

21W.747 (2) Rhetoric, Assignment A3, Rhetoric of Technology

Write an essay in which you analyze the meaning of some technology, looking especially at the rhetoric surrounding that technology. Choose some technology (current, future, or archaic), find a number of examples of rhetoric relating to that technology, and produce an essay in which you discover the meanings of that technology in the rhetoric surrounding it.

The challenge of this essay, as usual, will be finding something worth saying about the rhetoric of your chosen technology, something to tie together all of your interesting analysis into a motivated essay. While you may have something in mind at the start of your writing process, it is often a good idea to allow yourself to write freely about your topic, generating ideas in a forum unconstrained by a preconception of a thesis. Then, take the most interesting few ideas at which you arrive, and weave them together into a consistently probing, progressive essay.

The exemplar in this assignment is George Myerson's monograph, *Heidegger, Habermas, and the Mobile Phone*. You may wish to look back at some of Myerson's arguments and strategies, and adapt them for your own analysis. In particular, you would do well to emulate Myerson's approach to the rhetoric of the mobile phone as a *symptom* of cultural attitudes.

Research: This assignment requires at least some research, to find examples of the rhetoric of your chosen technology. You are also encouraged to consult secondary sources that analyze your chosen technology or its rhetoric, and to make use of these sources (with appropriate citations, of course) in your essay. However, "secondary" research is not essential. Though you may end up wanting to do a fair amount of research, be certain that your essay is mostly a presentation of your own original analysis and ideas. This is not a "research" essay, and should not be a summary of or list of the discoveries you make as you research your topic.

There is no length requirement for this essay, but I imagine that it will take around five to seven pages to treat the rhetoric of a technology in adequate detail. For rules of formatting, please refer to the syllabus section.

- Your **essay's ideal audience member** is a thoughtful, educated person, familiar with though not expert in current technologies. If you are analyzing an obscure technology,

you should spend some words explaining it to readers who might be unfamiliar with it.

- Your **purpose** is to offer an original and engaging insight into the rhetoric surrounding a technology. It may be of particular interest to contrast the rhetoric of the technology with the actual effects of the technology, and this could constitute an excellent essay. Or it may turn out that the technology lives up to its rhetoric. In either case, your analysis should engage substantially with rhetoric, with the way that the technology is represented in advertising, technical papers, popular stories, journalism, etc.
- **Features of successful essays** include
 - A clearly stated and provocative insight into your object of analysis, a thesis or problem that guides and motivates the entire essay,
 - Organized and flowing paragraphs that dig progressively deeper into the central insight and the rhetoric under analysis,
 - Appeals to sound logic, critical intuition, and defensible judgment,
 - Original, engaging commentary that defends your position while respecting its complexity,
 - Informative and fair summary or other means of presentation of the object of analysis, well integrated into the essay's flow,
 - Careful selection of specific moments or elements of your object of analysis, such that you make an effective case for your central insight without deliberately ignoring or eliding aspects of the text under study,
 - And clear, concise, accurate, correct prose with some memorable phrasings.
- **Features of unsuccessful essays** include
 - Unclear, inaccurate, wordy, and/or incorrect prose,
 - Dogmatic claims that are not critically examined,
 - A central insight that is not especially insightful,
 - Arguments that may be logical but that do not seem intuitively plausible or ethically conscionable,
 - Choppy, haphazard organization, no organization, or paragraphs that constitute a list of claims without a sense of progression,
 - An essay that could be written for a high school class in terms of sophistication of thought or language.

This essay will be submitted twice, first as a draft then as a revision. The draft is due *in my office at 10am on Friday*,

November 12, the day after Veteran's Day. The revision is due in class on Thursday, December 2. In both cases, please submit an additional copy as an attachment by e-mail on the due date. While the revision will determine the bulk of the grade for this assignment, the draft should be no less a submissible document. Both draft and revision should be properly formatted, free from typos and from grammatical and spelling errors, thorough, and complete. In short, edit.

Conferences: In between draft and revision, there will a mandatory one-on-one conference between each student and the professor to discuss the revision process. Conferences will take place on Thursday, November 18, and possibly the following Friday and Monday. Sign up for conference times in class.