

STS 10 | Progress

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Science, Technology, and Society Program | Fall 2023

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What is Progress?

Progress is a loaded term. Sometimes its use feels very concrete, and other times, it can feel more like, well, complete BS. Its meaning changes depending on the situation, and it is very usefully mobilized in terms of state-run projects or scientific and technological projects (and oftentimes where those two things meet). Because progress is such a slippery term, our main objective in this Reading Lab is to clarify it together. Another objective is to make some normative claims about progress as an intellectual community: what should scientific, technological, social, economic, and political progress look like?

Course Expectations:

So here's the deal: this course does not have any written assignments. But that does not mean it is effortless. No good intellectual community or project or anything worth doing or creating is *ever* effortless. We will read a fair amount, and you will be responsible for knowing what's in those readings. And because the point of the class is to discuss things and build intellectual community, attendance is mandatory. Above all, when you do contribute to class, I expect you to take responsibility for whether other people in the classroom will want to continue to participate and be engaged. Intellectual communities like this rest on mutually-shared trust and respect, which is all of our responsibilities to build together.

Some of you may prefer to understand these course expectations through a rubric:

Participation / engagement / knowledge of readings / community responsibility : 50%

Attendance : 50%

Make-up Work:

Naturally, life happens and you may need to miss a class. In these cases, you should email me to let me know (and though you are not obligated to tell me, it does help me to know why: that way, I know how to support you going forward). I will provide you with a make-up assignment that will take the place of attending the discussion. Generally speaking, this will look something like: writing a short essay (1-1.5 good paragraphs) on our readings and scheduling a 30-minute meeting with me to discuss it [Links to an external site.](#), OR writing a slightly longer essay (2-3 good paragraphs) and not meeting with me.

Because the entire point of this course is to grant credit for coming to class and participating in discussion, these make-up opportunities are constrained in a few ways:

- Make-ups must be requested by the Monday following class (ideally, please let me know before that!);
- Requests are granted at my discretion and are not guaranteed;
- Make-up work must be submitted within 11 days of the missed lab. (That's two Mondays later.)
- Up to two absences can be made up in this way. Beyond that, absences will not be excused and will affect your grade.

If you find yourself in an extreme situation that makes these constraints hard to meet, please, please let me know. If these constraints are causing you anxiety, please let me know also. It helps me to know what's going on with you, whether it's mental or physical health struggles, or something else, so that I can support your work in this class. As your instructor, I feel a bit like your coach: in order to encourage you to achieve and to be your best self in this course, I need to hold you to some standards. BUT—and this is very important—coaches also need to know when you are injured or healing from an injury. That doesn't mean you'll work less, but it means we need to come up with a contingency plan together: one that keeps you engaged and learning, and supports your success in this course.

My Teaching and Learning Values:

Learning is a process, and intellect is too. Scammers are able to manipulate people not (just) because people can be foolish or uncaring, but because it is comforting to feel as though intellect is a product; that someone arrives at all of the best answers one day. And who doesn't want to be comfortable?! But no one has all of the answers, and anyone who leads you to believe that they do is playing a trick on you. My role as your instructor is not to trick you into thinking I am a supreme being who has all of the answers, but to provide a space for you to think in a disciplined and empowering way.

Our classroom is, above all, about process. Holding oneself accountable for reading, for asking questions that are generous and critical, for having sincere and engaged conversations, and for learning as much as one can. There is something to be said for expertise and the value of it, particularly when it comes to being a discerning reader, writer, and communicator—it takes real, concerted discipline and practice to be those things. Expertise takes work.

Syllabus

Every week, we will read roughly 30-40 pages. Each week has its own theme, though nothing about these themes is discrete. Sometimes they will bleed into each other or stretch out across the course.

Week 1 | September 7th: Welcome and Intros

No readings for this class, but do arrive prepared to introduce yourselves and engage in some preliminary discussion.

Week 2 | September 14th: A Theory of Progress?

- Lorde, A. (1985). "Poetry is not a luxury." In *The Broadview Anthology of Expository Prose*, 217-220.
- Latour, B. (1991). "Crisis." In *We have never been modern*. Harvard University Press. Pgs. 1-11.

- West, S. (Host). (2022, August 20). "Bruno Latour — We Have Never Been Modern" (No. 169) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Philosophize This*. <https://www.philosophizethis.org/podcast/episode-169-latour-modern>.

Week 3 | September 21st: A Brief History of Progress? Pt. 1: Production

- Edgerton, D. (2011). "Production." In *The shock of the old: Technology and global history since 1900*. Profile books. pgs. 52-74.
- Dwamena, A. (2021). "Up From Sweatshops." In *Dissent*, 68(2), 78-83. <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/up-from-sweatshops/>.
- Mars, R. (Host). (2023, September 12). "Blood in the Machine" (No. 552) [Audio podcast episode]. In *99% Invisible*. <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/blood-in-the-machine/>.

Week 4 | September 28th: A Brief History of Progress? Pt. 2: Progress and Political Narratives in the U.S.

- Lasch, C. (1991). "Preface" and "Introduction: The Obsolescence of Left and Right." In *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics*. WW Norton & Company. pgs. 13-39.
- Lasch, C. (1992, October 15). "Is Progress Obsolete?" In *Time Magazine*. <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,976741-1,00.html>.
- Sitman, M. and Adler-Bell, S. (Hosts). (2022, August 11). "Christopher Lasch's Critique of Progress" (No. 59) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Know Your Enemy*. <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/know-your-enemy-christopher-lasch/Links to an external site>.

Week 5 | October 5th: Technological Determinism

- Peters, J. D. (2017). "'You Mean My Whole Fallacy Is Wrong?': On Technological Determinism." *Representations*, 140, 10–26.
- Wyatt, S. (2008). "Technological determinism is dead; long live technological determinism." *The handbook of science and technology studies*, 3: 165-180.
- Linsenmayer, M. (Host). (2022, August 9). "Donna Haraway on Feminist Science (Part One)" (No. 293) [Audio podcast episode]. In *The Partially Examined Life*. <https://partiallyexaminedlife.com/2022/05/09/ep293-1-haraway-feminist-science/Links to an external site>.

Week 6 | October 12th: Something "Old," Something "New"

- Gitelman, L. (2006). "Introduction: Media as Historical Subjects." In *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture*. MIT Press. pgs. 1-22.
- Marvin, C. (1988). "Introduction." In *When Old Technologies Were New*. Oxford University Press. pgs. 3-9. https://www.google.com/books/edition/When_Old_Technologies_Were_New/IDIQa7sf2aYC?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover.

Week 7 | October 19th: Value, Growth, and Economic Progress

- Mazzucato, M. (2018). "A Brief History of Value." In *The value of everything: Making and taking in the global economy*. Hachette UK. pgs. 21-56.
- Ongweso, E. (2023, March 23). "The Incredible Tantrum Venture Capitalists Threw Over Silicon Valley Bank." In *Slate*. <https://slate.com/technology/2023/03/silicon-valley-bank-rescue-venture-capital-calacanis-sacks-ackman-tantrum.html>Links to an external site..

Week 8 | October 26th

No Class

Week 9 | November 2nd: Degrowth

- Escobar, A. (2014). "Development, Critiques of." In D'Alisa, G., Demaria, F., & Kallis, G. (Eds.). *Degrowth: a vocabulary for a new era*. Routledge. pgs. 29-32.
- Schmelzer, M., Vetter, A., & Vansintjan, A. (2022). "Pathways to Degrowth." In *The future is degrowth: A guide to a world beyond capitalism*. Verso Books. pgs. 212-250.
- Vinsel, L. (Host). (2023, February 2). "Why It's So Hard for Us to Subtract: A Discussion with Leidy Klotz" [Audio podcast episode]. In *Peoples & Things*. <https://newbooksnetwork.com/025-leidy-klotz-on-subtract>.
- Reggio, Godfrey, and Philip Glass. *Koyaanisqatsi*. MGM Home Entertainment, 1983. [[in class]]

Week 10 | November 9th: What is a Luddite?

- Sadowski, J. (2021, August 9). "I'm a Luddite. You should be one too." In *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/im-a-luddite-you-should-be-one-too-163172>.
- Mueller, G. (2021). "High-Tech Luddism." In *Breaking things at work: The Luddites are right about why you hate your job*. Verso Books.
- Vadukul, A. (2022, December 15). "Luddite Teens Don't Want Your Likes." In *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/15/style/teens-social-media.html>.

Week 11 | November 16th: Silicon Valley

- Turner, F. (2010). "Introduction" Download "Introduction"and "The Shifting Politics of the Computational Metaphor." In *From counterculture to cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the rise of digital utopianism*. University of Chicago Press. pgs. 1-39.
- Ongweso, E. (2023, June 23). "Eugenics, Environmental Ruin, and Surveillance: The Story of Silicon Valley." In *The Nation*. <https://www.thenation.com/article/economy/san-francisco-silicon-valley-eugenics/>.

Week 12 | November 23rd: Thanksgiving Break

No readings. Enjoy your break!

Week 13 | November 30th: Utopia and Aesthetics

- Tu, T. L. N. (2021). "Skin Stories: Making Beauty in the Culture of Renovation." In *Experiments in Skin*. Duke University Press. pgs. 23-48.

- Bloch, E. and Adorno, T.W. (1964). "Possibilities of Utopia Today" ["Möglichkeiten der Utopie heute"]. (J. Roessler, Trans). [Radio broadcast]. Southwest Broadcasting [Südwestrundfunk]. https://blogs.law.columbia.edu/utopia1313/files/2023/03/Ernst_Bloch_and_Theodor_W_Adorno_Possibi.pdf

Week 14 | December 7th: Hope

- Review the Bloch and Adorno reading from last week. That's it!