you maintain privacy; when do you feel it slipping away?

W 11-14: **Field reports** on your public.

Week 13: Social

M 11-19: Research Day!

Week 14:

M 11-26: Workshop Presentations.

W 11-28: Workshop Presentations.

Week 15:

M 12-3: Presentations

W 12-5: Presentations.

Week 16:

M 12-10: Presentations.

Resources:

<http://ethnographymatters.net/> <https://www.rescuetime.com/> <https://www.timeuse.org/ahtus>
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/why-we-post>

Recommended:

Subscribe to the *New York Times* and to *Adobe Creative Cloud*, available through the Campus Computer Store.

Syllabus as a Living Document:

This syllabus is subject to change as the semester unfolds, as our discussions develop and your thinking and writing advance. Adjustments are likely and will hopefully reflect your feedback on our progress. I will announce changes in class and post syllabus updates to Canvas, *so pay attention and stay current with class discussions and writing*. Most readings are available online by following these links; for academic articles I will post a PDF when necessary. If you have trouble accessing an article, let me know immediately—others will likely encounter the same problem. But also please use your initiative to locate readings as necessary; it's good practice in honing digital skills.

Tech-etiquette: Despite much research that shows laptops and phones are a distraction in the classroom, this is a technology course. You are welcome to use such devices but you must demonstrate your cognizance that they are designed exactly to distract and absorb your attention. *When people are reading, refrain from using these devices*; also, I will call on people who seem adrift online. If tech-usage becomes rude and obnoxious, I will resort to drastic measures such as discounting the assignment turned in that day.

Expertise: I invite your expertise in improving this course. My digital literacy is fairly limited. Please offer suggestions on materials that may enhance our discussions and exercise, and provide feedback on my approach to this course, with suggestions for additional topics or considerations. Thanks in advance!

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

UT Honor Code: <http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi09-10/ch01/index.html>) Familiarize yourself with University statements about plagiarism and the consequences of plagiarizing: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/learningmodules/plagiarism/>

Penalties for violation of this Code can include failure of the course and University disciplinary action.