



Nanchang University
FILM 311: Culture and Technology
(Last Updated in 2025)

Credit: 6

Contact Hours

This course is composed of 24 lecture sessions, 3 tutorial sessions and 9 office contact hours. Each lecture session takes 2 contact hours in length; each tutorial session takes 3 contact hours in length; There will be a Q-A review session (3 contact hours) and Final Exam (3 contact hours) at the end of this term. This course has 72 contact hours in total.

Course Description

Does technology save our work? Improve our health? Ameliorate social inequality? We organize this class around two topics: Identity and infrastructure. How does thinking of our bodies and selves as technologies shape our ideas and experiences of cultural and personal identity? How are politics built into our infrastructures, from roads to electricity grids to the Internet and beyond? We will be interested in whether technology has produced a better world, and for whom.

Classes will combine interactive lectures, film screenings, and discussion. Each class is keyed to a set of readings, and it is crucial that students keep up with the readings and be prepared to discuss them in class. Some lectures will directly engage our readings while others will provide contextualizing historical and theoretical information. We will routinely break into small groups for more concentrated discussion. Class participation will count strongly towards the final grade.

Required Textbook

*Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman. *The Social Shaping of Technology* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999)

*Paul Heyer and D. Crowley. *Communication in History: Technology, Culture, Society* (Allyn and Bacon, 2002).

*Manuel Castells. *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business and Society* (Oxford UP, 2003).

Grading

15% Participation (incl. in-class activities and discussion prompts)

25% Implosion Assignment, Part 1: First Report

25% Implosion Assignment, Part 2: Second Report



35% Implosion Assignment, Part 3: Reconstructing the Object

Letter Grade	Grade Points
High Distinction	85-100
Distinction	75-84
Credit	65-74
Pass	50-64
Fail	0-49

Course Schedule

The course has 24 class sessions in total. All sessions are 2 contact hours in length. At the end of this term, there will be a Q-A review session (3 contact hours) and Final Exam (3 contact hours).

Note: the course outline and required readings are subject to change.

TOPICS	READINGS
Introduction	No readings assigned
Theories of Technology and Culture	Marx, Leo. "Technology: The Emergence of a Hazardous Concept." <i>Technology and Culture</i> 51, no. 3 (2010): 561–77. Gusterson, Hugh. "Nuclear Weapons Testing: Scientific Experiment as Political Ritual." Chapter 7 in <i>Naked Science: Anthropological Inquiry into Boundaries, Power, and Knowledge</i>. Edited by Laura Nader. Routledge, 1996. ISBN: 9780415914659. [Preview with Google Books] Marx, Karl. "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret." In <i>Capital: Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy</i>. Translated by Ben Fowkes. Penguin, 1992. ISBN: 9780140445688.
Labor-Saving Technology and the Worth of Workers	Babbage, Charles. "On the Economy of Machinery and Manufactures." Chapter 6 in <i>The Craft Reader</i>. Edited by Glenn Adamson. Bloomsbury Academic, 2010. ISBN: 9781847883032. Nye, David E. "Invention." Chapter 2 in <i>America's Assembly Line</i>. The MIT Press, 2013. ISBN: 9780262018715. [Preview with Google Books] Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. "Twentieth-Century Changes in Household Technology." Chapter 4 in <i>More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave</i>. Basic Books, 1985. ISBN: 9780465047321. Green, Penelope. "The New Domestic," <i>New York Times</i>
Technologies of	Davis-Floyd, Robbie E. "The Technocratic Model of Birth." In <i>Feminist</i>



TOPICS	READINGS
Reproduction and Family	Theory and the Study of Folklore. Edited by Susan Tower Hollis, Linda Pershing, and M. Jane Young. University of Illinois Press, 1993. ISBN: 9780252063138. Van Hollen, Cecilia. "Invoking Vali: Painful Technologies of Modern Birth in South India." <i>Medical Anthropology Quarterly</i> 17, no. 1 (2003): 49–77. Gawande, Atul. "The Score: How Childbirth Went Industrial." <i>The New Yorker</i>, October 9, 2006.
Medical Experimentation, Race, and Globalization	Jones, James. "The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment: 'A Moral Astigmatism'." In <i>The "Racial" Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future</i>. Edited by Sandra Harding. Indiana University Press, 1993. ISBN: 9780253208101. [Preview with Google Books] Petryna, Adriana. "Ethical Variability: Drug Development and Global Clinical Trials." <i>American Ethnologist</i> 32, no. 2 (2005): 183–97. Bartlett, Donald L., and James B. Steele. "Deadly Medicine." <i>Vanity Fair</i>, January 2011.
Food: If We Are What We Eat, What Are We?	Scrinis, Gyorgy. "On the Ideology of Nutritionism." <i>Gastronomica: The Journal of Critical Food Studies</i> 8, no. 1 (2008): 39–48. Yates-Doerr, Emily. "The Opacity of Reduction: Nutritional Black-Boxing and the Meanings of Nourishment." <i>Food, Culture & Society: An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research</i> 15, no. 2 (2012): 293–313. Freidberg, Suzanne. "The Secret Lives of Corporate Food," <i>Limn.it</i>. Rhinehart, Rob. "How I Stopped Eating Food," <i>Mostly Harmless</i>, February 13, 2013.
Wearables and Self-Tracking	Quart, Alissa. "The Body Data Craze." <i>Newsweek</i>, June 26, 2013. Schüll, Natasha Dow. "Obamacare Meets Wearable Technology." <i>MIT Technology Review</i>, May 6, 2014. The Future of Wearable Tech: Key Trends Driving the Form and Function of Personal Devices, Slideshare. Schüll, Natasha Dow. "The Folly of Technological Solutionism: An Interview with Evgeny Morozov." <i>Public Books</i>, September 9, 2013. Maudlin, Laura. "Precarious Plasticity: Neuropolitics, Cochlear Implants, and the Redefinition of Deafness." <i>Science, Technology, & Human Values</i> 39, no. 1 (2014): 130–53. Hardesty, Larry. "Cochlear Implants—with No Exterior Hardware," <i>MIT News</i>, February 9, 2014. Wu, Tim. "If a Time Traveler Saw a Smartphone." <i>The New Yorker</i>, January 10, 2014. Chen, Brian X. "Tech Attire, More Beta Than Chic," <i>New York Times</i>,



TOPICS	READINGS
	January 8, 2014. Vanhemert, Kyle. "Why Her Will Dominate UI Design Even More Than Minority Report." <i>Wired</i>, January 2014. Phelan, David. "Technology's Foremost Fortune Teller: Why Intel Has an Anthropologist on its Payroll," <i>The Independent</i>, September 25, 2013. Singer, Natasha. "Intel's Sharp-Eyed Social Scientist," <i>New York Times</i>, February 15, 2014.
Automobility	Kline, Ronald, and Trevor Pinch. "Users as Agents of Technological Change: The Social Construction of the Automobile in the Rural United States." <i>Technology and Culture</i> 37, no. 4 (1996): 763–95. Jain, Sarah S. Lochlann. "'Dangerous Instrumentality': The Bystander as Subject in Automobility." <i>Cultural Anthropology</i> 19, no. 1 (2004): 61–94.
Electricity and Markets	Hughes, Thomas P. "The Seamless Web: Technology, Science, Etcetera, Etcetera." <i>Social Studies of Science</i> 16, no. 2 (1986): 281–92. Kline, Ronald. "Resisting Consumer Technology in Rural America: The Telephone and Electrification." Chapter 2 in <i>How Users Matter: The Co-Construction of Users and Technology</i>. Edited by Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch. The MIT Press, 2005. ISBN: 9780262651097. Özden, Canay. "Economic Anthropology, Technologically Speaking." <i>Anthropology News</i> 54, no. 7 (2013): e11–29.
Ocean Infrastructures	Hamilton-Paterson, James. "Charts and Naming." Chapter 1 in <i>The Great Deep: The Sea and Its Thresholds</i>. Owlet, 1993. ISBN: 9780805027761. Starosielski, Nicole. "Underwater Flow." <i>FLOW</i>, October 16, 2011. Helmreich, Stefan. "From Spaceship Earth to Google Ocean: Planetary Icons, Indexes, and Infrastructures." <i>Social Research: An International Quarterly</i> 78, no. 4 (2011): 1211–42.



TOPICS	READINGS
Computers, Networked, Then and Now	Pfaffenberger, Bryan. "The Social Meaning of the Personal Computer: Or, Why the Personal Computer Revolution Was No Revolution." <i>Anthropological Quarterly</i> 61, no. 1 (1988): 39–47. Edwards, Paul N. "Y2K: Millennial Reflections on Computers as Infrastructure." <i>History and Technology: An International Journal</i> 15, no. 1–2 (1998): 7–29. Mackenzie, Adrian. "Wirelessness as Experience of Transition." <i>The Fibreculture Journal</i> 13 (2008). Gabrys, Jennifer. "Shipping and Receiving: Circuits of Disposal and the 'Social Death' of Electronics." Chapter 3 in <i>Digital Rubbish: A Natural History of Electronics</i>. University of Michigan Press, 2013. ISBN: 9780472035373. [Preview with Google Books] Supplemental Stephenson, Neal. "Mother Earth Mother Board." <i>Wired</i>, December 1996.
Disorienting Infrastructures: Underground and Outer Space	Deutsch, A. J. "A Subway Named Mobius." <i>Astounding Science Fiction</i> 46, no. 4 (1950): 72–86. Augé, Marc. "Solitudes." In <i>In The Metro</i>. Translated and with an Introduction and Afterword by Tom Conley. University of Minnesota Press, 2002. ISBN: 9780816634378. [Preview with Google Books] Toth, Jennifer. "Introduction." In <i>The Mole People: Life in the Tunnels Beneath New York City</i>. Chicago Review Press, 1995. ISBN: 9781556522413. [Preview with Google Books] "Underground Spaces." Chapter 5 in <i>The Mole People: Life in the Tunnels Beneath New York City</i>. Chicago Review Press, 1995. ISBN: 9781556522413. [Preview with Google Books] Valentine, David, Valerie A. Olson, et al. "Encountering the Future: Anthropology and Outer Space." <i>Anthropology News</i> 50, no. 9 (2009): 11–15. Battaglia, Debora. "Coming in at an Unusual Angle: Exo-Surprise and the Fieldworking Cosmonaut." <i>Anthropological Quarterly</i> 85, no. 4 (2012): 1089–106.
Technological Disasters	Petryna, Adriana. "Biological Citizenship: The Science and Politics of Chernobyl-Exposed Populations." <i>Osiris</i> 2nd Series 19 (2004): 250–65. Cisterna, Nicolas Sternsdorff. "Safe and Trustworthy?: Food Safety after Fukushima," An STS Forum on the East Japan Disaster. Masco, Joseph. "The End of Ends." <i>Anthropological Quarterly</i> 85, no. 4 (2012): 1107–24. Retro Report. "Nuclear Power's Promise and Peril," <i>New York Times</i>, April 29, 2014.



Attending Policy

Regular and prompt attendance is required. Under ordinary circumstances, you may miss two times without penalty. Each absence over this number will lower your course grade by a third of a letter and missing more than five classes may lead to a failing grade in the course. Arriving late and/or leaving before the end of the class period are equivalent to absences.

Policy on “Late Withdrawals”

In accordance with university policy, appeals for late withdrawal will be approved ONLY in case of medical emergency and similar crises.

Academic Honesty

Nanchang University expects all students to do their own work. Instructors will fail assignments that show evidence of plagiarism or other forms of cheating, and will also report the student's name to the University administration. A student reported to the University for cheating is placed on disciplinary probation; a student reported twice is suspended or expelled.

General Expectations:

Students are expected to:

- Attend all classes and be responsible for all materials covered in class and otherwise assigned;
- Complete the day's required reading and assignments before class;
- Review the previous day's notes before class and make notes about questions you have about the previous class or the day's reading;
- Participate in class discussions and complete required written work on time;
- Refrain from texting, phoning or engaging in computer activities unrelated to class during the class period;
- While class participation is welcome, even required, you are expected to refrain from private conversations during the class period.

Special Needs or Assistance

Please contact the Administrative Office immediately if you have a learning disability, a medical issue, or any other type of problem that prevents professors from seeing you have learned the course material. Our goal is to help you learn, not to penalize you for issues which mask your learning.