Historical Technology Studies
HSCI 5550, Section 001, CRN 30799; Thursdays, 1:30–4:20pm; Bizzell 324 (east)
Instructor: Assistant Professor Peter Soppelsa, peter.soppelsa@ou.edu
Office Hours: Thursdays, 9:00am–1:00pm, PHSC 611

Course Description: This course introduces basic historiographies, methods, and theories of social and cultural technology studies. Based in the history of technology, it also introduces students to tools and concepts from cognate fields including the social sciences, geography, environmental history, and recent studies of animals, disasters, and mobilities. Throughout, we will ask how history and other disciplines speak to each other as scholarly fields. The course's first half deals with basic concepts: technology, its designers (engineers and others) and users, innovation, and social construction. The course's second half then moves on to key themes in recent technology studies that challenge or revise constructivism by claiming the co-construction of society and technology: appropriation and domestication; gender; race; empire; envirotech; accidents/failures/risk/disasters; non-humans and materiality; infrastructure and the built environment; and mobilities.

Assignments: (1) Weekly Papers (40%): Students should write a 750–1,000-word response to each week's readings, to serve as a platform for discussion. Papers should briefly summarize readings and then move quickly into analysis, discussion, and evaluation. Papers are due before classes, by 9am Thursdays.
(2) Weekly Presentations (15%): Each week, one student will be responsible for presenting the readings to kick off discussion. Plan to speak no more than 15 minutes. Depending on class size, students will present once or twice during the semester. In weeks when you present, you do not have to write a response paper.
(3) Final Papers (20%): Students' final papers should be historiographic or methodological review essays of 5,000–7,500 words that focus on one (or a few) of the topics from the course that are most relevant to their own work. Students who would rather write a research paper may discuss that option with me.
(4) Class Attendance and Participation (25%): come to class and speak up!

Expectations and Policies: *** Come to class each week prepared for discussion. Occasionally we will discuss sensitive or controversial topics; please be respectful, courteous and civil with your fellow students and with me; be attentive and sensitive to what we have to say; and above all use common sense.
*** Students should familiarize themselves with OU policies concerning: reasonable accommodation for disabilities and equal opportunity; academic integrity and misconduct (especially plagiarism); harassment and discrimination; and religious holidays. We will follow these policies in class.
*** All readings are listed on the day they are due, and include notes in brackets on where you can access them. Recommended readings are optional. Books marked [!!!] should be purchased, rented, or borrowed from a library. I highly recommend buying them; they are leading books in the field, useful for future reference.
Course Schedule:

Introductory Meeting: 8/21: Discuss Syllabus, Choose Presentation Dates

Week 1: 8/28: Basic Concepts: Defining Technology/Artifacts & Politics

Defining Technology:
David Nye, “Can we define technology?” In Technology Matters: Questions to Live With (MIT, 2006), 1–15 [PDF on D2L].
Leo Marx, “Technology: The Emergence of a Hazardous Concept,” Technology and Culture 51, no. 3 (July 2010): 561–77 [MUSE].

Artifacts and Politics:
Langdon Winner, “Do Artifacts Have Politics?” In The Whale and the Reactor: a Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology (University of Chicago, 1986), 1–19 [PDF on D2L].
Anne-Jorunn Berg and Merete Lie, “Feminism and Constructivism: Do Artifacts Have Gender?” Science, Technology, and Human Values 20, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 332–51 [PDF on D2L].

Week 2: 9/4: Engineering Studies

**Week 3: 9/11: The 1980s Social Constructivist Turn: SCOT (social construction of technology), ANT (actor network theory), & LTS (large technical systems)**


**Week 4: 9/18: Technology’s Users/The Concept of Co-Construction**


**Week 5: 9/25: Appropriation & Domestication**

Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany, 1890–1945* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) [!!].


**Week 6: 10/2: Gender**
Francesca Bray, "Gender and Technology" Annual Review of Anthropology 36 (2007): 37–53 [PDF on D2L].
Nina Lerman, Ruth Oldenziel, and Arwen Mohun, eds. Gender and Technology: A Reader (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) [!!!].

**Recommended: Ruth Oldenziel, Making Technology Masculine: Men, Women, and Modern Machines in America, 1870–1945 (University of Amsterdam, 1999); Science, Technology and Human Values, 20, no. 3 (Summer 1995): Special issue on Feminist and Constructivist Perspectives.**

**Week 7: 10/9: Race**


**Week 8: 10/16: Empire (and Race)**
William Storey, Guns, Race, and Power in Colonial South Africa (Cambridge University Press, 2008) [!!!].

Week 9: 10/23: Envirotech


Week 10: 10/30: Accidents, Failures, Risk, & Disasters


Week 11: 11/6: Non-Humans & Post-Humans: Materiality & Thing Theory

Week 12: 11/13: Animals as Technology
Susan Schrepfer and Philip Scranton, eds., Industrializing Organisms: Introducing Evolutionary History (Routledge, 2004), preface, Introduction, section on animals, and afterward, pp. vii–18, 143–266 [PDF on D2L].


Week 13: 11/20: The Built Environment, Cities, Infrastructure & Space


Week 14: 11/27: NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING

Week 15: 12/4: Mobilities
Gii Mom et al., "Hop on the Bus, Gus," Transfers 1, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 1–13 [PDF on D2L].
Marc Augé, "Thinking Mobility," Transfers 2, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 5–9 [PDF on D2L].

Week 16: 12/12: Final Papers due by the end of the day.