In this course, we will explore together the concept of culture as seen through its forms of communication. Beginning with the oral tradition, we will read Walter Ong’s work on orality and literacy to analyze Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and also examine the impact of writing on the spoken word in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. Marshall McLuhan’s seminal work, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, will orient us towards the epistemological biases of different media and allow us to generate questions surrounding the impact of one medium on another. The course will conclude with an examination of digital culture in terms of its cognitive effects as described by two authors with contrasting views, Nicholas Carr in *The Shallows* and Clive Thompson in *Smarter Than You Think*. Contemporary themes on the issue of privacy in the age of big data and the role of technology in democracy will be addressed through more recent articles. Our discussions will often focus on forms of communication as they have emerged historically as well as how they coexisted in time. How do these technologies compete with one another and as a result how are they transformed? Most importantly, how are we transformed in how and what we communicate to one another and to ourselves? Please try to raise meaningful questions which may have only approximate answers rather than seek answers to wrong questions.
COURSE OBJECTIVES/LEARNING GOALS:
1) Critical reading of texts in terms of (a) thesis; (b) assumptions; (c) methodology; and (d) findings.
2) Critical assessment of differing theories on the impact of communication technologies on culture.
3) To demonstrate in clearly articulated writing an understanding of the major ideas in the texts as they apply to specific phenomena associated with the role and effects of technology.
4) To apply the knowledge gained from the texts and class discussions to develop your own critique of technology and its impact on culture.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
Required Texts:
Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word
Plato, Phaedrus translated by Nehemas and Woodruff
Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart
Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man
Nicholas Carr, The Shallows
Clive Thompson, Smarter Than You Think

For certain topics, there will be handouts of appropriate reading material. Selected films may be shown.

ATTENDANCE:
Attendance will be taken in every class. You are allowed 2 absences for the semester for which there is no penalty. If you exceed this number, you will need to speak to me and provide a valid reason for your absence. Excessive absences will result in a lowering of your grade. If you come to class 15 minutes late, it will count as half an absence; a later arrival will count as a full absence.
ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING CRITERIA:
You will be asked to write 3 response papers based on the readings and class discussions. Each paper must be 7-10 pages, double-spaced. Suggested topics will be given for each paper along with the due dates. A valid reason must be provided for late papers.
Each paper is worth 30% of your grade (total 90%). Attendance, class participation and an occasional in-class writing assignment will be worth 10% of your grade.
As a general rule, I prefer not to give an Incomplete Grade for the course. An I grade will be given only under special circumstances and requires that the student has submitted at least some work required for the course.

POLICY ON PLAGIARISM:
“As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website, (www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html) for a full description of the academic integrity policy.”
Readings and Class Session Topics:
All readings must be completed prior to class. Please bring the assigned text to class.

Wednesday, September 3
Introductions and course review

**Read for Monday, September 8**
Ong: Introduction and Chapter 1

Monday, September 8
Ong’s framework on technology
Definition of terms
Orality of language

**Read for Wednesday, September 10**
Ong: Chapters 2 and 3

Wednesday, September 10
Characteristics of oral cultures

**Read for Monday, September 15**
Ong: Chapter 4

Monday, September 15
Technology and the structure of consciousness

**Read for Wednesday, September 17**
Ong: Chapter 5

Wednesday, September 17
Print and its impact on orality and writing

**Read for Monday, September 22**
Ong: Chapter 6

Monday, September 22
Structure of narratives in oral cultures
Wednesday, September 24
Overview of Ong and critique

Monday, September 29
Film: Being There by Hal Ashby

Wednesday, October 1
Film: Being There cont’d

Monday, October 6
Discussion of Being There
Orality, print and TV

**Read for Wednesday, October 8**
Achebe: Things Fall Apart: Part 1

Wednesday, October 8
Achebe’s use of oral language and narrative structure

**NO CLASS MONDAY, OCTOBER 13**

**Read for Wednesday, October 15**
Achebe: Things Fall Apart: Finish book

Wednesday, October 15
Analysis of Achebe: Literacy, Power and Colonization

**Read for Monday, October 20**
Plato: Phaedrus: Introduction to end of Socrates’ First Speech

Monday, October 20
Role of rhetoric in philosophy

**RESPONSE PAPER 1 DUE WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22**

5
**Read for Wednesday, October 22**
Plato: Finish Phaedrus

Wednesday, October 22
Speech, writing and persuasion
Read for Monday, October 27
McLuhan: Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2
McLuhan’s framework for media

Read for Wednesday, October 29
McLuhan: Chapters 3 and 4
Narcissism and hybrid media

Read for Monday, November 3
McLuhan: Chapters 5, 6, and 7
Rendering media effects visible
Critique of McLuhan
McLuhan and the digital age
Review of Ong, Plato and McLuhan

Read for Wednesday, November 12
Carr: Prologue, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4
Carr’s framework for technology

Read for Monday, November 17
Carr: Chapters 5, 6, 7
Continued discussion of Carr
Read for Wednesday, November 19
Carr: Chapters 8, 9, 10 and Epilogue
Wednesday, November 19
Critical assessment of Carr

RESPONSE PAPER 2 DUE ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19

Read for Monday, November 24
Thompson: Chapters 1, 2 and 3
Monday, November 24
Humans, machines and memory

Read for Wednesday, November 26
Thompson: Chapters 4 and 5
Discussion on Thompson cont’d

THANKSGIVING RECESS

Read for Monday, December 1
Thompson: Finish book
Monday, December 1
Comparison of Carr and Thompson

Read for Wednesday, December 3
Selected articles on privacy and technology
Wednesday, December 3
Privacy, big data, and the digital self
Monday, December 8
Review of texts and major ideas in the course
Wednesday, December 10
LAST CLASS

FINAL PAPER DUE WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10

NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED