

## Culture, Art, and Technology (CAT 1)



TTH 2-3:30 PCYNH 106

Dr. Linda Strauss  
[lstrauss@ucsd.edu](mailto:lstrauss@ucsd.edu)  
Office hours

Pepper Canyon Hall 249  
858 822 1666  
M 11-1; W 1-2; Th 4-5

**OVERVIEW:** CAT 1 is the foundational course in the Culture, Art and Technology Sequence. It offers an interdisciplinary examination of the nature, development, functions, and interactions of culture, art and technology. The course considers some of the various and significant ways in which these human inventions both allow and direct people in different societies to adapt to the natural and social environments in which they are living. It also considers the ways in which the implications of certain cultural adaptations themselves pose challenges for subsequent human survival and well-being.

*“Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.”*

*Clifford Geertz, Interpretations of Cultures*

*“Culture is an adaptive process that accumulates partial solutions to frequently encountered problems”*

*E. Hutchins, Cognition in the Wild*

*“A culture may be thought of as a set of beliefs and behaviours shared by a people for the purpose of communicating about and manipulating what they deem most salient for survival and prosperity in a given environmental niche. The interplay between a culture and its environmental niche is complex and invariably based on an insufficient understanding of how to entirely predict or control either the positive or negative effects of this interplay. This incomplete understanding and control of the forces unleashed by a culture, its arts and technologies, entails unintended consequences-- consequences which may be, in the short or long run, deleterious for both the culture and the niche on which it depends. Members of a culture must necessarily reflect on how effectively their culture, with its arts and technologies, serves their efforts to successfully manipulate their environmental niche.*

*To elaborate: art and technology are part of the “adaptive process” we term “culture,” a process, to use Hutchins’ succinct formulation, that “accumulates partial solutions to frequently encountered problems.” While culture is an “adaptive process,” we must recognize that our species has achieved no unanimity about what it means to adapt, that a given culture’s arts and technologies may be based in an erroneous idea of what is required to adapt, and that the environmental niche to which a culture seeks to adapt is always changing, due in part to the effects of culture itself. Human beings have invented an astonishing variety of cultures and equally various conceptions of what constitutes a problem and its solution; our purpose in CAT is to ask how effectively members of a culture use their arts and technologies to mediate between themselves and their natural and social environment, and to consider the implications of the fact that one culture’s conception of a solution can be another culture’s idea of a problem.” – P. John*

### **Working Definitions of Key Terms**

**CULTURE** — *“webs of significance [mankind] [it]self has spun...”* Clifford Geertz, *Interpretations of Cultures*, 1973) [Max Weber]; *“Culture is an adaptive process that accumulates partial solutions to frequently encountered problems”* (E. Hutchins, “Cognition in the Wild”)

**ART**—*“Culturally significant meaning, skillfully encoded in an affecting, sensuous medium”* (R. Anderson, *Calliope’s Sisters*, 1990); *“Making special”* [for the purpose of adaptation] (Dissanayake)

**TECHNOLOGY** — *“teks”* (Gk): *“making, creativity and ingenuity”; “to fabricate or to weave”; “tekton:... carpenter or builder”; “techne...an art, craft or skill”* (T. Hughes, “Human Built World, 2004); *Technologia* (Gk): *“systematic treatment of an art”* (1658); *Technology*: *“an ensemble of means”* (Ellul); *“a system of rule, tools, materials, artifacts and processes for achieving an end”*(Strauss); *“making and use of artifacts”* (Durbin).

### **CAT GOALS: This course is designed to help you**

- understand what it is to be human, in terms of human physical, mental, social and cultural characteristics and in terms of their relationship to the larger world in which they have developed and lived
- understand how human beings use culture to express themselves and their nature, as well as how they use culture both to solve, and, inadvertently to generate problems concerning their relations to nature and to each other
- understand art and technology as particular instances of culture, with similarities and commonalities as well as differences.
- understand culture, art and technology in terms of their interactions, development over time, uses in different societies, and their effect on human characteristics and capacities
- understand the ways that art and technology shape how people think about and act upon what it means to be human.

### **CAT is also intended to help you learn how to take an interdisciplinary approach to complex issues. This includes enabling you to**

- learn to read more acutely
- gain an understanding of how and why scholars in different fields formulate questions and problems as they do, and how they go about assembling, assessing and analyzing evidence as they make and test claims; understanding the main purposes of scholarly argument, and appreciating the inquiry-driven nature of scholarly work.
- learn that your work in this sequence, like that of professional scholars, is not mainly about memorizing information and giving back pre-formulated answers, but about first crafting and pursuing thoughtful, fruitful questions to see where they might lead and then seeking out meaningful answers to such questions.
- learn to examine problems and subjects from more than one disciplinary perspective in order to gain a more complete and deeper understanding of it
- bring appropriate and critical questions to bear on your own thinking and writing through a process of writing and revision, so that your writing and

composition in other media become a means of discovery as well as communication

**Finally, CAT is intended to empower you start taking charge of your own education, as well of your own life. It does this by helping you to exercise**

- self reliance and responsibility
- reflexivity, so that you learn to apply your questions and what you are learning to yourself and your situation in the world
- collaboration, in teams and across cultures

## **General Program Requirements**

*Please note: For the year 2006-07 Sixth College is requiring every first-year student to maintain a portfolio containing copies of all completed **written assignments** (in every quarter) including those that have been commented on and/ or graded and returned by instructors or TAs. The portfolio would not include exams except for essay exams. Students must have portfolios complete and available for selection by the Associate Director for Writing at the end of the academic year. If selected, the work in these portfolios will not be returned; keep copies for your personal files separately.*

**Participation** will be a factor in determining your grade. It entails regular, punctual attendance and attention at both lecture and section (see attendance policy below), completion of assignments on time, active, appropriate participation in group class-work and any group projects, timely preparation of readings, papers and projects and thoughtful contributions to class discussions.

**Attendance Policy:** One of our goals is to cultivate your ability and desire to engage one another in serious and sincere intellectual discourse. For this purpose we require your consistent attendance in lecture and discussion, and to this end—though it may seem rather Draconian—we will deduct a full letter grade for more than two unexcused absences from lecture. Absence from section will negatively affect your participation grade. Also, for the purpose of encouraging promptness and, with it, respect for your fellow students, teaching assistants and instructors, attendance will generally be taken at the beginning of a class.

## Special Events:

In the third week of class, all CAT students will be required to attend one of the two evening Core Sequence academic orientation sessions (Oct 10 and 11, 7 pm Mandeville Auditorium).

On Nov 14, all first year CAT students must attend the Robert Pennock Convocation lecture at 7pm in RIMAC. Attendance will factor into the participation grade, and will be asked to write a page or two in response to each event

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**In CAT 1A, all students are asked to sign up for and attend both the instructor's and the TA's office hours at least once during the quarter. Students may do so individually or in small groups.**

### Grading Percentages:

<b>Reading commentaries and exercises</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Participation</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Midterm Exam</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Paper 1</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Paper 2/project</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Final Exam</b>	<b>25%</b>

### TEXTS:

CAT 1 common course reader (available at AS reserves in the first week of class; if reader is sold out, a copy is guaranteed within 48 hours upon AS reserves' receipt of paid order)

Ehrlich, Paul, *Human Natures: Genes, Cultures and the Human Prospect* (New York: Penguin, 2000)

## Schedule of Assignments

(Readings are to be completed before class by the day indicated)

### Week 0: Understanding Culture, Art, Technology in Practice

Sept 21      Learning how to approach CAT

### **Week 1: Perceiving and Navigating Cultural Webs**

- Sept 26      How do cultures work?  
Read: Harris; Douglas (Mauss); Geertz, ch. 1; Bohannan
- Sept 28      How can we detect a cultural web?  
Read: Miner; Barthes; MacDonald; Trask

### **Week 2: Human Beings, Culture, and Nature—**

- Oct 3         How do human beings relate to the world?  
Read: Adams; Ackerman; Dawkins; Claxton; White; Tuan
- Oct 5         Is culture a natural phenomenon?  
Read: McGrew; Stevens, McNeill; Tuan

### **Week 3: Becoming Human**

- Oct 10        Evolutionary theory and evidence  
Read: Eldridge; Gould (1989); Ehrlich Preface, chs 4-5
- Oct 12        Culture as an evolutionary force  
Read: Geertz ch. 3; Ehrlich ch 1, ch 3 (pps 62-67 only);

### **Week 4: How We Come to Know Ourselves and Our World?**

- Oct 17        Brains, minds and the environment  
Read: Ehrlich ch 6; De Duve
- Oct 19        How do we see? Physiological and cultural constraints  
Read: Searle, Dillard, Scudder, Bronowski, Damasio

### **Week 5: Art and Meaning**

- Oct 24        Conventions of visual perception and depiction  
Read: Behrens; Clark; Ferris; MacLeod; Sartwell; Thuan
- Oct 26        Art and survival  
Read: Dissanayake; review Damasio

### **Week 6: Art and Culture**

Oct 31 Cultural uses of art  
Read: Anderson, R. ch 13; Hatcher

Nov 2 Art and cultural values  
Read: Anderson, R. on Aboriginal Art

### **Week 7: Imagery, Language and Technology**

Nov 7 From hunter-gatherer to farming culture  
Read: Anderson on San and Sepik Art; John; Ehrlich ch 10

Nov 9 Art and language as “soft technologies”  
Read: Ehrlich, ch 7; Stevens; Lakoff and Johnson; Bahn; Mithen;  
Huxley; Kessing; Butler; Bierce

### **Week 8: Hidden dimensions of technology**

Nov 14 Tools and technological choices  
Read: Proctor; Pacey

Nov 16 Technology as symbol  
Read: Adas; Nye; Strebeigh

### **Week 9: Contemporary Culture and Human Nature**

Nov 21 Technological imperatives: does our technology fit our natures?  
Read: Marx; Vicente

Nov 23 Thanksgiving Holiday

### **Week 10 Cultural Alternatives**

Nov 28 What constitutes progress?  
Read: Sivaraksa

Nov 30 Reviewing CAT

**Final Exam Tues Dec 5, 3-6 pm**





