"For we are like tree trunks in the snow. In appearance they lie sleekly and a light push should be enough to set them rolling. No, it cannot be done, for they are firmly wedded to the ground. But see, even that is only appearance."

Franz Kafka

“We are like sailors who on the open sea must reconstruct their vessel but are never able to start afresh from the bottom.”

Otto Neurath

“Unfathomable mind: now beacon, now sea.”

Samuel Beckett

Texts:
1. Human Natures (Ehrlich)
2. Course Reader
3. Calliope’s Sisters (Recommended)

Grades:
- Commentaries 40% (2 pp., due weekly)
- Essays 35% (two five pp essays: 15%; 20%)
- Project 10%
- Final 15%

Preliminary and Incomplete Definitions

CULTURE — “webs of significance [mankind] [it]self has spun…” Clifford Geertz, Interpretations of Cultures, 1973) [Max Weber]; “Culture is an adaptive process that accumulates partial solutions to frequently encountered problems” (E. Hutchins, “Cognition in the Wild”)

ART—“Culturally significant meaning, skillfully encoded in an affecting, sensuous medium” (R. Anderson, Calliope’s Sisters, 1990); “Making special” [for the purpose of adaptation] (Disanayake)

TECHNOLOGY — “teks” (Gk): “making, creativity and ingenuity”; “to fabricate or to weave”; “tekton:… carpenter or builder”; “techne…an art, craft or skill” (T. Hughes, “Human Built World, 2004); Technologia (Gk): “systematic treatment of an art”) (1658); Technology: “an ensemble of means” (Ellul); “a system of rules” for achieving an end (Strauss); “making and use of artifacts” (Durbin).

Introduction
“Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.”

Clifford Geertz, Interpretations of Cultures

“Culture is an adaptive process that accumulates partial solutions to frequently encountered problems”

E. Hutchins, Cognition in the Wild

Art and technology are part of the “adaptive process” we term “culture,” a process, to use Hutchins’ succinct formulation, that “accumulates partial solutions to frequently encountered problems.” While culture is an “adaptive process,” we must recognize that our species has achieved no unanimity about what it means to adapt, that a given culture’s arts and technologies may be based in an erroneous idea of what is required to adapt, and that the environmental conditions to which a culture seeks to adapt is always changing, due in part to the effects of human culture. Human beings have invented an astonishing variety of cultures and equally various conceptions of what constitutes a problem and its solution; our purpose in CAT is to ask how effectively members of a culture use their arts and technologies to mediate between themselves and their natural and social environment, and to consider the implications of the fact that one culture’s conception of a solution can be another culture’s idea of a problem.

Arts and technologies are instruments for amplifying our sensory, cognitive and physical abilities in order to more effectively shape our world to our own ends. Both instruments are part of a single continuum concerned with identifying, communicating and controlling what a culture judges to be salient; they are concerned, that is, with determining what must be attended to and what can be safely ignored. A culture’s arts and technologies mediate—literally, stand between—ourselves, our experience of the world and the world itself; as such, like the brain and senses from which they originate, they predispose us to attend to some things but to ignore others. One may say that our brain’s interpretation of random sensory data is a process of “pattern recognition,” so long as we bear in mind that re-cognition literally means to “re-know”; we recognize patterns because we invented them and projected them on the world. Accordingly, our arts and technologies may be said to be adaptive to the extent they are based on an accurate cognitive “mapping” of our surroundings. Conversely, a culture may be said to be maladaptive to the extent that its members notice only what its arts and technologies designate as significant, while ignoring what is truly salient for the purpose of adaptation and even survival. In such a “negative feedback-loop,” we can at once amplify our natural capacities while utterly failing to clarify all that is relevant to our survival, both as a species and as members of specific cultures.

Our method in CAT focuses upon cultural artifacts. The term “artifact” traditionally refers to objects of cultures other than our own, objects studied by social scientists to reveal facts about the culture that made them. We wish to subsume our own arts and technologies within the category artifact, in order to underscore our intent to turn our gaze on our own culture. In this regard, it is important to juxtapose a natural scientist’s definition of “culture” (i.e., Hutchins’), with a definition provided by a social scientist. The cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz encourages us to think of culture as the “webs of significance” or meaning a group of people weave from their experiences. Technological and other cultural artifacts might be thought of as the nodal points in these webs. Or to use another metaphor, a culture’s arts and technologies may be seen as “diagrams” of the culture that created them. Cultural artifacts—be they domestic implements, social rituals, sculptures, paintings, religious or secular symbols, political systems, clothing, language, music, weapons, buildings, gestural signs, techniques of measurement and calculation, stylized motions, and many, many other things—are diagrams of culture we will attempt to decipher or “read.” Our purpose in “reading” the “encoded” meaning of cultural artifacts is to assess how plausibly and effectively a given culture has imposed its patterns on the world.
As noted, part of our approach in CAT is scrutiny of our own culture’s attempts to mediate experience. Indicative of our own culture’s adaptive efforts is the word “technology.” While we derive our word “technology” from the Greek “techne,” which means “art,” the cultural significance of the word “technology” is better indicated by the suffix “logy.” “Logy,” from another Greek word, “logos,” indicates the principle or pattern of reality to which our “techne” may be correctly and effectively applied. The conjunction of “techne” and “logos” reveals our culturally inherited belief that our technologies are rooted in a logical, and so presumably effective, comprehension of the order of things. The word “technology”—a relatively new word in the English lexicon—exposes our inherited assumption that our culture has discovered solutions to problems that are perhaps superior in their accuracy and efficacy to the solutions of other cultures, and that therefore these solutions may be applicable to the problems of all human beings. The belief that our technologies are instruments of progress is evidently supported by the power they afford us in manipulating our social and natural environment; indeed, many of us are in thrall to the apparent potency and precision of our inventions. But we must consider whether our enthrallment is warranted.

One consequence of using our powerful and sensitive instruments has been to reveal the wide-ranging and potentially lethal consequences of those instruments. Our technological servants, it turns out, are imperfect; we have given ourselves a wizard’s power (you may recall Disney’s allegory “The Wizard’s Apprentice,” starring Mickey Mouse), without the necessary foresight to use that power wisely, to use it, that is, in such a manner that the intended effects are not negated by the unintended. Returning to the idea that culture is an adaptive process, we might say that our culture has amplified its power beyond its capacity to imagine and control the consequences—in space and over time—of that power. As we will see, a traditional function of the arts has been to try to imagine, communicate, control the social and environmental consequences of human culture. A basic premise of CAT is that we, too, must bring our full imaginative and intellectual capacities, and not our instrumental abilities alone, to bear on the problems facing our culture. How might we more artfully employ our technological and other cultural capacities to identify, communicate, and so perhaps control the social and environmental consequences of those capacities?

Part I: Introduction: Culture as Solution and as Problem

Week One: Solutions as Problems

A. The “Human-Tech” ladder
   1. Vincente’s thesis on why solutions become problems:
      a. technologies suited for other technologies, but not necessarily for human beings (V’s examples, and others) (ambiguous legacy of specialization; “autonomous technology”)
      b. Illusion of the “techno-fix”: false dichotomy of humanistic vs. technological
      c. V’s solution: “human-tech” ladder: to humanize the technology by rethinking technology to improve the materials and methods that serve our needs and desires
   2. Problem: our idea of human needs and desires and the technology that best serves them depends on how a given culture conceives of “human” and “technology.” The values of a specific culture are the root of the human-tech problems. To really improve the situation one must rethink the inherited cultural assumptions that are the foundation of our arts and technologies, of our ideas about what is necessary and desirable (V’s implicit recognition of this; traditional beliefs).
      a. On what does our human-tech ladder rest, and to what does it extend?
      b. Below: What are the cultural underpinnings of our contemporary values, motivations, and techniques, including specializations? Are they warranted? Are their consequences sustainable? (L. White)
      c. Above: what is the relation between our cultural inheritance and the perpetuation of possibly undesirable geo-political phenomena, such as inequality, environmental
degradation, and war? (D. Suzuki). Solution? To reconceive the cultural function of art/science and technology: to discover and communicate what is salient (broadly conceived) to other members of one’s society (Anderson, “significant meaning”; Disanayake: “making special” and “as if”; V’ on salience; cognitive basis for this interpretation; student example [Escalade]). Art and technology as horizontal continuum of culture, instead of vertical discontinuum (recency of idea of sovereignty of technology (or what’s wrong with the T. Hughes’ phrase “Human-Built World”). To become conscious of the categorical lens through which we are looking; Art becomes technology to the extent we confuse our “as if” with reality, and technology becomes art to the extent we don’t (to the extent we use it to probe what is in fact salient). The boundary between art and technology should be measured by our degree of humility?

B. Climbing Up Another Culture’s “tech ladder” (to better see our own, and to reveal the cultural underpinnings of technologies and its continuity with the arts).

1. In cultures other than our own, what are some examples of the complex interplay between a culture and its artifacts (technological and otherwise)? What are some of the consequences of that interplay? “War as culture”: what might Easter Islanders, Zulus, Mamelukes, Samurai, Aztec, Europeans reveal about the cultural imbededness of art and technology?
2. Can we discern the interplay of culture and its artifacts in our own culture? (Reggio)
3. Human-tech ladder and the Tower of Babel: a fruitful analogy?
4. Transition: Where does culture come from, and why is it often inimical to the well being of those who invent and use it?

Week Two: Origins of Cultures? Where do cultures come from (and how does it happen they are often inimical to the people who invent and use them?)

Culture: “webs of significance [mankind] [it]self has spun…” Clifford Geertz, Interpretations of Cultures, 1973) [Max Weber];

A) Our natural (dis)advantage: Pattern Making

1. Perception: we are predisposed to notice only what is local and temporally immediate; what APPEARS salient.
2. Cognition: our idea of what is salient is guided by pattern recognition. But pattern recognition becomes pattern imposition: Our brain seeks patterns and discovers them, whether they are there or not (Ex. cause and effect; dichotomies), and then acts “as if” they are real.
3. Physiology: our cultural artifacts reflect our physical being (we “map” ourselves onto the world (symmetry; Homunculus; Vincente’s lathe example)
4. Social: our cultural skills evolved in and are adapted to small groups (Chwe on “rational ritual”).

B) How did we get this way? Natural selection of the Mind? (Neural Darwinism and Human Natures [Thuan, Dillard, Duve, Edelman “binding” problem, Darwin, Gould]) -Speculations about a “great leap” (Diamond, Ehrlich); on the importance of a “Rubicon” (Huxley)

C) Grander Speculations from the patterns or design we discern (McNeill, Bataille, Paglia, Freud, Paley, Dawkins, Gould, Monumental Impulses) [Reggio, Koyannisquatsi; “World in the Balance” demographic chart; sociobiology, epiphenomena] --What influence may our culture have upon our discernment of patterns? How can we test whether the patterns we discern are in fact there, or merely a cultural hallucination? Examples from the history of science (geocentricity; ether; flat earth).

D) How can cultures harm those who invented them?: “Webs of Meaning” we ourselves spin, in which we become suspended or, perhaps, ensared.
1. Lost in “Cognitive Space”? Ratio of Genome to Synapses and its Implications for successful adaptation, universal solutions, a single human nature. Cognitive space and the invention of cultures (Ehrlich; Mithen’s “Cathedral of Mind” model, or the “binding” problem, more broadly conceived) -- Axiom of Cog. Sci: “The mind is what the brain does” Yes, ok, but what does the brain do? One answer: It’s a place where Nature Meets [Meats] Nurture (Damasio, Franklin, Tavris). --Negative feedback loop between environments and our sensory-cognitive limitations

2. “Beyond Nature vs. Nurture”; or, in the jargon of cultural anthropology: Beyond Structural Functionalism vs. Cultural Determinism, towards…Dialectics (examples of cultural evolutionary “feedback loops”)
   a. One hypothesis about the origins of culture from a “feedback loop” (handaxes and conceptual strategies of how to use them: planning, imagining)
   b. “social traps”
   c. “Evolutionary hangovers”

3. Our condition? “culturally reinforced, structural disfunctionalism”?; Gods and Monsters of Cognitive Space? (Do other animals besides human possess natures or create cultures hostile to their own survival?)

4. We’re the ones who decide whether to seek evidence to confirm or disconfirm “webs of meaning.” What truths ought we pursue? What story should we tell? What story is warranted by the evidence available to us?

Part II: Art as a Social Force

Art: “Culturally significant meaning, skillfully encoded in an affecting, sensuous medium” (R. Anderson, Calliope’s Sisters, 1990); “Making special” (Disanayeke)

Week 3: The Invention and Communication of “Culturally Significant Meaning”

Preface: “Encoded Meaning”
The idea that “An Object is a Diagram of Forces” - D’Arcy Thompson
(Natural and cultural objects are “diagrams of forces” (beaks, bowers, buildings, bombs)

A) “Making Special”
   2. What are we to make of another culture’s “as ifs”? (Samurai, Aztec, 20th century Europe [fascism, communism, cold war], jihad, war on “terror”)
   3. Fundamental impulse: to parody what we don’t understand (“Venus” of Willendorf)

B) What, in fact, is salient?
   1. What appears salient for other cultures? Looking at Anderson’s example through the lens of Disanayeke’s thesis
   2. What appears salient for us? What would useful art be in contemporary culture? (some exemplary modern art)
   3. Modern art as a “diagram” of contemporary social and cultural forces.

ESSAY 1: Apply the concept of “making special” to the examples provided by Anderson. As part of your essay you should explore whether Disanayeke’s thesis and Anderson’s examples are compatible with an evolutionary model as it is conveyed by Ehrlich and by relevant examples in the Reader.
Week 4: Art as Solution and as Problem: On deciding whether a culture’s particular pattern of meaning is beneficial or detrimental.

A) Art as technology
   1. Meaning, action, efficacy?: Geertz on religious belief and ritual (mandala as “machine”)
   2. How do we know when a culture’s “as if” is effective or ineffective? (San, Sepik, Navajo)

B) The ambiguity of encoded meaning
   1. ambiguous significance: Gifts (Mauss)
   2. Tatoos (Gell), mokas, cars, clothes, cosmetics, cell phones, grafitti, the dozens
   3. Negotiating meaning
      a. Cave Art (Bahn)
      b. Veils and lip gloss (Nafisi)
      c. Pets (Sahlins)
      d. Sugar (Western cosmology and “the sadness of sweetness”)

GROUP PROJECTS: the meaning of everyday objects from the Paleolithic to the Present.
Beginning in the 4th week, form into groups of between 3 or 4 people. As a group, choose four artifacts: one from a Paleolithic culture, one from a proto-civilized culture, and one from your own culture, and one from a culture of your choice:

   1. Explain the artifacts (objects, rituals, gestures, customs, entertainments, pastimes, techniques and technologies) as nodal points of cultural meaning (“diagrams of forces”).
   2. Explore ambiguous, controversial meanings, especially those ambiguities arising from conflicts or competition within or between cultures
   3. Interpret the meaning(s) of the artifact in light of evolutionary theory
   4. With respect to all three tasks, explain how your interpretation might be empirically verified.

ESSAY #2: Each student in a group must submit a 5 page essay exploring the meaning of their artifacts in their cultural context, and link their own interpretations of the artifacts to other interpretations in their group. Endeavor to support your interpretations with evidence and arguments from the texts.

Project and Essay due week 7.

PART THREE: TECHNOLOGY AS SOLUTION AND AS PROBLEM

Technology: (Gk. Technologia: “systematic treatment of an art”) (1658); “An ensemble of means” (Ellul); “a system of rules” for achieving an end (Strauss); “making and use of artifacts” (Durbin);

Week 5: Technology as Cultural Artifact

A) The meaning of technology
   1. Prelude: Interpreting the technological artifacts of contemporary culture: Ewen, Hochshild, Solnit
   2. Beyond “making special”: What is the “logos” of our “techne”? (or, what happens when we treat “as if” as actuality?). The values inherent in, the encoded meaning of, the invention and use of technologies (Ellul, Mumford, Adorno, Heidegger, Foucault)
      a. “disposable batteries” for “autonomous technology,” (L. Winner), or CAT as humanities for incipient cyborgs
3. One critique of these criticisms: “Techgnosis,” E. Davis (Optimistic metaphor of the possibilities of digital technology: “The Axemaker’s Gift”)  
   a. Have we always been cyborgs? (Davis)  
   b. And the interesting origins of the term “cyberspace” and a hopeful reading of M. McCluhan’s famous dictum.

B) Cultures and sub-cultures: conflicting interpretations of what is salient.  
   1. Political Economy of Cultural Artifacts: (Marx on matter and mind, base and superstructure; hegemony and its critics (Hebdige-Scott; Marx on fetishism of commodities; retail therapy; Benjamin, Berger, Adorno)  

**Week 6: Technology as solution and problem**

A) Technology and progress since the hypothesized “great leap”  
   1. Prelude: Values laden with the notion that we crossed a “Rubicon”  
      a. historical necessity of this idea in light of modernity (Darwin [Copernicus, Freud], World War Two, UNESCO; “scientific revolution”; “industrial revolutions”)  
      b. are concepts cultural artifacts? Are they “technologies”? (more on this later)  
      c. Civilization as Rubicon  
   2. Civilized Technologies  
      a. Niche specific origin of technologies (measurement, agriculture, buildings, religion, politics, writing, armies)(Geography and belief; Frankfort, et al on Mesopotamia)  
      b. Technologies as Solution  
      c. Technologies as Problem

B) What is Progress?  
   1. What is Progress?  
      a. Quality of life (Sahlins, hunter-gathering)  
      b. The biggest mistake (Diamond on civilization)  
      c. Inevitability of civilization? (Diamond, McNeill)  
      d. The old-fashioned way (Conquest)  
      e. New fashions: “colonizing the mind”  
         i. Adas and the technological standard  
         ii. “politics” of display, and just about everything else; Enola Gay, et al)  
         iii. history as propaganda; Trask  
   2. What are the best techniques? Forms of culture, forms of knowledge (Turnbull, motley; local knowledge, bricolage, knowledge ecologies)

**Week 7: Project Presentations**

**Week 8: Language as Technology and as Art**

A) Language as social technology.  
   1. encoding meaning  
   2. “making special,” or “as if” the power of naming  
   3. Politics of naming -words, ideology, domination  
   4. Words think us (Binders of Time and Space: Lakoff and Johnson; Frost)  
   5. Words as Place Holders of Ignorance and Desire (Huxley, Orwell)
B) Language as art: ambiguity of meaning
   1. Aiello/Dunbar hypothesis (Ehrlich), Whorff-Sapir hypothesis (Ehrlich), How universal are conceptual dichotomies?
   2. Origin of the Alphabet and Characters
   3. “Family resemblance” (meaning and context) Ostensive definitions or “family resemblances”? (examples: machine, art, love, war, truth, good, beauty)
   4. Etymology, Metaphor, and Meaning
   5. Fundamental ambiguity of language, especially of abstract nouns: naming “love,” (eros, philo); naming knowledge (episteme, techne, phronesis; praxis); “science”, “culture,” “art” and “technology”). A Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian interlude: language and the knowledge of truth, right and the Good (sophos, logos, virtu, ekklesia, scholia, educare, educere, sa‘tan, archos, eros, etc.).

A brief overview of the changing meanings of Culture, Art and Technology (OED) and some other important words.

   Why dictionaries are essential but frequently unhelpful.

Part IV: Culture of Modernity

Week 9: Art and technology in the culture of modernity

A) Art in theory: ideas about the purpose of art in modern culture.
   1. characteristics of modernity
   2. the context for and meaning of experimentation in art since the 19th century

Week 10: The Necessary Alliance of Science, Art, and Technology

A) Blot or Diagram?
B) Continuity of art and science (or why modern artists think of themselves as scientists and vice versa)
C) What is salient, and how do we communicate this, why should we care?

Readings:

WEEK ONE:

Vincente
Suzuki/Gordon
White
Keegan

WEEK TWO:

Ehrlich (chp 6)
Ferris
Dillard
Thuan
Sartwell
Damasio
Tavris
Huxley
Franklin
Sagan
Plato

WEEK THREE:

Tuan
Bohannan
Sahlins
Ehrlich, chp 1
Gould
Darwin
Paglia
Bataille
McNeill

Disanayake
Anderson

WEEK FOUR:

Disanayake
Anderson
Geertz
Proctor
Mauss
Mithen
Barthes
Strebeigh

WEEK FIVE:

Marx
Scott
Hebdige
Ewen
Solnit
Hochschild
Mumford

WEEK SIX:

Ehrlich (9, 10, 11)
Diamond
John
Trask

WEEK SEVEN: Presentations

WEEK EIGHT:

Ehrlich (7)
Huxley
Weekly Commentaries
In approximately two typed pages, paraphrase what you judge to be the most relevant readings and attempt to draw insightful connections between readings, lectures, and discussions.

Springboards for Weekly Commentaries and Discussions:

1] Vincente suggests that the problems posed by our technologies are remediable by more attention to “human factors,” and by attending to steps in the “human-tech ladder.” Gordon and Suzuki provide some evidence that the problems posed by technology may be more complex and dangerous than Vincente allows. Part of the problem with Vincente’s thesis is his belief that we can speak about human beings in general, without reference to a specific cultural context. Lynn White elaborates on an important suggestion in the Gordon and Suzuki piece, that culture mediates our idea of what human beings are and what they need, and what sort of technologies may be appropriate to fulfilling those needs. Keegan provides more reason to doubt Vincente’s too facile discussion of technology and human beings divorced from cultural context, by providing multiple examples of how cultural factors—such as belief and value systems—shape to a large extent, a people’s decisions about what technology to use and how to use it.

2] But where does culture come from in the first place? How do we come by the ideas, beliefs, value systems that inform our invention and use of particular arts and technologies? Ferris poses for us the basic question of how what is “out there” gets in here, inside our head. Dillard qualifies Ferris’s “hour-glass” image, by pointing out just how inattentive we are to most of what is “out there.” Ehrlich, chapter 6, provides other essential facts about our contemporary understanding of the brain and senses in relation to the world about us (Be sure to consult Ehrlich’s index to see what he says about “evolutionary hangovers,” “social traps,” “small-group animals”; what are the implications of these things?). The excerpt from Thuan takes us closer to the physiological particulars of seeing, though in doing so he inadvertently brings us back to Vincente’s implicit suggestion that we can talk about our experience of the world—in this case—our experience of “beauty” without reference to cultural context, as if there is some sort of universal notion of “beauty” that all human beings agree upon. Sartwell’s brief comparisons suggests that culture may be fundamental even to our perception of beauty (Does Ehrlich’s evidence affirm Sartwell’s suggestion? Aren’t all human beings attracted to certain basic qualities—symmetry, for instance?). Plato’s famous allegory may be read as a gloss on these various contemporary explorations into the problem of trying to see and know what is Real (I wonder: do we, as a culture, share Plato’s suppositions? Do “we” share a culture?). And Damasio and then Tavris serve as a contemporary gloss on Plato; they reveal the likelihood that the attempts of our brain and senses to perceive and conceive the world about us is unavoidably mediated, by culture, but initially and fundamentally, by the body of which our brain and senses are a part. Brief readings from Huxley,
Franklin, Sagan and the diagram from Diamond are intended to provoke reflection about “human nature”: is there such a thing? Is the evidence of our actual behavior consistent with our conception of ourselves and our species?

INTERLUDE: As we proceed to consider how variously human cultures have conceived and used arts and technologies, and with what consequences, we must pause to consider some ideas about how cultures originate out of our natural sensory and cognitive capacities. Though it raises almost as many questions as it provides answers for, the evolutionary model is, so far, the best one available to us; as a model, not its least virtue is that it can be tested (it is, to use K. Popper’s phrase, “falseifiable”). Ehrlich, chapter 1, reviews some of the tenets of this model and reflects on its significance for our understandings of human beings in the context of their cultures. Readings from Darwin and Gould are also provided to review your comprehension of the actual model. The short readings by McNeill, Paglia, and Bataille suggest just three ways in which we may speculate on the situation of human beings in the world, by working from the premise that human beings and their cultures are fundamentally biological entities and their cultural creations are to be understood as expressions of natural and biological forces.

3] Yi-Fu Tuan offers us a transition from the subject of nature to culture by asking some basic questions about the function of culture. Tuan explores the relation of nature to culture, and specifically doubts—contrary to Plato—that there is any leaving of our cultural “caves”; culture is a necessary buffer between ourselves and reality; culture mediates, that is, stand between us and the world; we need it, Tuan suggests, not only as tool but as necessary illusion (does Tuan implicitly agree with Tavris). Bohannan takes us further into the issue of cultural variety and what we are to make of such variety, as does the brief example (from M. Sahlins) concerning the Kaluli people of New Guinea.

From theories about the natural origins of human cultures, we must consider theories about the particular things we find in human cultures: how do we explain art and technology? Are their various manifestations and uses consistent with an evolutionary model? Disanayake argues that, “yes, they are.” What evidence does she adduce to support her thesis about “making special”? Does Geertz’s thesis support or contradict Disanayake? Do the various, specific examples provided by Anderson (in “Calliope’s Sisters) affirm or contradict D’s theory? Disanayake’s theory focuses on what we have come to call “art.” Might the theory be extended to what we call “technology”? How are we to explain the various types and uses of technology? Does Mithen’s “cathedral” model help? Is it consistent with D’s model? Does Ehrlich’s discussions of arts and technologies affirm or contradict D’s model?

4] Considering evidence of a variety of cultures (e.g., Anderson, Disanayake), address the question of what constitutes an effective adaptation to an environmental niche? What can a culture’s artifacts reveal about what is and is not succeeding in that culture? Are their unresolved tensions or conflicts? Do the people of a culture embrace ideas or values that may be ultimately detrimental to themselves or others? What are some of the cognitive, perceptual and physiological foundations of our cultural solutions and problems? Can any of the examples presented in Vincente or Keegan, Disanayake or Anderson, be explained in terms of our sensory-somatic-cognitive nature? Explore the idea that culture and its artifacts is something “between” ourselves and our environment, something born particularly of the “dialogue” between our brain and its situation in the world.

As you consider the questions above, bear in mind that the meaning of cultural artifacts is multifaceted, ambiguous, and often highly contentious. Proctor, Mauss, and Mithen introduce the idea that with respect to cultural artifacts, there is much more than meets the eye, or the brain Barthes, Harris, Strebeigh and Miner look at familiar cultural artifacts to reveal some of the layers of meaning or significance that might at first glance not be apparent. Attempt to read technologies for evidence of “fault lines” within a given culture. What can a given artifact reveal about what is and is not working well within a given culture? Are their unresolved tensions or conflicts? Do the people of a culture
embrace ideas or values that may be ultimately detrimental to themselves or others? What role do economic factors play in our conception and use of certain technologies.

5] While the evolutionary model is the best available for trying to explain biological phenomena, is there a model for explaining cultural phenomena? While Disanayake’s theory extends an evolutionary model to cultural phenomena such as “art,” it cannot really offer an account of the ambiguous meanings we find in cultural artifacts (ambiguities like those revealed by Barthes, Mauss, et. Al.; it is important in this regard to reflect on the artificiality of the categories “art” and “technology”; like the objects, rituals and other cultural manifestations they refer to, they are complex and highly ambiguous cultural artifacts).

We consider Marx’s model of human society. Hebdige elaborates on and extends this model, with particular reference to the thought of Gramsci. And Scott offers a counter-argument to the Marxist and Gramscian model (can you put into your own words Scott’s implicit objection to the Marxist model?)

The next set of readings—Ewen, Solnit, Hochschild—invite you to consider what models best account for a culture’s creation and use of particular technologies. What theory informs their treatment of their subjects? Are their interpretations compelling? Could you take the same examples and evidence and offer a different, but coherent account? Does Mumford’s thesis affirm or contradict the arguments put forth by these various authors?

6] Next we must look specifically at civilized—that is, urban-based, agriculturally dependent—arts and technologies. Diamond explains civilization, its arts and technologies largely in terms of natural and biological forces. McNeill and others (discussed in John) suggest that there may be irreducible cultural factors shaping the origins and use of civilized arts and technologies. What does the evidence provided by Ehrlich (chapters 9, 10 and 11) suggest? Use Ehrlich, Diamond and other relevant readings to explore the ambiguous legacy of civilizations. What is the significance of Caneiro’s thesis for our understanding of the origins and growth of civilizations? Given the niche-specific origins of most civilized technologies and techniques, does the attempt to universalize their use make sense? Is the exportation of “superior” technologies warranted? Inevitable? Does it solve problems? Do Trask’s and MacDonald’s essays imply support from Diamond or McNeill’s interpretation?

7] How does the interpretation of cultural artifacts presented by your peers in their project presentations either affirm or contradict your own interpretations?

8] Language—words and symbols—is one of our subtlest and most powerful technologies, since it shapes the way we think and so in turn directs or influences the way we behave. Huxley, Lakoff and Johnson, and Frost explore this idea. What does Ehrlich indicate about the origins and cultural significance of language (note, in particular the hypothesis of Aeillo and Dunbar)? Discuss language as an art and as a technology. Probe the words “art” and “technology” to reveal what meaning they “encode” of the culture that uses these or analogous words?

9] What is our modern situation? What do modern artists and intellectuals think of our situation? What does this situation indicate about the proper function of art and technology? (Art in Theory; Clark, “Blot and Diagram”).

10] What is salient, how do we best communicate it? What is the role of science, art, and technology in figuring this out? Does it matter whether or not we succeed? What are Ehrlich’s (chapter 12 and 13) thoughts on these and related questions? (Bronowski, Lewis, Winterton)
COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Please note: For the year 2004-2005, UCSD is requiring every first-year student to maintain a portfolio containing copies of all completed written assignments (in every course: not just writing courses) that have been commented on and/or graded and returned by instructors or TAs. The portfolio would not include exams except for essay exams. Students must have portfolios complete and available for selection by the Writing Director of their respective colleges at the end of the academic year. If selected, the work in these portfolios will not be returned; keep copies for your personal files separately.

IMPORTANT NOTES re GRADES

Policy on missed exams and late assignments

- Unexcused late assignments will be docked 1/3 (one-third) of a letter grade for each day late (e.g. A becomes A- the first day late, B+ the second day late, etc.).
- Make-up exams must be arranged as soon as possible after illness, injury, or family emergency.
- The policy on make-up finals follows UCSD policy, since there are strict calendar deadlines established by the University for the submission of grades at the end of a quarter.
- Sudden long-term illness, injury, or family emergency may necessitate an incomplete for the course, or withdrawal from it. Excuses and incompletes must be negotiated with your TA and the course instructor(s) prior to the final exam.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

UCSD has a university-wide Policy on Integrity of Scholarship, published annually in the Catalog (pp. 62-64 for 2004-5), online at []. All students must read and be familiar with this Policy.

Receipt of this syllabus constitutes an acknowledgment that you are responsible for understanding and acting in accordance with UCSD guidelines on academic integrity.

Academic stealing refers to the theft of exams or exam answers, of papers or take-home exams composed by others, and of research notes, computer files, or data collected by others.

Academic cheating, collusion, and fraud refer to having others do your schoolwork or allowing them to present your work as their own; using unauthorized materials during exams; inventing data or bibliography to support a paper, project, or exam; purchasing tests, answers, or papers from any source whatsoever; submitting (nearly) identical papers to two classes.

Plagiarism refers to the use of another’s work without full acknowledgment, whether by suppressing the reference, neglecting to identify direct quotations, paraphrasing closely or at length without citing sources, spuriously identifying quotations or data, or cutting and pasting the work of several (usually unidentified) authors into a single undifferentiated whole.

Students with special needs

Students with physical or learning disabilities should first work with UCSD’s Office for Students with Disabilities to obtain current documentation, then contact instructor and TA’s to arrange appropriate academic accommodations. This should be accomplished as soon in the quarter as possible. To be
fair to all students, no individual accommodations will be made unless the student first presents the proper documentation.

**Required handbook for writing program:**

Except for the required texts, course readings that are in the reader will also be available through the UCSD library’s electronic reserve system. From the UCSD website, click on libraries, then on Roger, or go directly to Roger at [http://roger.ucsd.edu/](http://roger.ucsd.edu/). Select “course reserves,” then “text reserves” (Print and electronic) and look for Culture, Art, and Technology when it asks you for “department.” Or you may put in the name of your instructor, or name of course: CAT 1. Readings may be listed by author, or by exact title, or by a general title that will be listed in the syllabus if you will be reading a small collection of pieces for an assignment. You may read them on-line or print them out in full or in small batches as PDF files.

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[[ Our approach demands that we scrutinize our own culture: How effectively have our own arts and technologies mediated our interactions with the world around us? Consider, by way of a preliminary example, a familiar set of cultural artifacts: our distinction between “art” and “technology.” What might this distinction reveal about the “webs of meaning” woven by our shared culture? We derive our word “technology” from the Greek “techne,” which means “art.” Our distinction between art and technology stems in part from the peculiar significance our culture attaches to the suffix “logy.” “Logy,” from another Greek word, “logos,” indicates an order or pattern—a logic—to which our “techne” may be correctly and effectively applied. The conjunction of “techne” and “logos” reveals our culturally inherited belief that our technologies are rooted in an accurate, and so presumably effective, comprehension of the order of things. The word “technology”—a relatively new word in the English lexicon—is thus one nodal point in our culture’s fabric of meaning; it exposes our inherited assumption that our culture has discovered solutions to problems that are perhaps superior in their accuracy and efficacy to the solutions of other cultures, and that therefore these solutions may be
applicable to the problems of all human beings. We are in thrall to the apparent potency and precision of our cultural inventions. We must consider whether our enthrallment is warranted.]