Notes from the Introduction: ‘Culture’ and ‘Technology’

Suggested Reading Strategies:

1. Before reading, write down your own (one-sentence) definition of the word "technology", and your own (one-sentence) definition of the word "culture".

2. Think about the following question before you read, and keep it in mind as you read: Why should we study theories / philosophies / ideas of culture in an Informatics course?

3. Read these lecture notes and watch the videos (my presentation and Jason Silva's Understanding is Perceiving Patterns) before reading the chapter, and review them again after you finish reading. The videos are posted on Blackboard & the class wiki.

4. Take notes as you read and add your own notes to this handout.

5. After you finish reading, rewrite your definitions of "technology" and "culture".

Vocabulary to review before reading:

- Ideologies – beliefs; philosophies; principles
- Dictum – authoritative declaration; saying; proverb; motto; rule; decree
- Ubiquitous – present everywhere at the same time; omnipresent; pervasive; universal; extensive; far-reaching; wide-spread
- Dichotomy – division into two parts; difference; separation; split; “either or”; binary; duality (good and evil; night and day; male and female; experimental group and control group; own or rent; present or absent)

After reading and studying this chapter, you should know:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8 Key Terms</th>
<th>6 Key Concepts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. cultura</td>
<td>1. the relationship between technology and culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. culture</td>
<td>2. the differences between dichotomous and interconnected</td>
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<td>3. logos</td>
<td>views of technology and culture</td>
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<td>4. technique</td>
<td>3. the connection and differences between technology</td>
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<td>5. technocrat</td>
<td>and techniques</td>
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<td>6. technoculture</td>
<td>4. the historical development of the terms ‘technology’</td>
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<td>7. technology</td>
<td>and ‘culture’</td>
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<td>8. tekhnne</td>
<td>5. culture as dynamic, multiple, and unpredictable</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. why the Internet is an example of technoculture</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

From Murphie & Potts (2003) *Culture & Technology*
Notes from the Introduction: ‘Culture’ and ‘Technology’

Murphie and Potts pose four questions in the introduction of this text:

- How do technologies from the printing press to the Internet function culturally?
- How do they affect the manner in which we think about ourselves and the world?
- From which cultural shifts do such new technological forms arise?
- Do they bring new cultural possibilities into being?

We will examine these questions through various theoretical viewpoints within various contexts throughout this book.

Your Notes:

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The Technology ↔ Culture Relationship

- Complex
- Unpredictable
- Ever-changing

- Interdisciplinary field of study

Is there an aspect of society today that is not connected to technology?

Your Notes:

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From Murphie & Potts (2003) *Culture & Technology*
Technoculture

Two important statements to consider on page 2:

- “the cultural ramifications of technological change…”
- “any theoretical engagement with this thing called technoculture…”

Your Notes:

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From Murphie & Potts (2003) Culture & Technology
Ways of Thinking

- Learn *how* to think... not *what* to think

- Critical skills:
  - Analyze technological change
  - Synthesize historical, philosophical, cultural, and technical knowledge
  - Evaluate problems in order to CREATE solutions

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*Your Notes:*

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Chapters Cover Broad Topics

- Examine various issues within various contexts
  - Power, gender, race, social class, intellectual property, fear, hope, ethics, cognition, etc...
  - Always through a technocultural lens

- Multiple theoretical perspectives

- Identify key topics of interest to you
  - Presentation assignment

From Murphie & Potts (2003) *Culture & Technology*
Our Focus

- Relationship between technology & culture
- Guiding questions
- Examine and analyze how technologies work CULTURALLY

Three key terms to define:
- Technology
- Technique
- Culture

From Murphie & Potts (2003) *Culture & Technology*
Historically Situated & Culturally Mediated

- Words have historical and cultural roots

- Meanings change:
  - Over time; and
  - Through social developments

- Definitions = results of cultural practices

"Technocrat" – page 3

From Murphie & Potts (2003) *Culture & Technology*
“Technology”

- From the Greek:
  - Tekhne – art or craft
  - Logos – word, system, or study

- Today’s definition is a modern concept of an old idea
  - 1600’s & 1700’s – “a study of the arts”
  - 1860’s – “system of mechanical and industrial arts”
    - The application of science to production

- Today technology is ubiquitous, so...
  - Our working definition must include cultural aspects
    - Excellent definition on page 4

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Your Notes:

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“Technique”

- Technology = systems of machines and processes; tools
- Technique = methods and skills
  - Culturally-mediated use and understanding of technology

- Techniques are physical (ways of using technology) and mental (ways of thinking about technology)

- Techniques are effective and traditional

- Page 6: “A deeper understanding of technique enriches our experience and analysis of technology”

Your Notes:

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From Murphie & Potts (2003) Culture & Technology
“Culture”

- Many meanings depending on context
  - Specific: self-contained, like French culture or youth culture or Star Wars fan culture or university culture
  - General: all purposeful human activity (culture vs. nature; culture vs. survival)

- From the Latin “cultura” meaning “cultivation”
  - Ancient agricultural context shifted in the 16th century
    - Became “development of mind and body”
  - By early 19th century it shifted again
    - Became “intellectual or artistic aspect of civilization”

Your Notes:

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From Murphie & Potts (2003) *Culture & Technology*
Dichotomous View of Society

**Industrial (technology)**
- “Low” culture
- Working class; Common man
- Menial

**Intellectual (culture)**
- “High” culture
- Upper class; Gentleman
- Important

From Murphie & Potts (2003) *Culture & Technology*
Technocultural Perspective

- Technology and culture are not separate things
- There is no division or separation between them
  - *One cannot exist without the other*

- “Technoculture” – fusion of the two
  - *Technology and culture are deeply and permanently connected*
  - *To consider one is to instantaneously consider the other*

Your Notes:
Culture is...

- Dynamic
- Multiple
- Unpredictable

The Internet:

- From security invention to global network
- Technology, culture, politics, economics
- Technocultural phenomenon

From Murphie & Potts (2003) Culture & Technology
Culture is difficult to define

- **Practical definition:** “The signs, beliefs, and practices of a group or society”
- **Eno’s definition:** “Everything you don’t have to do”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survival demands...</th>
<th>Culture creates...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apples</td>
<td>Pie</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*From Murphie & Potts (2003) *Culture & Technology*
Interaction at all levels

In early civilizations, technology transformed the natural environment

- Tools and weapons

We built these cities...

- On writing.
- No, it wasn’t Rock - N - Roll.

Popular culture today depends on communication & digital technologies

Your Notes:

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From Murphie & Potts (2003) Culture & Technology
To Review...

- ‘Technology’ and ‘culture’ are:
  - Expansive and complicated concepts
  - Historical & social developments

- The relationship between them is:
  - Multi-layered, multi-faceted, and inseparable
  - Relevant to Informatics
  - Critical for analysis of today’s society & technology issues

From Murphie & Potts (2003) *Culture & Technology*