Instructor: K.J. Surkan	TA: Peter Oviatt
Office: 14N-221b	
Hours: W 1-4pm and by appointment	
Phone: 617-452-3190 (office)	
Email: ksurkan@mit.edu	

Course Description

This course examines the intersections of technology, culture, and politics in a variety of social and historical settings. Discussions and readings are organized around three questions: what cultural effects and risks follow from treating biology as technology; how computing and digital technology has changed the way we think about ourselves and others (and particularly how it has changed the landscape of labor relations); and how politics are built into our infrastructures. We will explore the forces behind technological and cultural change; how technological and cultural artifacts are understood and used by different communities; and whether, in what ways, and for whom technology has produced a better world. We will consider the ways in which technology offers possibilities for new social relations, and how we should evaluate these possibilities. Our class will be participating in some collaborations with other FemTechNet DOCC nodes, which may involve reading and responding to shared texts, or engaging with digital objects created by others.

Course Requirements
- Attendance and participation (10%)
- Blog Commentary/Collaborations with weekly posts on assigned readings and/or relevant current event topics (20%)
- Critical Response Paper (20%)
- Twine exercise (20%)
- Final paper/project (30%)

Attendance and participation are critical to your success in this course. Each class session will focus on one or more topics and be accompanied by appropriate readings. Please be sure to read all assignments **in advance,** come to class on time and be prepared to discuss your reactions and ideas. Failure to attend will adversely affect your grade. Missing more than two weeks of class is grounds for failure in this course. Active participation in discussion in class **and responding to classmates' blog posts** is necessary to receive full credit.

Blog Posts/Discussion

In this course we will have a shared WordPress blog (21A500.wordpress.com), which will enable us to read and respond to each other. Blog posts may consist of discussion questions or brief comments on readings, which will be a critical component of this class as they help us focus discussion when we meet. Posts should be made no later than Monday at noon for each week, so that everyone can read them prior to the class discussion. They may focus on a single reading of your choice, or respond to another student's discussion question or reaction to a text. You are encouraged to post and respond to others frequently, but at least a minimum of one post a week, including images and links when relevant. The blog may be a place where you choose to explore and develop ideas for assignments or the final project. In addition, this semester we will be

collaborating with other courses at several key points in the term; these collaborative conversations will also count as part of your commentary grade for the course.

Critical Response Paper
One short critical response paper (4-6 pages) will be due during the semester. This essay is an opportunity for you to examine the cultural implications of a technology of your choice, in response to a given prompt.

Twine game exercise
In this exercise students will work in small groups to create a Twine game that follows a theme or set of rules designed to explore a particular cultural scenario.

Final Paper/Project
There will be two options for the final – students may work on an independent research project investigating the cultural aspects of a particular technology (perhaps how it impacts or alters notions of embodiment, labor conditions, infrastructure, or social behavior within a cultural context), or submit a take-home final exam consisting of two short essays of 4-5 pages each, written in response to given prompts. For those who opt for an independent project, it may take the form of an 8-10 page paper, or an alternative project representing equivalent depth of analysis. (This could be a collaborative group project and could take the form of a game, video production, social media event, performance, exhibition, or other creative format engaging with technology and culture. This option may be derived from an expansion of the short critical paper or the Twine exercise) The final will demonstrate your proficiency in applying concepts we have discussed in class to a cultural analysis of technology.

<u>**Grading Policies**</u>
In order to receive a passing grade for this course, all assignments must be completed. Please **talk to me in advance** if you know you will have to miss class and/or need an extension on an assignment. **It is preferable to negotiate an extension rather than be absent on a day a paper is due, as I will not accept late papers without prior notice.**

I expect students to adhere to MIT's guidelines on academic integrity. Plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, cheating, or facilitating academic dishonesty may cause us to contact the Office of Student Citizenship or Committee on Discipline. If you feel you need academic help, there are many sources of support around campus, including those listed below. If you have questions about what qualifies as plagiarism and how to avoid it — and for tips on how to succeed — check out: http://integrity.mit.edu/

Additional Requirements
Please be sure that all assignments are **word-processed**, double-spaced documents in 12 point type of a conventional font. Make sure to include page numbers when quoting from source texts. WGS.111 assumes abilities in spelling, sentence construction, punctuation and other basic writing mechanics. For additional practice with writing skills please visit the Writing Center (see below).

Please bring to class the required readings for each session — a book, or printed hard copies or electronic versions of the articles. You will need these to participate in class discussion, complete in-class exercises, and perform group activities.

Student Support Services (S^3): If you are dealing with a personal or medical issue that is impacting your ability to attend class, complete work, or take an exam, please discuss this with

Student Support Services (S^3). Students will not be excused from coursework or granted lengthy extensions without verification from Student Support Services. The S^3 office is in 5-104, with walk-in hours Monday-Friday, 9:00-10:00 a.m. Or call 617-253-4861.

Student Disability Services: Students who need disability accommodations should speak with Kathleen Monagle, Associate Dean, prior to or early in the semester so that accommodation requests can be evaluated and addressed. Student Disability Services is in 5-104; phone: 617-253-1674.

MIT's Writing and Communication Center (12-132): http://writing.mit.edu/wcc offers free consultation as well as on-line help to MIT students at any stage of the writing process. Get help overcoming writer's block and formulating an argument, and with questions on grammar and style. (Writing Center consultants do not proofread, but they do offer help with grammar and beyond). Make appointments via https://mit.mywconline.com

Required Texts: chapters and articles listed below, on Stellar or linked from our Stellar site:
http://stellar.mit.edu/S/course/21A/fa15/21A.500/
Full citations are given on Stellar.

Schedule
Please note that since we are not holding class on 9/23 and 11/25, the course will meet from 7-9:30 from 9/30-12/2

9/9 – Introduction to course. What is technology? How do we use it? How do we think about technology in relationship to culture and history, and how are our ideas about it influenced by gender, race, and class? What does a feminist analysis bring to technology studies?

9/16 – Changing Definitions of Technology/Technological Determinism
Please note that class will run from 7:30-9:30 instead of 7-9

Leo Marx, "Technology: The Emergence of a Hazardous Concept"
Merritt Roe Smith, "Technological Determinism in American Culture"
Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "The 'Industrial Revolution' in the Home: Household Technology and
    Social Change in the 20th Century"

9/23 – no class this week; watch FemTechNet "Bodies" feminist video dialogue with Jessie Daniels and Alondra Nelson, https://vimeo.com/86712529 and comment with a blog post.

9/30 – Technological Interventions into Embodiment
Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the
    1980s"
Erik Parens, "Thinking about Surgically Shaping Children"
Eliza Strickland "We Will End Disability by Becoming Cyborgs"
    http://spectrum.ieee.org/biomedical/bionics/we-will-end-disability-by-becoming-cyborgs
Viktoria Modesta, "Prototype" http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/22/viktoria-modesta-
    bionic-pop-star-prototype-video_n_6369228.html
Madeline Stix, "World's First Cyborg Wants to Hack Your Body"
    http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/02/tech/innovation/cyborg-neil-harbisson-implant-antenna/

10/7 – Users and the Gendered Politics of Technology
Nelly Oodshorn and Trevor Pinch, "How Users and Non-Users Matter"
Linda Layne, "Introduction" to *Feminist Technology*
Deborah Johnson, "Sorting Out the Question of Feminist Technology"
Kate Boyer & Maia Boswell-Penc, "Breast Pumps: A Feminist Technology or (yet) 'More Work for Mother'?"
Sharra L. Vostral, "Tampons: Rescripting Technologies as Feminist"

Critical essay due

10/14 – Digital/Mobile Technology and the Transformation of Labor
Watch https://vimeo.com/75183012 - FemTechNet video dialogue in which Judy Wajcman is interviewed by Anne Balsamo
"Families without Borders: Mobile Phones, Connectedness, and Work-Home Divisions" by Judy Wajcman, Michael Bittman, and Judith Brown
http://www.lse.ac.uk/sociology/pdf/Wajcman%20Families%20Without%20Borders.pdf
"Circuits of Labor: A Labor Theory of the iPhone Era" by Jack Linchuan Qiu, Melissa Gregg, and Kate Crawford
https://www.academia.edu/7268238/Circuits_of_Labor_A_Labor_Theory_of_the_iPhone_Era
"Introduction" to *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory* by Trebor Scholz
https://www.academia.edu/2303176/Introduction_to_Digital_Labor_The_Internet_as_Playground_and_Factory

10/21 **Robots, AI, and the Illusion of "Realness"**
Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together* [excerpt]
Dautenhahn et al., "What is a Robot Companion – Friend, Assistant, or Butler?"
Robertson, "Gendering Humanoid Robots: Robo-sexism in Japan"
Evelyn Fox Keller, "Booting Up Baby"

Optional: Lucy Suchman, "Feminist STS and the Sciences of the Artificial"

10/28 – Tracking Data, Tracking Health in an Age of Precision Medicine
Alondra Nelson, "Racial categories in medical practice: how useful are they?"
Dorothy Roberts, *Fatal Invention* [excerpt]
Natasha Schull, "Obamacare Meets Wearable Technology"
Kate Crawford, Jessa Lingel, and Taro Karppi, "Our metrics, ourselves: A hundred years of self tracking from the weight scale to the wrist wearable device." European Journal of Cultural Studies, 2015, Vol. 18(4-5) 479–496

11/4 – What is Wrong with Digital Culture: Gaming and Online Safety
Watch https://vimeo.com/112163167 FemTechNet video dialogue with Brenda Laurel and Janet Murray, moderated by Anne Balsamo.
Consalvo, M. (2012). Confronting Toxic Gamer Culture: A Challenge for Feminist Game Studies Scholars. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology,* No. 1.
http://adanewmedia.org/2012/11/issue1-consalvo/
 "Television Interview about Harassment in Gaming." *Feminist Frequency*. November 3, 2012.
http://www.feministfrequency.com/2012/11/television-interview-about-harassment-in-gaming/

"#GamerGate: Here's Why Everybody in the Video Game World Is Fighting." *Vox*. 14 Sept. 2014. http://www.vox.com/2014/9/6/6111065/gamergate-explained-everybody-fighting

Zoe Quinn. "5 Things I Learned as The Internet's Most Hated Person." *Cracked.* September 16, 2014. http://www.cracked.com/blog/5-things-i-learned-as-internets-most-hated-person/

11/11 – Veteran's day, no class
Play games - suggestions:
- Redshift and Portalmetal by micha cardeñas
- Depression Quest by Zoe Quinn
- howling dogs by porpentine
- dysp4ria and The Hunt for the Gay Planet by Anna Anthropy

11/18 – Twine/Games as Exploration of Cultures through Technology
Brendan Keogh, "Just Making Things and Being Alive About It: The Queer Games Scene"
Laura Hudson, "Twine, the Videogame Technology For All"
In-class Twine workshop

11/23 – Final versions of Twine games due

11/25 – no class

12/2 – Guest lecture by Amanda Giang on infrastructure [readings TBA]

12/9 – Technological Affect: Drones and Disasters
Leo Marx, "The Idea of 'Technology' and Postmodern Pessimism"
Nicolas Sternsdorff-Cisterna, "Food After Fukushima: Risk and Scientific Citizenship in Japan"
Tyler Wall and Torin Monahan, "Surveillance and violence from afar: the politics of drones and liminal security-scapes"
Nicola Abe, "Dreams in Infrared: The Woes of an American Drone Operator"

Final essay due