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 2
Introductions and course review

**Read for Wednesday, September 9**
Ong: Introduction and Chapter 1

Wednesday, September 9
Ong’s framework on technology
Definition of terms
Orality of language

**Read for Monday, September 14**
Ong: Chapters 2 and 3

Monday, September 14
Characteristics of oral cultures

**Read for Wednesday September 16**
Ong: Chapter 4

Wednesday, September 16
Technology and the structure of consciousness

**Read for Monday, September 21**
Ong: Chapter 5

Monday, September 21
Print and its impact on orality and writing

**Read for Wednesday, September 23**
Ong: Chapter 6

Wednesday, September 23
Structure of narratives in oral cultures
Monday, September 28
Overview of Ong and critique

Wednesday, September 30
Film: Being There by Hal Ashby

Monday, October 5
Film: Being There cont’d

Wednesday, October 7
Discussion of Being There
Orality, print and TV

NO CLASS MONDAY, OCTOBER 12

Read for Tuesday, October 13
Achebe: Things Fall Apart: Part 1

Tuesday, October 13
Achebe’s use of oral language and narrative structure

Read for Wednesday, October 14
Achebe: Things Fall Apart: Finish book

Wednesday, October 14
Analysis of Achebe: Literacy, Power and Colonization

Read for Monday, October 19
Plato: Phaedrus: Introduction to end of Socrates’ First Speech

Monday, October 19
Role of rhetoric in philosophy

RESPONSE PAPER 1 DUE WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21

Read for Wednesday, October 21
Plato: Finish Phaedrus

Wednesday, October 21
Speech, writing and persuasion
Read for Monday, October 26
McLuhan: Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2
Monday, October 26
McLuhan’s framework for media

Read for Wednesday, October 28
McLuhan: Chapters 3 and 4
Wednesday, October 28
Narcissism and hybrid media

Read for Monday, November 2
McLuhan: Chapters 5, 6, and 7
Monday, November 2
Rendering media effects visible
Wednesday, November 4
Critique of McLuhan
McLuhan and the digital age
Monday, November 9
Review of Ong, Plato and McLuhan

Read for Wednesday, November 11
Carr: Prologue, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4
Wednesday, November 11
Carr’s framework for technology

Read for Monday, November 16
Carr: Chapters 5, 6, 7
Monday, November 16
Continued discussion of Carr
Read for Wednesday, November 18
Carr: Chapters 8, 9, 10 and Epilogue

Wednesday, November 18
Critical assessment of Carr

RESPONSE PAPER 2 DUE ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18

Read for Monday, November 23
Thompson: Chapters 1, 2 and 3

Monday, November 23
Humans, machines and memory

THANKSGIVING RECESS (NOVEMBER 25-30)

Read for Monday, November 30
Thompson: Finish book

Monday, November 30
Comparison of Carr and Thompson

Read for Wednesday, December 2
Selected articles on privacy and technology

Wednesday, December 2
Privacy, big data, and the digital self

Monday, December 7
Review of texts and major ideas in the course

Wednesday, December 9
In-class presentations

Monday, December 14

Last Class

FINAL PAPER DUE MONDAY DECEMBER 14 (NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED)