Technology and Culture, RTF 393N/AMS 391 (08503; 29714), 2010
Thursday, 9:30-12:30, CMA 3.108
Sharon Strover, Radio-TV-Film
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> *The only real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking*
> *new landscapes but in having new eyes.* – Marcel Proust

Course Description

In this course we will examine several influential books that address the interplay of
media systems, technologies and society. The class does not have a single theme or one
overarching question. Rather, the material we'll read during the term has been selected
because it raises issues concerning the social context for which media, old and new, have
defining powers. Our simplest goals will be to understand alternative conceptions of how
technology is viewed, including its supposed "impacts" on society, its role in creating and
shaping broad media systems and the attendant cultural reverberations. Theories of
society are foregrounded in some of the readings, and occupy central positions in other
work even though they may be more implicit than explicit. Our point of departure is that
one cannot meaningfully discuss media systems without acknowledging the social
context in which they reside, originate, function and evolve. Culture and cultural issues
are defined and explored broadly as encompassing the common practices and rituals of
everyday life as well as the long-standing patterns and values that characterize American
society. The ways in which media systems or technologies are synonymous with
modernity will be directly addressed in many of our readings. The social construction of
technology, technological determinism, actor-network theory and the political economy
of communication will be among some of the theoretical approaches we will consider.

Readings will include: Carolyn Marvin, When Old Technologies were New, New York:
Oxford University Press, 1988; Cass Sunstein, Republic.com 2.0, Princeton, Princeton
University Press, 2007; Bruno Latour, We have never been modern, Harvard, Harvard
University Press, 1991; Raymond Williams, Television: Technology and Cultural Form,
Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1974; Lawrence Lessig, Free Culture: How Big
media uses technology and the law to lock down culture and control creativity, New
York: Penguin, 2004; Susan Douglas, Inventing American Broadcasting, Baltimore:
Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987; William Mitchell, Me++: The Cyborg Self and
the Networked City, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004; Tom Boelllstorff, Coming of Age in
Second Life, Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2008; David Lyon, Surveillance
Society, Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001; Clay Shirky, Cognitive Surplus,
New York: Penguin, 2010; and Vincent Mosco, The Digital Sublime: Myth, power and
Cyberspace, Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2004. A few
articles available through electronic reserves will round out our readings.

I also recommend and may refer to: Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities,
London: Verso, 1983; Shoshana Zuboff, In the Age of the Smart Machine, New York:

Basic, 1984; Ithiel de Sola Pool's classic <u>Technologies of Freedom</u>, and a few other books and articles or chapters as we go along.

You will find that several of the books we examine focus on particular media systems or technologies, and that their overall approach debunks the idea that communication technologies are independent, "exogenous variables" in equations of productivity and outcomes. One of our goals in the course will be to carefully investigate how media systems and presumed effects of technologies are presented to the public at large and to the community of scholars. Theories of political economy and theories of economic development are fundamental to our work, as are conceptions of how what passes for progress (and the panoply of terms describing the hops, jumps, falls, and straddling that bind and explain innovation, science, and cultural trajectories) becomes labeled as such.

Please note that some materials will be housed on the electronic reserves site associated with this class. Our class password for the e-reserves site is "technology" (without the apostrophes). As well, our commentaries will be hosted in the course Blackboard forum site (for AMS 391, the cross-listed course with RTF 393N). Please post your weekly responses/comments there.

<u>Grading</u>

Students are expected to attend class having read the assigned material. Please be prepared to discuss the material and to raise questions and issues. The course will be conducted as a seminar, and students will be responsible for certain questions or commentary on the readings.

I will ask you to write commentaries on our readings that will be posted in an electronic forum, and these commentaries will be a point of departure for discussion purposes. In general, I will post questions to which you may respond; alternatively, your commentaries could develop some other point or question that you believe is important. I do not expect you to do outside research in the commentaries; rather, they are a way for you to reflect on the readings of the week and to integrate them with other work you might have encountered in your graduate career; I expect you to spend no more than about an hour on each comment. While I will not give letter grades on the commentaries, I will read and sometimes respond to them (and record them as "credit" or "no credit"). You will be expected to take an active role in planning for seminar conversations.

A final term paper will allow you to explore one theme in depth (it is due on December 6). The written work for courses such as this generally results in papers that can be presented at professional conferences and ultimately submitted for publication, and I urge you to strive for a high level of originality, professional writing, and careful research in your final paper. The paper should address some aspect of technology development in the context of the broader social environment, and I anticipate that one of the theoretical approaches we dissect will be developed in your work. It should include formal citations and represent thorough conceptual development.

Grades will be assigned along the following basis:

    Course participation: 15%
    Final research paper: 45%
    Commentaries: 40%

<u>Schedule</u>

August 26	Introduction to the course. Approaches to researching technology.
September 2	Technology, power, the state, and culture. Raymond Williams (1974), <u>Television: Technology and Cultural Form</u>. Hanover: University Press of New England. (Any edition is fine – different editions have different introductions by various scholars.)
September 9	Networks, technologies, and the self. William Mitchell (2004), <u>Me++: The Cyborg self and the networked city</u>. Cambridge: MIT Press.
September 16	Electric Communication, social structure, and the body. Carolyn Marvin (1988), <u>When Old technologies were new: Thinking about electric communication in the late nineteenth century</u>. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
September 23	Control and commercial exploitation: the case of broadcasting. Susan Douglas, <u>Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899-1922,</u> Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Introduction through Ch. 5. Dr. Michael Kackman will be in class.
September 30	Douglas, <u>Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899-1922</u>, remainder of book.
October 7	Critical analysis, modernity, translation and purification. Bruno Latour (1993), <u>We have never been modern</u>. Tr. Catherine Porter. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
October 14	Exploring issues of control and capitalism. Cass Sunstein (2007), <u>Republic.com</u>. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Discuss research paper ideas.
October 21	Anthropological approaches to technological mediation. Tom Boellstorff (2008), <u>Coming of age in Second Life</u>. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

October 28   The role of the popular and the optimist. Clay Shirky (2010),
                    <u>Cognitive Surplus</u>. New York: Penguin.

November 4   Social participation, the panoptic, and social structure. David
                    Lyon (2001), <u>Surveillance Society</u>. Buckingham: Open
                    University Press.

November 11   Embedding control in technology. Lawrence Lessig (2004), <u>Free
                    Culture</u>. New York: Penguin. Please read through chapter ten.

November 18   Lessig, remainder of book.

November 25   Thanksgiving Holiday

December 2   The history of the 'sublime' in technology.   Vincent Mosco
                    (2004), <u>The Digital Sublime. Cambridge: MIT Press.</u> Please
                    read the entire book.

Final version of papers due on December 6.

<u>A note on scholastic honesty</u>

The General Information catalog of the University defines scholastic dishonesty on pages
171-172. Its definition includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion,
falsifying scholastic records, and any act designed to give unfair advantage to the student,
or the attempt to commit such an act. Each such act is further defined in the General
Information section. Of particular relevance to graduate classes is the prohibition on
**falsifying research data, laboratory reports, and/or other academic work offered for
credit** and **plagiarism**, which is defined **the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift,
or obtaining by any means another's work and the submission of it as one's own
academic work offered for credit.** As the section in the catalog points out, you can
avoid plagiarism by clearly citing other peoples' work when you use it in your own
written papers. Copying from published and unpublished (e.g., web works) can
constitute plagiarism. Any incidence of scholastic dishonesty in this course will result in
a failing grade for the class. The University's Honor Code is found at
http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi09-10/ch01/index.html.

<u>Students with disabilities</u>

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

Attending class and religious holidays

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Other Related Readings

Benkler, Y. (2006). The Wealth of Networks. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Bijker, W. and Law, J. (1992), Shaping technology, Building society: Studies in sociotechnical change. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Carlson, W. B. (1992). Artifacts and frames of meaning: Thomas A. Edison, his managers, and the cultural construction of motion pictures. In Bijker, W. and J. Law (Eds.), Shaping technology, Building society: Studies in sociotechnical change. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, pp. 175-200.

Latour, B. (1987). Science in action: How to follow scientists and engineers through society. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, pp. 103-144.

Law, J. and W. Bijker, (1992). Postscript: Technology, stability, and social theory. In Bijker, W. and J. Law (Eds.), Shaping technology/Building society: Studies in sociotechnical change. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, pp. 290-308.

McGuire, P. and M. Granovetter (1998). Business and bias in public policy formation: The National Civic Federation and social construction of electric utility regulation, 1905-1907. Presented at the American Sociological Association conference, San Francisco.

Nye, D. (1990). Electrifying America: Social meanings of a new technology, 1880-1940. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, pp. 287-338.