

# NYU Paris

## IDSEM-UG 9353 C01

### What is Technology?

#### Instructor Information

- S. Romi Mukherjee
- Tu/Thurs, 13:00 – 14:30

#### Course Information

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- It would be a misnomer to assume that technology is something we “use.” Rather, the human appears something quite non-technical about technology which has an intrinsically social nature and can take the form of bodily and socializing techniques, the canalization of creative powers, becomings of all sorts, and of course the mechanical and material manipulation of ourselves and our life-worlds. We must thus speak of a biological and technical habitus of dependency and over-coming, one constituted by everything from creating art, to language, to ideological persuasion, to human enhancement and post-humanism, and various forms of convergence. What is the relationship between these various techniques and technologies and their respective effects (ethical, cultural, aesthetic) on the category of the human? Social transformation and technology cannot be theorized in isolation. The technological, mediological, and digital have to be unearthed as constitutive of our shared “material culture” and milieu. Within such a milieu, which is both internal and external to actors and agents implicated within it, the “essence” of the human is not only potentially redefined, but indeed dissolved. In such a potential redefinition and dissolution, one finds a radically new ethical and political threshold that has yet to be adequately theorized. This course attempts to reveal this threshold through developing a critical heuristic which maps the topoi of the socio-eco-techno system. Drawing on mediology, ethics, and the French school of the anthropology of techniques, we explore such topoi in terms as both “deep” historical sediment and also futurology with a view to illuminating how as embedded in a matrix of the socio-techno-material. In this sense, there is our values are negotiated and transformed in our rapport with the technological.
- General Background in the social sciences.
- Tu/Thurs. 13:00 -14:30/Room 504

#### Course Overview and Goals

##### Upon Completion of this Course, students will be able to:

- develop critical perspectives to the study of society and technology

- develop understanding of the French tradition of the anthropology of technology
- reflect on the ethics of science and technology with a view to understanding key policy debates
- understand the larger nexus of techniques, material culture studies, and materiality

## Course Requirements

- **Class Participation:** this is a discussion course. Much of each class session will consist of moderated discussion of the texts/images, following an introductory, thematic lecture. It is therefore imperative that students read and think about the assigned reading material so as to be able to participate meaningfully in class discussions.
- **Show and Tell:** Students will have presentations where they describe a “technological object” or vestige of material culture.
- **Mid-term and Final Papers.**
- **Debate on Post-Humanism:** Students will explain why or why not they want to be robots.

## Grading of Assignments

The grade for this course will be determined according to the following formula:

<b>Assignments/Activities</b>	<b>% of Final Grade</b>
[Class Participation]	[25%]
[Mid-Term Paper]	[25%]
[Final Paper]	[25%]
[Class Debate]	[25%]

## Letter Grades

Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>A</b>	16-20	Outstanding
<b>A-</b>	15	Excellent
<b>B+</b>	14	Very Good
<b>B</b>	13	Good
<b>B-</b>	12	Satisfactory
<b>C+</b>	11	Above Average
<b>C</b>	10	Average
<b>C-</b>	9	Below Average
<b>D+</b>	8	Unsatisfactory
<b>D</b>	7	Low Pass
<b>D-</b>	6	Low Pass
<b>F</b>	5	Fail

## **Course Schedule**

### **Week 1. General Introduction and Methodology**

#### **For a History of Techniques and Technology**

Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, "Forward by the Author" and pp. 3-22,  
 Jacques Ellul, "The Autonomy of Technological Production," pp. 386-396

## **Week 2. Tools, Thingness, and Reification**

Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, pp. 17-42  
Daniel Chandler, "Keywords – Reification, Reductionism, Imperative, Progress," pp. 1-10

## **Bodily Techniques and Bodily Communication**

Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," pp. 455-475  
Steven Matthews, "The Materiality of Gesture: Intimacy, Emotion, and Technique in the Archaeological Study of Bodily Communication," pp. 1-15

## **Week3. Biopolitical and Carceral Technologies/Technologies of Power**

Michel Foucault, "Panopticon," from *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 360 – 367  
Jose Perez de Lama, "On Biopower and BioPolitics," pp. 1-5  
pp. 21-35  
Btihaj Ajana, "Surveillance and Biopolitics," pp. 1-13.

## **Case-Studies: Biometrics, Pluralism, and "Security Technologies"**

Andrea Cairola, "Facial Recognition in China," from *UNESCO: An Information Ethics Handbook*.

## **Week 4. Foresight and Futorology**

Jerome Bindé, "Towards an Ethics of the Future"

## **Attention Economies**

Michael H. Goldhaber, "The Real Nature of the Emerging Attention Economy," 2012,  
Yves Citton, "Rethinking 'Impact': Between the Attention Economy and the Readerless Republic of Letters," *Substance*, #130, Vol. 42, 2013

## **Week 5. Clones**

Slavoj Žižek, "Of Cells and Selves," in *The Žižek Reader*, ed. Edmond and Elisabeth Wright, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009)  
Jean Baudrillard, "Clone Story," pp. 95-105

## **Non-Human Animal Technologies**

Jean Baudrillard, "The Animals: Territory and Metamorphosis,"  
Jes Harfield, " Husbandry to Industry: Animal Agriculture, Ethics, and Public Policy,"

## **Week 6. Debate on Post-Humanism**

### **Human Animal Technologies**

Peter Sloterdijk, Excerpt from "Rules for the Human Zoo"  
Nancy Scheper Hughes, "The Last Commodity: Post-Human Ethics and the Global Traffic in 'Fresh Organs'," pp. 145-169

## **Week 7. Robot Ethics/Friendly Robots?**

Colin Eilen and Wendell Wallach, "Moral Machines: Contradiction in Terms or Abdication of Moral Responsibility,"  
Amanda and Noel Sharkey, "Granny and the Robots: Ethical Issues in Robot Care for the Elderly,"

### **Technology as Material Culture**

Ron Eglash, "Technology as Material Culture," pp. 329-340  
Phillip Vannini, "Material Culture and Technoculture as Interaction" pp., pp. 73-88

## **Week 8. Cars**

Pierre Lemonier, "Race Cars, Dinky Toys, and Aging Boys," pp. 99 – 118  
Chaim Noy, "On Driving a Car and Being a Family," pp. 101-115

### **Ethnography of Your Car (TBC)**

## **Week 9. Cooking**

Tina Peterson, "The Zapper and the Zapped: Microwave Ovens and the People who Use them," pp. 229-243  
Judith Farquhar, "Food, Eating, and the Good Life," pp. 145-161

## **The War Machine**

Paul Virilio, Selections from *Pure War*  
Manuel de Landa, Selections from *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*  
Marairosario Taddeo, "An Analysis for a Just Cyber Warfare," pp. 209-218.

**Week 10. What is the Internet?**

Nicolas Carr, "The Juggler's Brain," pp. 115-143

Robert McChesney, Selections from *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism is Turning the Internet against Democracy*,

**"Show and Tell"**

**Week 11. "Show and Tell"**

**Week 12. Technology and Religion: Jihad.com/Cyber-Radicalisation**

Maura Conway, "The Emergence of the Internet as a New Form of Radical Milieu," pp. 1-17

Gary Bunt, selections from *Islam in the Digital Age*

**Technology vs./as Religion**

David Noble, selections from *The Religion of Technology*

Peter Pels, Stef Aupers, Dick Houtman, "Cybergnosis: Technology, Religion, and the Secular," pp. 687-702

**Week 13. Re-enchantments: Astrology, Divination, Pagan Technics**

Theodor Adorno, Selections from "The Stars down to Earth"

**Social Media, Narcissism, and the New Loneliness**

Geert Lovink, "Facebook, Anonymity, and the Crisis of the Multiple Self," and "Treatise on Comment Culture," pp. 25-49

Roger Scruton, "Hiding Behind the Screen," *The New Atlantis*, 2010

Christine Rosen, "Virtual Friendships and the New Narcissism," *The New Atlantis*, 2007

**Week 14. Policy Debate – Drafting of a Declaration on Technological Ethics**

**Week15: Wrap up**

# Course Materials

## Required Textbooks & Materials

- Readings will be circulated in PDF form.

## Resources

- **Access your course materials:** [NYU Classes](https://nyu.edu/its/classes) (nyu.edu/its/classes)
- **Databases, journal articles, and more:** [Bobst Library](https://library.nyu.edu) (library.nyu.edu)
- **Assistance with strengthening your writing:** [NYU Writing Center](https://nyu.mywconline.com) (nyu.mywconline.com)
- **Obtain 24/7 technology assistance:** [IT Help Desk](https://nyu.edu/it/servicedesk) (nyu.edu/it/servicedesk)

# Course Policies

## Attendance and Tardiness

- Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student's final course grade for every week's worth of classes missed. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in harsher penalties including failure.
- Unexcused absences affect students' grades: unexcused absences will be penalized with a 2% deduction from the students' final course grade.
- Absences are excused only for illness, religious observance, and emergencies.

**Illness:** For a single absence, students may be required to provide a doctor's note, at the discretion of the Associate Director of Academics. In the case of two consecutive absences, students must provide a doctor's note. Exams, quizzes, and presentations will not be made up without a doctor's note.

**Religious Observance:** Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. Students must notify their instructor and the Academic Office in writing via email one week in advance before being absent for this purpose. If exams, quizzes, and presentations are scheduled on a holiday a student will observe, the Associate Director, in coordination with the instructor, will reschedule them.

**Please note: if you are unable to attend class, you are required to email your professors directly to notify them.**

## Late Assignment

Late submission or work will be accepted only with justifiable reasons of health or family emergency.

## Academic Honesty/Plagiarism

*At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community.*

**Plagiarism:** *presenting others' work without adequate acknowledgement of its source, as though it were one's own. Plagiarism is a form of fraud. We all stand on the shoulders of others, and we must give credit to the creators of the works that we incorporate into products that we call our own. Some examples of plagiarism:*

- *a sequence of words incorporated without quotation marks*
- *an unacknowledged passage paraphrased from another's work*
- *the use of ideas, sound recordings, computer data or images created by others as though it were one's own*
- *submitting evaluations of group members' work for an assigned group project which misrepresent the work that was performed by another group member*
- *altering or forging academic documents, including but not limited to admissions materials, academic records, grade reports, add/drop forms, course registration forms, etc.*

*For further information, students are encouraged to check [www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html](http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html)*

## Disability Disclosure Statement

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or [mosescsd@nyu.edu](mailto:mosescsd@nyu.edu)) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

## Instructor Bio

- S. Romi Mukherjee received his B.A., M.A, and Ph.d from the University of Chicago where his thesis, in the sociology and history of religions, examined the politics of the sacred in inter-war France. He is currently Assistant Professor in religion and politics at SciencesPo-Paris and co-editor of the English edition of *La Revue de Synthèse*. He is also lecturer at New York University in Paris. Between 2006 and 2009, he was a researcher at the Interdisciplinary Center for Comparative Research in the Social Sciences (CIR-Paris) where he worked on a series of European Commission research projects (Framework 7) concerning *inter alia* the French Republic and pluralism, secularism and the return of religion, and collective memory. Since 2009, he has been affiliated with UNESCO in various capacities, most recently as associate researcher in the Social and Human Sciences Sector where he works on issues pertaining to the ethics and anthropology of technology

and the question of humanism in the age of the anthropocene. He has published widely, mostly in political theory and the history of religions. Recent monographs and edited volumes include: *Durkheim and Violence* (Blackwell, 2010) *The Political Anthropology of the Global* (Blackwell, 2011) and *Social Memory and Hypermodernity* (Blackwell, 2012, with Éric Brian et Marie Jaisson), and *Nouveaux Visages du Religieux dans un Monde Sécularisé* (with Lionel Obadia, Karthala, 2016). His current research project is entitled “The Trials of Marianne: The French Republic and the Sacred.”