

Marion Fourcade

UC Berkeley

Sociology

Tuesdays 4-6pm Barrows 402

Office hours: Monday 3:30-5:30pm

<https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/hepeo>

SOC 290 - Political Economy of Digitality

The combined deployment of digital systems, massive data collection and computer code have reshaped the basic rules of social life: how people communicate, work, exchange and associate; how they relate to one another, themselves, and the world around them, down to the most ordinary and intimate aspects; how institutions, both public and private, think about and pursue their social mission and economic purpose; and how they sort, slot, and know populations and individuals. This course will analyze the political economy of digitality, paying attention to continuities and ruptures with antecedent forms of capital accumulation and state control. We will study closely the specific implementations of digital technologies across a wide range of domains and geographical settings and use that knowledge to revisit classic questions of social scientific theory –such as the search for economic profit, the production of social groups and inequalities, and the nature of politics and government.

Class goals and expectations

This course draws on research from a wide range of fields beyond sociology (including law, media studies, anthropology, STS, etc...). Some of these may be familiar to you, while others may take you outside of your comfort zone. I invite you to keep an open mind and approach this class with intellectual curiosity, interest, and imagination.

Our goal is to build productively on each other's knowledge and ideas. Try to understand what a text is saying, and where the author is coming from. Be generous with your classmates, too. Remember that views expressed in the class may not reflect the speaker's fully developed thinking about a topic. This course, like all courses, is a collective process of learning and intellectual exploration!

Books you should buy (they are also available online from the library):

Amoore, Louise. 2020. *Cloud Ethics. Algorithms and the Attributes of Ourselves and Others*. Duke University Press.

Benjamin, Ruha. 2019. *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. John Wiley & Sons.

Crawford, Kate. 2020. *Atlas of AI*. Yale University Press.

Eubanks, Virginia. 2017. *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Golumbia, David. 2016. *The Politics of Bitcoin: Software as Right-Wing Extremism*. University of Minnesota Press.

Greene, Daniel. 2021. *The Promise of Access: Technology, Inequality, and the Political Economy of Hope*. MIT Press.

Stuart, Forrest. 2020. *Ballad of the Bullet: Gangs, Drill Music, and the Power of Online Infamy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Course website

There is a course website for Sociology 290 on bCourses. All journal articles and book excerpts are available in PDF format (Go to bCourses > Files > Required). You can also access some papers directly by clicking the hyperlinks in the syllabus.

Course Requirements

Active participation of all seminar members to class discussions.

Weekly facts about the topic being discussed that week. Just upload a web link to a news story (or twitter feed, or blog post, etc...) and add a one-sentence summary. Go to bCourses > Pages > page for that week and post the story. No need for your name, it will be fun to guess who posted what.

Two in-class presentations. One presentation will cover the readings for one week. It should be supported by a written memo briefly summarizing the main arguments and raising several themes / questions for further discussion in class. The memo should be posted on the course web site no later than midnight, on the day before class, so that people have enough time to read it. I will not grade the memos. The second presentation will take place at the end of the semester and will involve a discussion of the proposed research paper.

One three-to-five pages final paper proposal, due on October 5 at 5pm. (email is fine). The proposal should outline the research question, the research strategy, some relevant factoids, and explain the sociological motivation behind the problem studied (a critical review of the scholarly literature is an acceptable motivation). You are encouraged to come discuss your proposal in office hours.

One final research paper (15-20 double-spaced pages), due on Tuesday December 14 in both email and paper format. The only imperatives for this requirement are: (i) The paper must address a topic of your choice, related to the digital economy (ii) It must use some of the **readings** and **factoids**

discussed in this class. The paper may be empirical (e.g., a pilot study) or consist in a research proposal. Additional guidelines will be posted on the course website.

Food! Because we are meeting from 4-6pm, we will all be hungry! Therefore, we will take turns bringing a snack for the group. I will bring food on the very first day of class and we will have a big feast on the last day. Please [sign-up here](#) for your presentation date and food turn.

August 31. Introduction.

Langdon Winner. 1980. "[Do Artefacts have Politics?](#)" *Daedalus*. 109(1): 121-136.

Burrell, Jenna, and Marion Fourcade. 2021. "[The Society of Algorithms.](#)" *Annual Review of Sociology* 47(1): 213–37.

Recommended

Bruno Latour. 1989. "[The moral dilemmas of a safety belt.](#)"

Max Weber. 2012. "Science as a Vocation." Pp129-159 in From Gerth and Mills, *From Max Weber*. Ulan Press.

September 7. The Age of Information.

Norbert Wiener. 1948. "[Cybernetics.](#)" *Scientific American* 179(5): 14-19.

Gilles Deleuze. 1992. "[Postscript on the Societies of Control.](#)" *October* 59: 3-7.

Alexander Galloway. 2004. *Protocol. How Control Exists After Decentralization*. Cambridge: MIT Press. Esp. Pp1-27 (optional: pp81-115).

Haggerty, Kevin, and Richard Ericson. 2000. "[The Surveillant Assemblage.](#)" *British Journal of Sociology* 51(4): 605–22.

Burrell, Jenna. 2016. "[How the Machine 'Thinks:' Understanding Opacity in Machine Learning Algorithms.](#)" *Big Data & Society* 3(1).

Recommended

Dreyfus, Hubert. 1992. "The Scope and Limits of Artificial Reason." Pp 285-306 in *What Computers Still Cannot Do. A Critique of Artificial Reason*. Cambridge, MA. MIT Press.

Max Tegmark. 2017. *Life 3.0. Being Human in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*. New York: Vintage Books.

September 14. Production

Kate Crawford. 2020. *Atlas of AI*. Yale University Press. Pp1-121.

Cottom, Tressie McMillan. 2020. "[Where Platform Capitalism and Racial Capitalism Meet: The Sociology of Race and Racism in the Digital Society.](#)" *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 6(4): 441–49.

Fourcade, Marion, and Daniel N. Klutzz. 2020. "[A Maussian Bargain: Accumulation by Gift in the Digital Economy](#)" *Big Data & Society*.

Recommended

Ensmenger, Nathan. 2018. "[The Environmental History of Computing.](#)" *Technology and Culture* 59(4): S7–33.

Lohmann, Larry. 2021. "[Interpretation Machines: Contradictions of ‘Artificial Intelligence’ in 21st-Century Capitalism.](#)" *Socialist Register* 57.

O’Mara, Margaret. 2020. *The Code: Silicon Valley and the Remaking of America*. Penguin.

Plantin, Jean-Christophe, Carl Lagoze, Paul N Edwards, and Christian Sandvig. 2018. "[Infrastructure Studies Meet Platform Studies in the Age of Google and Facebook.](#)" *New Media & Society* 20(1): 293–310.

September 21. Freedom and Desire

Richard Barbrook & Andy Cameron. 1996. "[The Californian ideology.](#)" *Science as Culture* 6(1): 44-72.

Fred Turner. 2009. "[Burning Man at Google. A Cultural Infrastructure for New Media Production.](#)" *New Media and Society*. 11(1-2): 73-94.

Harcourt, Bernard E. 2015. *Exposed: Desire and Disobedience in the Digital Age*. Harvard University Press. Pp1-28, 108-140.

Arora, Payal. 2016. "[Bottom of the Data Pyramid: Big Data and the Global South.](#)" *International Journal of Communication* 10.

Google’s Selfish Ledger. [Youtube](#).

Recommended

Cottom, Tressie McMillan. 2020. "[The Hustle Economy.](#)" *Dissent* 67(4): 19–25.

Metcalf, Jacob, Emanuel Moss and danah boyd. 2019. [Owning Ethics: Corporate Logics, Silicon Valley, and the Institutionalization of Ethics](#), *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 86(2): 449-476.

Mosco, Vincent. 2005. *The Digital Sublime*. MIT Press.

Rose, Nikolas. *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.

September 28. Enclosures

Zuboff, Shoshana. 2015. "[Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization](#)." *Journal of Information Technology* 30(1): 75–89.

Cohen, Julie E. 2019. *Between Truth and Power: The Legal Constructions of Informational Capitalism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Pp1-74.

Pistor, Katharina. 2020. "[Rule by Data: The End of Markets? The Market as a Legal Construct](#)." *Law and Contemporary Problems* 83(2): 101–124.

Sadowski, Jathan. 2020. "[The Internet of Landlords: Digital Platforms and New Mechanisms of Rentier Capitalism](#)." *Antipode* 52(2): 562–880.

Recommended

Birch, Kean. 2020. "[Technoscience Rent: Toward a Theory of Rentiership for Technoscientific Capitalism](#)." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 45(1): 3–33.

Culpepper, Pepper D., and Kathleen Thelen. 2020. "[Are We All Amazon Primed? Consumers and the Politics of Platform Power](#)." *Comparative Political Studies* 53(2): 288–318.

Fields, Desiree. 2019. "[Automated Landlord: Digital Technologies and Post-Crisis Financial Accumulation](#)." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*.

Kapczynski, Amy. 2020. "[The Law of Informational Capitalism](#)." *The Yale Law Journal* 56.

Morozov, Evgeny. 2019. "[Digital Socialism? The Socialist Calculation Debate in the Age of Big Data](#)." *New Left Review*, no. 116/117.

Zuboff, Shoshana. 2019. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. Public Affairs.

Ivan Ascher. 2018. *Portfolio Society. On the Capitalist Mode of Production*. Zone Books.

October 5. The Promise of Inclusion

Greene, Daniel. 2021. *The Promise of Access. Technology, Inequality and the Political Economy of Hope*. MIT Press.

Recommended

Arora, Payal. 2019. *The Next Billion Users*. Harvard University Press.

Fourcade, Marion. 2021. "[Ordinal Citizenship](#)." *The British Journal of Sociology* 72(2): 154–73.

Gabor, Daniela, and Sally Brooks. 2017. "[The Digital Revolution in Financial Inclusion: International Development in the Fintech Era](#)." *New Political Economy* 22(4): 423–36.

Teräs, Marko, Juha Suoranta, Hanna Teräs, and Mark Curcher. 2020. "[Post-Covid-19 Education and Education Technology 'Solutionism': A Seller's Market](#)." *Postdigital Science and Education* 2(3): 863–78.

October 12. Work

Levy, Karen. 2015. "[The Contexts of Control: Information, Power, and Truck-Driving Work](#)." *The Information Society* 31(2): 160–74.

Gray, Mary and Siddarth Suri. 2019. *Ghost Work. How to Stop Silicon Valley from Building a New Global Underclass*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Pp1-37.

Christin, Angèle. 2018. "[Counting Clicks: Quantification and Variation in Web Journalism in the United States and France](#)." *American Journal of Sociology* 123(5): 1382-1415.

Duffy, Brooke Erin. 2018. *(Not) Just for the Fun of It: The Labor of Social Media Production*. Pp45–135. Yale University Press.

Recommended

Ajunwa, Ifeoma, Kate Crawford, and Jason Schultz. 2017. "[Limitless Worker Surveillance](#)." *California Law Review* 105(3): 735–76.

Aneesh, Aneesh. 2009. "[Global Labor: Algoratic Modes of Organization.](#)" *Sociological Theory* 27(4): 347–70.

Benanav, Aaron. 2020. *Automation and the Future of Work*. Verso.

Rosenblat, Alex, and Luke Stark. 2016. "Algorithmic Labor and Information Asymmetries: A Case Study of Uber's Drivers." [International Journal of Communication](#).

Shestakofsky, Benjamin. 2017. "[Working Algorithms: Software Automation and the Future of Work.](#)" *Work and Occupations* 44(4): 376–423.

Vallas, Steven, and Juliet B. Schor. 2020. "[What Do Platforms Do? Understanding the Gig Economy.](#)" *Annual Review of Sociology* 46(1): 273–94.

Van Oort, Madison. 2019. "[The Emotional Labor of Surveillance: Digital Control in Fast Fashion Retail.](#)" *Critical Sociology* 45(7–8): 1167–79.

October 19. Sorting

Oscar Gandy Jr. 1993. *The Panoptic Sort. A Political Economy of Personal Information*. Boulder, Co: Westview Press. Pp1-52. (or new edition, 2021)

Marion Fourcade & Kieran Healy. 2017. "[Seeing Like a Market.](#)" *Socio-Economic Review* 15(1): 9–29.

Kiviat, Barbara. 2019. "[The Art of Deciding with Data: Evidence from How Employers Translate Credit Reports into Hiring Decisions.](#)" *Socio-Economic Review* 17(2): 283–309.

Engelmann, Severin, Mo Chen, Lorenz Dang, and Jens Grossklags. 2021. "[Blacklists and Redlists in the Chinese Social Credit System: Diversity, Flexibility, and Comprehensiveness.](#)" In *Proceedings of the 2021 AAAI/ACM Conference on AI, Ethics, and Society*, 78–88. AIES '21. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery.

Recommended

Espeland, Wendy Nelson, and Michael Sauder. 2016. *Engines of Anxiety: Academic Rankings, Reputation, and Accountability*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Feher, Michel. 2018. *Rated Agency. Investee Politics in a Speculative Age*. Zone Books.

Gerlitz, Carolin, and Celia Lury. 2014. "[Social Media and Self-Evaluating Assemblages: On Numbers, Orderings and Values.](#)" *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* 15(2): 174–88.

O'Neil, Catherine. 2016. *Weapons of Math Destruction*. Broadway Books.

Mau, Steffen. 2019. *The Metric Society: On the Quantification of the Social*. John Wiley & Sons.

Mayer-Schönberg, Viktor and Kenneth Cukier. 2014. *Big Data. A Revolution That Will Transform How We Live, Work and Think*. Mariner Books.

October 26. The Digital Poorhouse

Eubanks, Virginia. 2017. *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Recommended

Brayne, Sarah. 2020. *Predict and Surveil: Data, Discretion, and the Future of Policing*. Oxford University Press.

Lageson, Sarah. 2020. *Digital Punishment: Privacy, Stigma, and the Harms of Data-Driven Criminal Justice*. Oxford University Press.

Frank Pasquale. 2018. "[A Rule of Persons, Not Machines: The Limits of Legal Automation.](#)" *George Washington Law Review*, Forthcoming; U of Maryland Legal Studies Research Paper No. 20018-08.

November 2. The New Jim Code

Benjamin, Ruha. 2019. *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. John Wiley & Sons.

Recommended

Barocas, Solon and Andrew Selbst. 2016. "[Big Data's Disparate Impact](#)" *California Law Review* 104.

Browne, Simone. 2015. *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Duke University Press.

Buolamwini, Joy, and Timnit Gebru. 2018. "[Gender Shades: Intersectional Accuracy Disparities in Commercial Gender Classification](#)." In *Proceedings of Machine Learning Research*, 81:1–15.

Gray, Kishonna L. 2017. "[They're Just Too Urban?: Black Gamers Streaming on Twitch](#)." In *Digital Sociologies*, edited by Jessie Daniels, Karen Gregory, and Tressie McMillan Cottom, 1st ed., 355–68. Bristol University Press.

Kroll, Joshua, Solon Barocas, Ed Felten, Joel Reidenberg, David Robinson, and Harlan Yu. 2017. "[Accountable Algorithms](#)." *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 165(3): 633-706

Noble, Safiya Umoja. 2018. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. NYU Press.

November 9. The Uses of Social Media

Stuart, Forrest. 2020. *Ballad of the Bullet: Gangs, Drill Music, and the Power of Online Infamy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Recommended

Bucher, Taina. 2018. *If..Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Tripodi, Francesca. 2018. "[Searching for Alternative Facts. Analyzing Scriptural Inference in Conservative News Practices](#)." *Data and Society* report.

Stark, Luke. 2020. "[The Emotive Politics of Digital Mood Tracking](#)." *New Media & Society* 22(11): 2039–57.

Ziewitz, Malte. 2019. "[Rethinking Gaming: The Ethical Work of Optimization in Web Search Engines](#)." *Social Studies of Science* 49(5): 707–31.

November 16. Democracy

Golumbia, David. 2016. *The Politics of Bitcoin: Software as Right-Wing Extremism*. University of Minnesota Press.

Nadler, Anthony, Matthew Crain, and Joan Donovan. "[Weaponizing the Digital Influence Machine: The Political Perils of Online Ad Tech](#)," n.d.

Davies, William. 2015. "[The Return of Social Government: From 'Socialist Calculation' to 'Social Analytics'](#)." *European Journal of Social Theory* 18(4): 431–50.

Recommended

O'Neil, Catherine. 2022. *The Shame Machine. Who Profits in the Age of Humiliation.*

Sarah Sobieraj. 2021. *Credible Threat: Attacks Against Women Online and the Future of Democracy.* Oxford University Press.

November 23. No Class

November 30. Moral Economies

Amoore, Louise. 2020. *Cloud Ethics. Algorithms and the Attributes of Ourselves and Others.* Duke University Press.

Recommended

Benthall, Sebastian, and Jake Goldenfein. "[Artificial Intelligence and the Purpose of Social Systems.](#)" In *Proceedings of the 2021 AAAI/ACM Conference on AI, Ethics, and Society*, 3–12. AIES '21. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery, 2021.

Cheney-Lippold, John. "[Jus Algorithmi: How the National Security Agency Remade Citizenship.](#)" *International Journal of Communication* 10 (2016): 1721–42.

Johns, Fleur. "[From Planning to Prototypes: New Ways of Seeing Like a State.](#)" *Modern Law Review* 82 (2019): 833–63.

Kear, Mark. 2021. "[The Moral Economy of the Algorithmic Crowd: Possessive Collectivism and Techno-Economic Rentiership.](#)" *Competition & Change.*

December 7. Paper presentations. 4-hour class and dinner.