

STS 304H.001 Ethical Dimensions of Progress

Fall 2008

MW 3:00-4:15pm Winston 00017

Instructor: Marie Hicks

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Office Hours: Wednesday 4:30-6pm, Withers 467

Course Description

The goal of this course is to gain insight into technology's role in establishing the traditional western notion of progress, focusing on ethical issues raised by the concept of progress, and connections between science, technology, and society. Throughout the course, we will try to understand the different ways that technology and society shape each other. We will be concerned with assessing how technological networks and objects can participate in molding human culture and values.

The questions this course will address include: What are the different ways of understanding technology and society's mutual shaping of each other? Who (if anyone) is responsible for technology's unintended consequences? And, what sorts of intellectual tools must we employ to begin to answer both qualitative and quantitative questions about the nature of technological "progress"?

Course Requirements

One short paper (5pp.) (25%)

Group Project (25%)

Final Paper and Outline (10pp.) (25%)

Discussion Questions and Class participation (25%)

The **short paper assignment** will be described and discussed in class before it is due. The **Final Paper and preceding outline exercise** will be discussed later in the semester, and will draw on course readings as well as materials you choose.

Discussion Questions: Please formulate one or two discussion questions and bring them with you to each class for which a reading has been assigned. These informal questions can be about something in the readings you would like to talk about more in class, or something you did not understand or agree with in the readings. These will aid in giving us jumping-off points for class discussion and allow us to make the most of each class period.

Group Project: For one week of the semester you will be required to work in a group to find three on-line news articles pertaining to that week's topic. You will send links to these articles to the class no later than 5pm on the Sunday preceding your assigned week. You will work on this in groups of 2 or 3 people and will briefly talk about your article choices in class, explaining what they are about and why you chose them.

Late Policy: Assignments turned in late will be decremented by a grade each day, with the following exceptions: the Group Project must be presented on the assigned day, and the Final Paper cannot be accepted late (as it is in lieu of a final exam).

Classroom participation: Attendance and participation are major portion of your grade. Please do the readings on time in order to participate effectively in class.

Books

These books will be available in the bookstore:

- 1) Nina Lerman, Ruth Oldenziel, and A. Mohun, *Gender and Technology: A Reader* (Johns Hopkins, 2003)
- 2) Lynn Townsend White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford University Press, 1966)

In addition, there will be a number of articles on e-reserve.

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. In order to take advantage of available accommodations, students must register with Disability Services for Students at 1900 Student Health Center, Campus Box 7509, 515-7653. For more information on NC State's policy on working with students with disabilities, please see the [Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Regulation \(REG02.20.1\)](#)

Class Schedule:

W 8/20 Introduction

Raising Questions, Defining Parameters of Inquiry

M 8/25 Half the class focuses on Langdon Winner "Do Artifacts Have Politics" article, and the other half reads Bruno Latour "Where are the Missing Masses" article

Systems Design/Evolution of Systems

W 8/27 Reading: White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* chapter 1&2
Groups Assigned

M 9/1 NO CLASS (Labor Day)

W 9/3 NO CLASS (Meet with your groups)

M 9/8 First Paper Due (Comparison of Latour's and Winner's technological philosophies)
Class Exercise: Read each other's papers and pick out one good point, and one aspect that needs work. Then, we will apply Latour's and Winner's theories to:
Thomas Hughes, "The Evolution of Large Technological Systems"

User Construction/User Choice, Technophobia

W 9/10 Ronald Kline and Trevor Pinch, "Users as Agents of Technological Change: The Social Construction of the Automobile in the Rural United States," *Technology and Culture* 37, No. 4 (October 1996): 763-95.

M 9/15 **Metropolis** (dir. Fritz Lang, 1927)
Why does the concept of technological dystopia have such long-standing appeal? How does the fantasy world presented in *Metropolis* relate thematically to the articles we are reading in this unit?

W 9/17 Jameson Wetmore, "Amish Technology"

M 9/22 Group 1 Presentation: Dystopian visions of technological progress

Constructing Technological Narratives and Progress Narratives

W 9/24 Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "How the Refrigerator got its Hum"

M 9/29 Jennifer Light's article, pp. 295-317 in *Gender and Technology: A Reader*

W 10/1 Jameson Wetmore "Redefining Risks and Redistributing Responsibilities" (Airbag Article)

Progress in Food and Agriculture

- M 10/6 Biopharming:
<http://www.foe.org/camps/comm/safefood/biopharm/PharmRiceReportExecSummary.pdf>
Starlink Corn Problems:
<http://www.ehponline.org/members/2002/110p5-13bucchini/EHP110p5PDF.PDF>
Lawsuit over pollution by GM Crop Testing:
http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/cfs_files2.cfm
Failure of Biotech Wheat:
http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/monsanto_p.cfm
rGBH Labeling Controversy:
http://www.bioethics.iastate.edu/Bioethics_in_Brief/nov05.html
Monsanto Sues Farmers:
<http://www.i-sis.org.uk/MonsantovsFarmers.php>
http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/press_release1.13.05.cfm
- W 10/8 Group 2 Presentation: Exporting American Agricultural Progress
- M 10/13 Excerpts from *Fast Food Nation*

Progress at Work and at Home

- W 10/15 Roger Horowitz, "Meatpacking" in *Gender and Technology: A Reader*
- M 10/20 Group 3 Presentation: Potential fictions of domestic and workplace labor savings
- W 10/22 Ronald Kline, "Home Ideologies: Progress?" in *Gender and Technology: A Reader*
Assign Final Outline/Bibliography
- M 10/27 NO CLASS (Work on research for Final Paper)

Technology, Society, and the Standardization of Bodies

- W 10/29 Nick Watson, *In Pursuit of Standardization: The British Ministry of Health's Model 8F Wheelchair, 1948-1962* (on reserve)
- M 11/3 Group 4 Presentation: Technology, Disability, and Progress
- W 11/5 Herzig's article, pp. 73-89, of *Gender and Technology* reader

Deconstructing the Technological West, Literally and Figuratively

- M 11/10 *Shipbreakers of Alang* (Film)
- W 11/12 Reading: Donna Haraway,
Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.Femaleman_Meets_Oncomouse,
pp. 49-69, 79-87 (on reserve)
- M 11/17 Group 5 Presentation: How theories of progress have changed in the last century/are changing currently
- W 11/19 Outlines and Annotated Bibliography for Final Papers Due
Discuss Final Papers (class members will present their topics to the class)

M 11/24 NO CLASS (Work on Final Papers)

W 11/26 NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break, Nov. 24-26)

M 12/1 **Discuss Final Papers (class members will present their topics to the class)**

Individual Actors Within a Large Technological System: Do They Matter?

W 12/3 Course Review, Summation
Listen to Part 2 “Should I Stay or Should I Go?” Beginning at 26:35 minute mark
http://thislife.org/Radio_Episode.aspx?sched=1071
The story of Graphing Calculator 1.0:
<http://www.pacifict.com/Story/>

Final Exam period Dec. 8 through 16
FINAL PAPERS DUE Monday Dec 15 at 3pm