

HIST386 – The History of Technology

Professor: Dr. Kyle Riismandel

Email: kriis@njit.edu

Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 10-11:20AM

Classroom: CKB 314

Office: Cullimore 326/x3379

Student Office Hours:

- Monday 230-4PM
- Tuesday 1-2PM
- Thursday 1-3PM
- By appointment

Course Description

In this course, we will analyze the social and cultural histories of various consumer technologies in postwar America. We will consider how these technologies were invented, distributed, used, and understood in three areas:

1. Technologies of Music
2. Video Technologies
3. Social Media

Through this analysis, we will make sense of the broader changes in race, class, gender, sexuality, and capitalism in postwar America tracking the interactions between consumer capitalism, social identities, and popular technology.

As an upper level course, we will focus more on reading, writing, and discussion than on lecture. To that end, class time will be spent working together to analyze primary and secondary sources and come to some bigger conclusions about that theme/unit and the course as a whole. So, please come prepared to do this work.

Course Goals

- Analyze and understand the invention, use, and distribution of consumer technologies within their historical contexts including the cultural values and social relationships articulated through these processes
- Define and analyze postwar American consumer culture
- Define and identify significant changes in postwar American culture, politics, and society
- Learn and practice the skills to analyze, discuss, and write about primary and secondary sources related to the study of American technology and consumer culture

Course Texts

All texts, including films, podcasts, etc., will be available on Canvas.

Course Grade:

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

- Class Participation 15%
- Reading Quizzes (3 x 5%) 15%
- Recap Paper 10%

- Recap Presentation 5%
- Short Paper (2 x 15%) 30%
- Big Takeaway Paper 25%

Assignments

Participation – 15%

Students are expected to participate actively in all class discussions and activities, to be respectful to the instructor and their fellow classmates, to arrive to class on time, and to stay focused on what is happening in our classroom not on chatting or using digital devices. Further, participation will be assessed not just on quantity but also on quality. Quality participation demonstrates knowledge of the issues at hand, completion of that week's assignments, and a willingness to engage in critical assessment of course texts and lectures. The participation grade may also include pop quizzes and short writing assignments done in class.

I encourage students to check in with me over the course of the semester regarding their class participation performance. As a reminder, office hours are for meeting with students. You do not need to make an appointment during those times. Further, do not wait to contact me if you are falling behind or having trouble understanding course content. I am here to help!

Reading Quizzes – 3 x 5%

Three times during the semester, you will complete a multiple-choice reading quiz designed to test reading comprehension of that day's assignment.

Recap Paper and Presentation – 15% (10 – paper/5 – presentation)

You will be responsible for recapping one class during the semester. That means, for your chosen date, you will write a short paper (400-750 words) that will include the key analytical takeaways from a lecture and/or discussion. That means, you should articulate what we learned or now understand about that week's theme or topic as well as how it connects to the broader themes and ideas discussed to that point in the course. At the next class, you will start by presenting your recap to the class. You do not need to do a formal presentation. Rather, you should shortly summarize the main points of your paper. An assignment sheet with further instructions will be distributed in class and via Canvas.

Short Paper x 2 – 15% each

For 2 of the 3 units, you will submit a paper (1000-1500 words) that ties together the topics in that unit. In doing so, you will make an argument that explains what those different readings, sources, etc., when analyzed together, help us understand about consumer technologies in postwar America and how they do so. An assignment sheet with further instructions will be distributed in class and via Canvas.

Big Takeaway Paper

This assignment asks you to tie together the 3 units of the semester by making an argument about what big things we can understand about American consumer technologies after analyzing all of our sources over the course of the semester. An assignment sheet with further instructions will be distributed in class and via Canvas.

Course Policies

Attendance:

Students are expected to attend all course meetings on time unless receiving prior authorization. Missing class will not only adversely affect your class participation grade, but there will be screenings in class that will only be offered during that class period so do your best to attend. If you miss class to attend an NJIT sponsored event, to observe a religious holiday, or due to a documented illness, those absences will be excused. For these absences to count as excused, you must receive permission from the instructor in advance or provide a doctor's note in the case of sickness.

Classroom Conduct:

In this course, we welcome intellectual inquiry and thoughtful discussion of difficult questions, but hate speech and disrespectful comments will not be tolerated. We must come to class with an open mind, a willingness to learn, and fundamental respect for the humanity of each person in the room and the historical actors we discuss.

Office hours/student appointments:

My office hours will be every Monday 12-1PM and Tuesday and Thursday 1-3PM. I am also available to meet by appointment if students are unable to make it to my office during these times. Feel free to send me an email to set up a meeting if you'd like to talk or have any questions about course topics, assignments, or grades.

Academic dishonesty:

Students are expected to obey the NJIT honor code, and I will enforce this code to its fullest extent. The goal of this course is to evaluate your understanding of course materials and ability to express that understanding. Cheating, plagiarizing or otherwise violating the code of academic integrity not only breaks the trust between professor and student but keeps you from learning course content and improving writing and critical thinking skills. I am here to help so if you are having trouble, do not cheat, ask me for help.

For the tenets of the code or for clarification of what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, please consult: <http://www.njit.edu/academics/honorcode.php>.

Generally speaking, it is a violation of the academic integrity code to:

- Use someone else's words or ideas without attribution
- Copy content from someone else's paper, quiz, or exam
- Pay for course assignments to be complete by someone else

Cell phones:

Students must turn off and stow their cell phones before class begins. Under no circumstances may students answer their phones, make calls, send text messages, or use their cell phone in any manner during class hours unless approved by me before class begins. If I see a student using a cell phone in class, I will at minimum mark that student absent for the class and reserve the right to ask the student to leave for the remainder of the class. I do not want to interrupt class to ask you to stop texting. It interrupts the flow of discussion, distracts other students, and will inevitably embarrass the texter. I understand that cell phones have become central to many of our lives, but their use in class is a distraction for not just the user but others in class.

Laptops and miscellaneous technology rules:

Students may use laptops in this course for class-related activities only. If I learn that students are using laptops for any other purpose, I will issue a laptop ban for this class. Students are also prohibited from listening to ipods or using any other device in this class that has not received prior authorization. Essentially, you are in class approximately 3 hours a week. Please be present and prepared when you are here. If you would rather text or surf the internet, please do not come to class.

Students Requiring Accommodations:

Students who require accommodations should contact NJIT's Student Disability Services to help procure accommodations in completing coursework. The center can be found at <http://www.njit.edu/counseling/services/disabilities.php>.

Course Schedule

WEEK 1

Tuesday, January 21 – Introductions/What are we doing here?/Technology and Culture

Thursday, January 23 – Consumer Culture and Technology

Secondary Sources

- Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, Ch. 3
- David Nye, "Does Technology Control Us?"

Unit 1 – Technologies of Music

WEEK 2

Tuesday, January 28 - Radio

Primary Source

- Alan Freed, "Rock N' Roll Show" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s19HmcLeTtQ>

Secondary Source

- Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination*, Ch. 9

Thursday, January 30 - Guitars

Primary Source

- Jimi Hendrix, "Live at Monterey Pop," 1967 - Spotify
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZot7BBzgog>

Secondary Source

- Steve Waksman, "Black Sound, Black Body: Jimi Hendrix, the Electric Guitar, and the Meanings of Blackness," *Popular Music and Society*, 1999

WEEK 3 – Portable, Personalized Music

Tuesday, February 4

Primary Source

- Sony Walkman Commercial Playlist

Secondary Source

- Paul DuGay, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Walkman*

Thursday, February 6 – Streaming and Algorithms

Primary Source

- Listen to WFMU
- Listen to an algorithm generated playlist of the streaming music service of your choice

Secondary Source

- Elena Razlogova, “The Past and Future of Music Listening”

WEEK 4 – Unit I Wrap Up

Tuesday, February 11

Thursday, February 13

Paper #1 Due

Unit II – Video Technologies

WEEK 5 – Video Tapes and the VCR

Tuesday, February 18

Primary Source

- VCR News and Commercial Playlist -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8Q9fKXxHjI&list=PLmUH0DO9ueN_XMprSPuB_lhmEAohPj_VNc

Secondary Source

- Frederick Wasser, *Veni, Vidi, Video: The Hollywood Empire and the VCR*, Ch. 4

Thursday, February 20

Primary Source

Secondary Source

- Joshua Greenberg, *From Betamax to Blockbuster*, Ch. 4

WEEK 6 – Video Games

Tuesday, February 25 – The Arcade

Primary Source – Class Trip

- Barcade Newark, 494 Broad St. – Family Day, TBD

Secondary Source

- Michael Z. Newman, *Atari Age: The Emergence of Video Games in American Culture*, “Good Clean Fun: The Origins of the Video Arcade”

Thursday, February 27 – Home Console

Secondary Source

- John Willis, *Gamer Nation: Video Games and American Culture*, “Grand Theft Los Angeles”

WEEK 7 – Online Video

Tuesday, March 3 - Pornography

Primary Source

Secondary Source

- Susanna Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography*, Ch. 5

Thursday, March 5 – Tik Tok

Primary Source

- “Funny Tik Tok Memes” - https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTBqCtoS_XvwU5oczcQdplw

WEEK 8 – Unit II Wrap Up

Tuesday, March 10

Secondary Source

- Michael Z. Newman, *Video Revolutions*, Ch. 5

Thursday, March 12

Paper # 2 Due

WEEK 9

Tuesday, March 17 – Spring Break

NO CLASS

Thursday, March 19 – Spring Break

NO CLASS

Unit III – Social Media

WEEK 10 – Bulletin Board Systems

Tuesday, March 24

Primary Source

- BBS Archives - <http://archives.thebbs.org/>

Secondary Source

- *BBS: The Documentary*, Episode 2 - <https://archive.org/details/BBS.The.Documentary/BBS.The.Documentary.ep2.avi>

Thursday, March 26

Secondary Source

- Charlton D. McIlwain, *Black Software: The Internet and Racial Justice from the AfroNet to Black Lives Matter*, “Black Software Comes to Cambridge”

WEEK 11 – MySpace, Facebook, etc.

Tuesday, March 31

Secondary Source

- Mary L. Gray, *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*, “Online Profiles: Remediating the Coming-Out Story”

Thursday, April 2

Secondary Source

- Casey Newton, “The Secret Lives of Facebook Moderators in America” - <https://www.theverge.com/2019/2/25/18229714/cognizant-facebook-content-moderator-interviews-trauma-working-conditions-arizona>

WEEK 12 – Surveillance Capitalism

Tuesday, April 7

Primary Source

Secondary Sources

- Shoshanna Zuboff, “How Google Discovered the Value of Surveillance” - <https://longreads.com/2019/09/05/how-google-discovered-the-value-of-surveillance/>
- Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor*, Ch.1

Thursday, April 9

Primary Source

- *The Circle* – <https://www.netflix.com/title/81044551>

Secondary Source

- danah boyd, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, “Identity: Why Do Teens Seem So Strange Online?”

WEEK 13 – Unit III Wrap Up

Tuesday, April 14

Thursday, April 16

Paper #3 Due

Unit IV – Course Wrap Up/Big Takeaways

WEEK 14

Tuesday, April 21

Thursday, April 23

WEEK 15

Tuesday, April 28

Thursday, April 30

Big Takeaways Paper Due – May 11th