English/DTC 561, Studies in Technology and Culture   **Spring 2017**
Dr. Mike Edwards   Mondays 1510–1740

Overview:

This graduate seminar develops a historical, ethical, rhetorical, and cultural understanding of technology and culture by merging theory and practice with a crucial emphasis on cultural needs, historical trajectories, and lived practices. Students will examine the key concepts, debates, tools and possibilities afforded by engaging technology through a critical cultural lens. The course challenges both technologically determinist and celebratory narratives by building a critical vocabulary and in-depth knowledge of the historical, political, social and ethical decisions, projects and processes that define practical implementations of technologies that are never culturally neutral or value-free.

The seminar therefore asks: how can we as participants better respond to increasingly pervasive flows of ambient information in culturally responsible ways? And how can we do so in ways that do not imagine that a graduate seminar can simply transfer familiar material cultural *topoi* into new digital environments, but that rather understand that digital environments are no less material than any other aspects of our culture, and that investigate their complications as such, rather than assuming a project of somehow remediating those familiar cultural *topoi* into the digital? Students in the seminar will collaboratively examine the cultural and material effects of the intersection of process and information in such areas of culture as archiving, privacy, regulation, expression, coercion, research, security, representation, and persuasion.

Materials (alphabetical by author):

- Finn Brunton and Helen Nissenbaum, *Obfuscation: A User's Guide for Privacy and Protest* (MIT, 2016: ISBN 9780262529860)

- Philip N. Howard, *Pax Technica* (Yale, 2015: ISBN 9780300199475)

- Tung-Hui Hu, *A Prehistory of the Cloud* (MIT, 2016; ISBN 9780262029513)

- Fred Kaplan, *Dark Territory: The Secret History of Cyber War* (Simon & Schuster, 2016: ISBN 9781476763255)

- Julie Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplining Digital Humanities* (University of Michigan, 2015: ISBN 9780472052547; available free)

- Frank Pasquale, *The Black Box Society* (Harvard, 2015: ISBN 9780674368279)

- Jeffrey Pomerantz, *Metadata: A Very Brief Introduction* (MIT, 2015: 9780262528511)

- Bruce Schneier, *Data and Goliath* (Norton, 2015: ISBN 9780393244816)

Additionally, students will choose to read one of two novels: either *Count Zero* by William Gibson or *Homeland* by Cory Doctorow.

Students should plan on bringing a networked digital composing device (smartphone, tablet, or laptop) to class each week or arranging to borrow one from the AML or making arrangements to share with no more than one other student in the seminar.

Contributions:

Each week, one student will identify problems raised by the readings and link those problems to previous discussions in order to present an **agenda** for the discussion. A second student will investigate the lists of works cited in the readings in order to present a genealogical and theoretical **background** for the discussion, including an annotated bibliography of key academic antecedents: doing so will also help to emphasize for students the ways in which histories and archives are always constructed and never disinterested. A third student will present use cases and instructions on ways to use a digital **tool** to extend that week's discussion, either for data analysis (e.g., statistical or topic modeling software) or for data presentation and visualization (e.g., illustration or animation software).

Assignments:

On 2/27, students will turn in midterm problem statements outlining a possible controversy or intervention based on course readings that they wish to investigate more deeply in an end-of-semester multimodal seminar project.

For 1/23, 1/30, 2/6, 2/13, 2/20, 3/6, 3/27, 4/3, 4/10, and 4/17, students who are not presenting an **agenda**, **background**, or **tool** will be responsible for writing a total of 8 short informal responses (400–600) words to the readings. (Since that totals 10 weeks, students who are presenting will not be responsible for writing responses.)

On 3/20, students will turn in short papers that extend the work of their problem statements into review essays, investigating and evaluating at least four additional scholarly sources that help shape their perspectives on the challenges they wish to investigate.

The end-of-semester multimodal seminar project will be collaborative in the sense that students will be expected to quote and make use of some of the resources and responses their classmates have presented and incorporate material from their own informal responses. During the final week of class, students will present their projects.

Calendar:

Date	Preparation	Activity
UNIT ONE	**METHODS AND PROBLEMS**	
1/9	Sign up for Eli Review, Toggl, and 750words	Course overview; view *CitizenFour*
1/16	*Count Zero* or *Homeland*	No class; introductions in Eli Review

Date	Preparation	Activity
1/23	*Metadata* 1–207; Crawford, "Asking the Oracle" 138–151	Eli Review; metadata
1/30	*Interdiscipining Digital Humanities* Chapters 1–6 and Resourcing; Derrida, *Archive Fever* excerpts 1–3	Secure communications; collaboration
2/6	*Data and Goliath* 13–154 (Chapters 1–11); Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control" 3–7	Identity part 1
2/13	*Data and Goliath* 155–237 (Chapters 12–16); Dush, "When Writing Becomes Content" 172–194	Git (possible); nationalism part 1
UNIT TWO	**HISTORIES AND FUTURES**	
2/20	*A Prehistory of the Cloud* 1–143	No class
2/27	Midterm due	Workshopping; information theory and Turing machines
3/6	*Pax Technica* 1–106 (Chapters 1–3); Kline, "What Is Technology" 210–212; Horning, "Savior Machines"; Feenberg, "Democratic Rationalization" 652–664	Infrastructure
3/13	*Pax Technica* 107–257 (Chapters 4–7)	Spring Break
3/20	*Dark Territory* 1–143 (Chapters 1–8); Marx "Fragment on Machines" 690–712; short review essay	Review essay presentations and feedback
3/27	*Dark Territory* 145–284 (Chapters 9–15); Sterne, "Compression: A Loose History" 31–52	Nationalism part 2
UNIT THREE	**SEEKING AND HIDING**	
4/3	*Black Box Society* 19–139 (Chapters 2–4); Dourish, "Protocols, Packets, and Proximity" 183–204	Identity part 2
4/10	*Black Box Society* 140–218 (Chapters 5–6); Reyman, "User Data"; Allison et al., "Quantitative Formalism"	
4/17	*Obfuscation* 1–98; Ohmann, "Literacy, Technology"; Benjamin, "Age of Mechanical Reproduction"	

Date	Preparation	Activity
4/24	Draft due	Workshopping; wrap-up
5/1	Finals due	DTC awards