HS 260 THE TECHNOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Cornish College of the Arts
Humanities and Sciences Department

Course: **HS 260 03 LE**
Semester: **Fall 2015**
Time: **M+W 6.00p-7.20p**
Location: **MCC 303**
Instructor: **Terry Schenold**
Email: **tschenold@cornish.edu**
Website: **http://courses.bloodedbythought.org/dti**

"In changing the technical world, Man changes his own nature."
- Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* / 1867

"The relations between art and technics give us a significant clue to every other type of activity, and may even provide an understanding of the way to integration. The great problem of our time is to restore modern man's balance and wholeness..."
- Lewis Mumford, *Art and Technics /* 1952

"The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance. The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity."
- Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media /* 1964

"Technology is the active human interface with the material world."
- Ursula K. Le Guin, "A rant about "technology" / 2004

"Technology proposes itself as the architect of our intimacies."
- Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together* / 2011

"We humans are geniuses at confusing ourselves by using computers."
-Jaron Lanier, "High tech peace will need a new kind of humanism" / 2015

§1 COURSE DESCRIPTION
Humans live in and through our technology: from stone tools to computers, our society is continually altered by technical objects. Living in a networked society such as ours, one need only try to imagine life without the digital technologies that seamlessly mediate our daily routines; yet this is precisely what it is so difficult to do: to *think* technology, to imagine its peculiar agency in our individual experience and in our world. This situation is magnified by the intricate interconnectedness and layering of digital systems, vast networks, databases, and ubiquitous computing. Our needs go beyond literacy and practical mastery of these technologies to the development of a *reflective technological imagination* in which we consider the ways technologies enable as well as disable us, shape and reshape our lives and creative practices. This course explores the technological imagination through the discourses of media theory, software and game studies, and philosophy of technology.

§2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1) <u>Acquire conceptual tools, language and critical methods</u> for reflecting on and articulating the cultural and personal impact of technology and specific forms of media.

2) <u>Develop awareness of the aesthetic and political aspects of technology</u>, with special emphasis on digital media and information systems, in contemporary society.

3) <u>Gain familiarity with academic discourses addressing technology</u>, including media, software, and game studies, and philosophy of technology, with an eye to application in the arts.

4) <u>Grow the technological imagination</u> beyond basic literacy, commonplace uses and extrapolations, to include a *critical* dimension—a second order literacy characterized by reflective reasoning on humanistic, historical, ethical, and cultural concerns.

§3. LEARNING EXPERIENCES
The class sessions will be a <u>lecture/seminar hybrid</u> that will include short framing lectures that make use of multimedia, detail-oriented analysis of selected technology and media, and guided group and whole-class discussions. There are several sources of difficulty that students should be aware of:

<u>Difficult Reading</u>: The reading experience in the class can be demanding and difficult. One reason for this is that we will be reading primary sources. This means that you will be encountering live thinking about problems by authors engaged with specific discourses—some technical, some historical, some philosophical—rather than simplified, textbook-style summaries that digest the ideas and present them as unproblematic to a popular or student audience. This class values your individual struggle to understand the readings as part of the learning process. Lecture and discussion will provide guidance, but this process will be challenging. We will discuss reading strategies in class!

<u>Multi-Disciplinarity</u>: We will be reading in multiple discourses in order to acquire a diverse set of concepts and varied perspectives on technology and media, and this can have a confusing effect as authors will not always use important terms in the same way or approach a common problem, concept, etc. with the same assumptions and working examples. These differences will be instructive, but they can also be maddening without a mindful approach.

<u>Primacy of Examples</u>: In order to mitigate these two sources of difficulty (above) baked into the course design I will frequently try to connect ideas in the readings to current events and contemporary pop culture. It is important to me that you come away with more than an abstract sense of the concepts presented in the readings and media, so I will spend some time in lecture rendering course ideas intelligible through examples.

§4. EXPERIMENTS
The short lectures will provide historical context, conceptual resources, and a narrative of ideas for understanding the course topic and assigned media, but *the most important and lasting development that occurs in any educational program is self-development*. Much of the course is concerned with the creation of the *conditions* for this aspect of education. The assignments listed below will constitute the memorable core of your learning experience and will provide opportunity for discoveries not only about the works under scrutiny, but your own values and selfhood.

Just as the development of scientific understanding of the natural world cannot proceed very far on received knowledge and the isolated speculative reasoning of an individual, understanding human culture *and ourselves* requires, perhaps counter-intuitively, purposeful experimentation and collaboration with other people. Only so much can be achieved from information and introspection. These assignments should be understood as *experiments*—as mediums (or technologies!) for understanding—designed to provide opportunity for insight and collaborative inquiry. *Detailed documents explaining these works will be given in class, but here is a quick overview (with provisional due dates)*:

A. Engagement (all semester)
Being engaged not only entails attending, paying attention in class and following the assigned material, but also actively contributing to the class sessions. This means sharing insights and questions on lecture or readings in discussion – both those that arise organically in class and those that you have formulated in *preparation for class*. We will also have periodic short quizzes on assigned reading depending on how discussions go, and using the blog to share "questions and quotations" (Q&Q) on the readings—these will count toward engagement as well. The quizzes are meant to monitor attentiveness and measure very general comprehension of the reading—broad themes, key concepts, general arguments, etc. These will not include obscure points or require complicated scholarly inferences: just do the reading with your brain turned on and your iPod and smartphone off (gasp!).

B. Blogging (10/2, 10/30 + ad hoc)
There will be two prompted blog posts designed as opportunities to explore course ideas from reading or lecture in more depth. Student will have open access to publishing on the course blog and ad hoc posting is encouraged. Blogging for the course may take many forms, from resource sharing to critical commentary, and will be incorporated into class discussions when possible. Insightful replies to posts will also count!

C. Tetrad Project (11/13)
We will be appropriating Marshall McLuhan's "tetrad" tool for reflecting on media and technology in order to structure student analysis of a self-selected technical object or media form. Students will create a "tetrad" image and also write an accompanying four-fold commentary on the effects of the selected object.

D. Technology Self-Experiment (all semester)
Early in the semester students will select a technology they use and take for granted in their daily life and conduct a self-experiment in which they dramatically alter their habits of use for the duration of the semester; alternatively, students may choose to incorporate a new technology into their everyday regime. In both cases students will maintain an informal journal and create a Microsoft SWAY artfully conveying how their technological imagination is changed over the course of the experiment.

§5. REQUIRED MATERIALS
Although there are no required *textbooks* you will need the following in order to participate fully in the course:

Internet: We will make heavy use of the course website for distributing media (readings, video links, media files), archiving course documents, and tracking revisions to the schedule based on our collective progress, and blogging. Therefore, you will need to have *daily access* to the Web. *Required texts will either be downloadable as PDFs or Web-based*, thus requiring software for reading/printing PDFs and a modern Internet browser.

§6. Demonstration of Learning & Evaluation

Evaluation methods will vary by assignment so more detailed information will be given on specific assignment documents, but the course will follow the Humanities and Sciences grading system summarized below.

A	4.0	C+	2.3	D+	1.3
A-	3.7	C	2.0	D	1.0
B+	3.3	C-	1.7	D-	0.7
B	3.0				
B-	2.7			F	0.0

The final grade in the course reflects the following elements:

- Engagement (quizzes, in/out of class discussions)   25%   all semester
- Blogging (assigned & ad hoc)   20%   10/2 & 10/30 + ad hoc
- Tetrad Project   20%   11/13
- Technology Self-Experiment   35%   TBD (~Week 14)

Please also consider the following departmental policy on attendance for the course:

Effect of Absences on *Final Grade*														
Absences	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Max Grade Possible	A/A-			A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F

After 3 absences the final grade you can earn in the course is reduced with each subsequent unexquent absence. The success of this course depends on many elements, one of which is our ability as a group to create a dependable community of vigorous and searching inquiry built on the accrual of common understandings as well as cognitive diversity. In the case of the former, if you miss class you will become alienated from the common understanding; in the case of the latter, the group cannot benefit from your humanity, your insights, your unique experience and point of view. In this context, showing up to class takes on a moral quality! If you must miss class because "life happened" contact me ahead of time via email. Please note that it is your responsibility to get caught up by going to the website for lecture slides and consulting your colleagues for notes on discussion.

§7. Course Schedule

The provisional reading schedule is posted online, here:

<p style="text-align:center">http://courses.bloodedbythought.org/dti/schedule/</p>

§8. Department Practice and Policy

<u>Academic Etiquette</u>
- Arrive on time
- Cell phones off unless being used for purposes related to the course
- No headphone use during class time unless approved by instructor
- No checking e-mail or text messaging
- No surfing the Web during class unless for purposes related to the course
- Respectful participation and discussion is expected

Attendance: The learning experience cannot be duplicated outside of class and depends on the participation of all classroom community members. Attendance is required for all Humanities and Sciences courses. In all other Humanities and Sciences courses, students are permitted three absences before having their grade affected. In all courses, these permitted absences include absence due to personal matters or illness, and absences due to departmental commitments, such as rehearsals, performances, or show installation. In all cases, it is the responsibility of the student to alert his or her instructor of a pending absence and to make arrangements to complete all coursework in a timely manner.

Academic Honesty: The College demands a high level of artistic integrity and academic honesty on the part of students. No form of academic dishonesty (for example, cheating and plagiarism) will be tolerated. If an instructor demonstrates to the Department Chair that a student is guilty of academic dishonesty, the student will be assigned a failing grade for the entire course.
All cases of academic dishonesty are reviewed by the Academic Standards Committee. Disciplinary action may be determined by the Academic Standards Committee depending on the circumstances of the particular case. Further disciplinary actions may include warning, probation, suspension, and expulsion.

§9. SUPPORT SERVICES
Student Affairs: Student Affairs is dedicated to enhancing and complementing students' educational experience through programs, services and opportunities that aid in their personal development. Student Affairs is committed to community building, co-curricular learning, and student support. If you are a student with a documented disability and you need accommodations, please make an appointment with the staff in Student Affairs, located in room 301 at the Main Campus Center. You can call 206-726-5098 to reach them.

Counseling: The mission of the Counseling Offices at Cornish College of the Arts is to assist students with their academic and artistic pursuits by providing supportive counseling, referrals and outreach programs that promote students' mental health and emotional well being. To schedule an appointment, call a Counselor at 206-726-5027 or 206-726-5047. If they are not available, please leave a message on their voicemail and they will return your call as soon as possible. The Counseling Offices are located in rooms 308 A & B in the Main Campus Center.

In addition to drop-in hours Mon-Fri, the Writing Center now accepts submission of writing ONLINE 24 hours a day. Writers who use the online service can expect a video response from a consultant containing suggestions addressing the writer's concerns.

Visit http://www.cornish.edu/academics/writing_center/ for hours, contact information, or to submit your writing for feedback.

§10. GENERAL SAFETY
Please inform yourself of safety procedures for this room, including emergency evacuation routes and the location of the closest first aid kits and fire extinguishers. Consult the Health & Safety Procedures booklet posted near doors and eyewash stations. Detailed information is also provided in the College student handbook.