The Politics of Digital Media
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Draft (still “Under Construction,” but this gives you an idea...)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar examines various political themes and issues such as the politics of regulation and network architecture, the politics of piracy and hacking and the politics of grassroots activism. Students will interrogate a range of higher order political theories about democracy, liberalism and neoliberalism as they concern the intersection of technology and politics. Specific topics may include: domain name registration, ICAAN, filtering, tactical media, and open source software.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students will:

− be familiar with an array of political questions and tactics that emerge out of the use, invention, circulation, dissemination and production of networked technologies.
− grasp and specify a number of political theories about democracy, liberalism, social movements, and neoliberalism as they concern the politics of technology.
− differentiate between the various levels of politics we address as well as discuss their relationships to each other as we confront various examples and case studies
− identify how technology is at once imagined as an agent of political change and contrasts this with how these technologies work to enable and curtail various political possibilities.
− think more broadly about different levels and types of politic action and impacts, a framework that can be applied to non-digital contexts as well.

COURSE FORMAT, GENERAL REQUIREMENTS, & ATTENDANCE

This class will be run as a seminar and as indicated below, participation is not only required, but will count significantly toward your final grade. To aid in our discussion, you will be required to send at least one question to the whole class, at least 1.5 hours prior to class, engaging with the class readings. Every person will also be required to give a 20-25 minute presentation either on the history of the topic we are examining and/or on the chapters of the book we were not required to read. There are two writing assignments, one short one based on class reading and the other on a research paper of your own design. During our first class, I will provide more details on the paper topics and presentations.

GRADING

- Class Participation and Questions: 25%
- Presentation 15%
- Short Essay 15% (5-7 pages based on class readings)
- Final Research Paper: 45% (20-25 pages)
EVALUATION

SCHEDULE

* This is a current sample of what may appear on the syllabus.

Part One: Introductions and the Politics of Architecture and Governance

Week 1: The Materiality of Politics/Political Materiality

** During our first class we will introduce and explore the theoretical problematic and explore various models by which we can propose the politics of digital media and start to discuss how to approach the differences and similarities between the three types of politics we are exploring.

We will also begin our discussion by reading one very brief historical account of computers as well two seminal texts in STS and one in legal studies that proposes various ways to address the relationship between technical architectures and politics. These texts will form one important theoretical backbone of our course.

Winner, Langdon
1986 “Do Artifacts have Politics?” The Whale and the Reactor

Mumford, Lewis
1964 Authoritarian and Democratic Technics.” Technology and Culture

Grimmelmann, James
2005 Regulation by Software. 14 Yale Law Journal 1719

Week 2: A First Look at Liberal Theory

Because liberal ideology and imaginations play such an important role in the rest of the course, we are going to spend this week getting acquainting ourselves with some of the basic attributes of liberal political theory and cultural commitments.

Peters, John Peters
2005 Courting the Abyss

Starr, Paul
2007 Freedom’s Power: The True Force of Liberalism

Week 3: ICANN and Internet Governance
Week 4 Protocol, Access, and Network Neutrality

Galloway, Alex

Wu, Tim

Wu, Tim and Christopher Yoo

Gillespie, Tarleton.

Weiser, Phil and Robert Atkinson

Week 5: Privacy, Filtering & Search Engines

Nissenbuam, Helen and Lucas Itrona
2000 “Shaping the Web: Why the Politics of Search Engines Matter.” The Information Society

Solove, Daniel
2004 The Digital Person: Technology and Privacy in the Digital Age [Chapter 1, 9 and 11]

Zittrain, Jonathan and John Palfrey

Deibert, Ronald and Rafal Rohozinski
2008 “Good for Liberty, Bad for Security? Global Civil Society and the Securitization of the

Week 6: Hacking Liberalism

Kelty, Chris
2008 Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software [Chapter 1 and 2]

Coleman, Gabriella and Alex Golub

Week 7: Free as in Speech, not as in Beer

Kelty, Chris
2008 Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software [Rest of part one and part two]

Netanel, Neil
2008 Copyright's Paradox [Chapter 3, 5, 7]

Derrida, Jacques
1992 ”Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority’” in Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice.

Week 8: The Politics of Transgression

Thomas, Douglas
2003 Hacker Culture [Chapters TBD]

Walter Benjamin,

Foucault, Michele
1977 Language, Counter-memory, practice. Selected essays and interviews. Edited by Bouchard. (pp. 29-52)

Part Three: Social Movements, Grassroots Activism and New Digital Media

Week 9: Rethinking Social Movements, Protest, and New Technologies
Tarrow, Sidney  
2005   The New Transnational Activism [Chapter 1, 3, and 7]  

De Donk, Leader, Nixon, and Rucht,  

Rossiter, Ned and Brett Neilson  
2006   “Towards a Political Anthropology of New Institutional Forms.” Ephemera  
http://www.ephemeraweb.org/journal/6-4/6-4index.htm  

Scholz, Trebor  
http://www.collectivate.net/the-participatory-challenge/  

Phlip, Kavita  
2008   “Producing Transnational Knowledge, Neoliberal Identities, and Technoscientific Practice in India.” Tactical Biopolitics: Art, Activism, and Technoscience.  

Before class, please read over this site “An Introduction to Activism on the Internet”  
http://backspace.com/action/  

Week 10: Grassroots Activism, Citizen Journalism and the Politics of Democracy.  

Brigitte Le Grignou and Charles Patou  
2004   “ATTAC(K)ing expertise: does the Internet really democratize knowledge? Cyberprotest: New media, Citizens and Social Movements  

The Role of the Internet in Burma's Saffron Revolution  

Gilmor, Dan  
2005   We the Media [Chapter 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11]  

Week 11: The Fight Against Neoliberal Capitalism and the Revitalization of Anarchist Politics  

Harvey, David  
2005   A Brief History of Neoliberalism [chapter 1 and 2]  

Klein, Naomi  

Juris, Jeff  
2008   Networking Futures: The Movements Against Corporate Capitalism. [chapter 1, 2 and chapter 8]  

Peter Van Aelst and Stefaan Walgrave  
2004   “New Media, New Movements? The Role of the Internet in Shaping the Anti-globalization Movement.” Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens and Social Movement.
Graeber, David and Andrej Grubacic
http://www.zmag.org/znet/viewArticle/9258

Week 12: The Fight Against Neoliberal Capitalism and the Revitalization of Anarchist Politics
(Continued)

Klein, Naomi

Juris, Jeff
2008 Networking Futures: The Movements Against Corporate Capitalism. [chapter 1, 2 and chapter 8]

Graeber, David
2002 Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology.

Week 13: Web 2.0 in the Context of Balkanization, the Right, and the Global South

State of The Blogosphere

Sunstein, Cass
2003 republic.com [chapters TBD]

Statzel, Sophie
2008 “Cybersupremacy: The New Face and Form of White Supremacist Activism.” Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times

Zuckerman, Ethan

“What Is Web 2.0 Anyway? Indispensable tools your nonprofit should know about,”
http://www.techsoup.org/howto/articles/webbuilding/page4233.cfm

Week 14: Conclusion

Student Presentations/Wrap up