

Soc 148b
Brandeis University
Spring 2008
M W 5:10-6:30
Pearlman 203

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office hours: M 2:00-3:00
W 3:30-4:30
and by appointment

The Sociology of Information

It has become a cliché to state that in contemporary society, information is power. But what exactly does that mean? Who uses information, and for what purposes? This course will examine the claim that information is a key economic and political resource in advanced capitalist societies. It will pose the questions: what is the information society, and how is it (or is it not) different from previous eras; what is at stake in the control over information; and who are the information poor and how are they disadvantaged. As well as comparing varying theoretical perspectives on these issues, we will address a number of related themes, including privacy and surveillance, and the ownership and commodification of information. The course will also include sections that address the role of information in government, finance, science, and marketing. While information technologies will necessarily be discussed, the focus of the course will not be on technology per se, but on the substance, uses, and social roles of information itself.

Requirements

Students are expected to keep up with the readings, attend class, and actively participate in discussions. In addition, you will complete a short paper covering readings and other course material, a research paper in the form of a case study that reflects on various themes from the class, and a take-home final exam consisting of essay questions.

Evaluation

Short paper (4-5 pages)	25%
Research paper (7-8 pages)	35%
Take-home final	25%
Participation	15%

Students are expected to uphold standards of academic integrity. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person without proper acknowledgement of that source. This means that you must use references and, where appropriate, quotation marks to indicate the source of any phrases, sentences, or ideas not your own -- whether they are found in written materials or on the Internet, and whether they are created by a published author, another student, or your parent. Violations of University policies on academic integrity may result in failure in the course or on the assignment, and could end in suspension from the University. Students with questions about standards of academic integrity are advised to consult Section 4 of Rights and Responsibilities from the Brandeis Student Handbook and/or speak to me. If you are in doubt about the instructions for any assignment in this course, you must ask for clarification.

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability, you

should contact me, and present your letter of accommodation, as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations, you should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in Academic Services at 736-3470. Letters of accommodation should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

The following books are available for purchase from the university bookstore:

Alasdair Roberts, *Blacked Out: Government Secrecy in the Information Age*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Corynne McSherry, *Who Owns Academic Work? Battling for Control of Intellectual Property*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

These books are also on reserve at the main library.

The readings for Weeks 2-4 are on the Latte site for this class. Look at the section titled "Readings."

All other readings are contained in a custom course packet. Information on how to purchase this will be announced in class.

Course Schedule

week 1
Jan 16

Introduction

week 2
Jan 23

The Discovery of Information

Margaret F. Stieg, "The Nineteenth-Century Information Revolution." *Journal of Library History*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1980, pp. 22-52.

Ronald E. Day, *The Modern Invention of Information: Discourse, History, and Power*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001, chap. 2.

Theodore Roszak, *The Cult of Information: The Folklore of Computers and the True Art of Thinking*. New York: Pantheon, 1986, chap. 1.

week 3
Jan 28-30

What Is the Information Society

Daniel Bell, "The Social Framework of the Information Society." In Tom Forester, ed., *The Microelectronics Revolution: The Complete Guide to the New Technology and Its Impact on Society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981, pp. 500-549.

Manuel Castells, "The Network Society: From Knowledge to Policy." In Manuel Castells and Gustavo Cardoso, eds., *The Network Society: From Knowledge to Policy*.

Washington, DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2006, pp. 3-21.

week 4
Feb 4-6

Utopian Popularizers

Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave*. New York: William Morrow, 1980, chaps. 13-14.

Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital*. New York: Vintage, 1996, chaps. 12-14, 18, epilogue.

week 5
Feb 11-13

Skeptical Critics

Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High-Technology Capitalism*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999, chap. 2.

Jean-Pierre Dupuy, "Myths of the Informational Society." In Kathleen Woodward, ed., *The Myths of Information: Technology and Postindustrial Culture*. Madison: Coda Press, 1980.

Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004, chap. 4.

week 6
Feb 25-27

Controlling People and Processes

Max Weber, "The Power Position of the Bureaucracy" and "Effective Supervision and the Power Basis of Bureaucracy." *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology, Vol. Two*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978, pp. 990-994 & 1417-1419.

James R. Beniger, *The Control Revolution: Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986, chap. 9.

James Hoopes, "Growth Through Knowledge: Wal-Mart, High Technology, and the Ever Less Visible Hand of the Manager." In Nelson Lichtenstein, ed., *Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism*. New York: New Press, 2006, pp. 83-104.

Short paper due Wednesday, February 27th

week 7
Mar 3-5

Government: Secrecy and Censorship

Alasdair Roberts, *Blacked Out: Government Secrecy in the Information Age*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, chaps. 1-2, 9.

week 8
Mar 10-12

Personal Information: Work, Family, and the Public Sphere

Georg Simmel, from "Secrecy." In Kurt H. Wolff, ed., *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: Free Press, 1950 [1908], pp. 330-338.

Gary T. Marx, "Soft Surveillance: The Growth of Mandatory Volunteerism in Collecting Personal Information -- 'Hey Buddy Can You Spare a DNA?'" In Torin Monahan, ed., *Surveillance and Security: Technological Politics and Power in Everyday Life*. New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 37-56.

Sonia Livingstone, "Children's Privacy Online: Experimenting with Boundaries within and Beyond the Family." In Robert Kraut, Malcolm Brynin and Sara Kiesler, eds., *Computers, Phones, and the Internet*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 128-144.

Priscilla M. Regan, "Genetic Testing and Workplace Surveillance: Implications for Privacy." In David Lyon and Elia Zureik, eds., *Computers, Surveillance, and Privacy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp. 21-46.

week 9
Mar 17-19

Personal Information: Selling and Marketing

Rob Kling and Jonathan P. Allen, "How the Marriage of Management and Computing Intensifies the Struggle for Personal Privacy." In David Lyon and Elia Zureik, eds., *Computers, Surveillance, and Privacy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp. 104-131.

Oscar Gandy, Jr., "Data Mining, Surveillance, and Discrimination in the Post-9/11 Environment." In Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson, eds., *The New Politics of Surveillance and Visibility*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006, pp. 363-384.

David Lyon, "Fear, Surveillance, and Consumption." *Hedgehog Review*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Fall 2003, pp. 81-95.

Serra Tinic, "(En) Visioning the Televisual Audience: Revisiting Questions of Power in the Age of Interactive Television." In Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson, eds., *The New Politics of Surveillance and Visibility*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006, pp. 308-326.

Constance L. Hays, "What They Know About You." *New York Times*, November 14, 2004, p. 1.

week 10
Mar 24-26

Banking and Finance

Karin Knorr Cetina and Urs Bruegger, "Global Microstructures: The Virtual Societies of Financial Markets." *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 107, No. 4, January 2002, pp. 905-950.

Alasdair Roberts, *Blacked Out: Government Secrecy in the Information Age*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, chap. 8.

week 11 **Intellectual Property: Copyright**

Mar 31-Apr 2

Ronald V. Bettig, *Copyrighting Culture: The Political Economy of Intellectual Property*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996, chap. 2.

Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*. New York: Penguin, 2004, "Piracy."

week 12 **Intellectual Property: Patents**

Apr 7-9

Corynne McSherry, *Who Owns Academic Work? Battling for Control of Intellectual Property*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001, pp. 42-46.

James Boyle, *Shamans, Software, and Spleens: Law and the Construction of the Information Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996, chap. 11.

Jayashree Watal, "Intellectual Property and Biotechnology: Trade Interests of Developing Countries." In Ricardo Meléndez-Ortiz and Vicente Sánchez, eds., *Trading in Genes: Development Perspectives on Biotechnology, Trade and Sustainability*. London: Earthscan, 2005, pp. 123-137.

Jakkrit Kuanpoth, "Closing in on Biopiracy: Legal Dilemmas and Opportunities for the South." In Ricardo Meléndez-Ortiz and Vicente Sánchez, eds., *Trading in Genes: Development Perspectives on Biotechnology, Trade and Sustainability*. London: Earthscan, 2005, pp. 139-152.

week 13 **Scientific Knowledge**

Apr 14-16

Corynne McSherry, *Who Owns Academic Work? Battling for Control of Intellectual Property*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001, chaps. 4-5.

research paper due Wednesday, April 16th

week 14 **Citizenship and Empowerment: From Information to Knowledge**

Apr 28-30

Ellen Ullman, *Close to the Machine: Technophilia and Its Discontents*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997, pp. 74-93.

Cass Sunstein, *Republic. Com 2.0*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007, chaps. 1, 3-4.

Take-home final due Friday, May 2 (seniors)
Wednesday, May 7 (all others)