This special topics course in technology studies and technical communication is aimed at probing the theoretical, historical, philosophical, and rhetorical issues concerning the “problem of technology.” In short, we will take a close look at the emergence of technology as a metaphysical and material phenomenon from ancient to contemporary times. Beginning with a focused look at primary concepts such as techne, phronesis, poesis, and episteme, we will move toward analyzing manifestations of technology in several different arenas of human endeavor.

The overall question that we will keep our eyes on is, “What does it mean to be human?” This broad, yet important question, will guide us as we explore technology as it has arisen in education, technical communication, and the law. We will spend approximately 3-4 weeks on each of these areas.

The Actions of the Course

As this is a course, of course, engaged in the arts (and that includes the arts of invention), I have taken the opportunity to invent some genres (or at least refashion some) for the purposes of the pedagogical impact that the subject matter might have on the identity formation of the subjects involved.

Passages
Simply, a Passage is an oral genre. You choose a passage from the week’s readings to share orally with the class. A-close-reading-kind-of-thing. We will do this for part of the class at most meetings throughout the semester.

Thinkings (a.k.a. Tracings)
Thinkings are genres based in good question asking practices. We will let Arendt and Heidegger lead us in this genre (but it will be explained more fully in class). The ultimate purpose of Thinkings is to move you, not so linearly, toward your final Productions (see below). They can be forged in any stable medium and will be discussed in class to share the current state of your confusion concerning the topic matter of the class. I will also read these and return them to you with comments.

Productions
The productions will be of two types. First, you will have a mid-term exam modeled after a comprehensive exam. You will be able to craft your own question or I can write one for you. This will be a take-home exam, allowing you about a week to write 10+ pages in response.

The second production will result in a mini-conference at the end of the semester. About the tenth week of the semester, you will write a one-page proposal (ala the CCCC, ATTW or CPTSC) for a conference presentation on a topic relevant to the class. I will
group your proposals into several panels for presentation at the end of the semester. The proposals will be copied and distributed to the other members of the class and will serve as pre-presentation abstracts for your talks.

The conference will consist of probably three panels (depending upon final class enrollment). Each presenter will have about ten minutes to present a position based upon his/her proposal. After each panel has finished, there will be discussion concerning the panelists’ positions. (The conference, which we should be all rights call a jamboree, will be conducted MTU-style. That is, there will be beverages and food to accompany the activities). You will hand in a paper to me in finals week based on your presentation.

Required Texts and Materials


A Course Packet available from OfficeMax after Sept. 15. (I will provide a table of contents of for this packet in case you have these readings or want to seek them in the library or through other channels).