WORK, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY

Instructor: Benjamin Shestakofsky   Sociology 190
University of California, Berkeley   Spring 2018

<u>Seminar</u>   <u>Office Hours</u>
Mondays, Noon-2pm   Mondays, 4-6pm
104 Barrows   434 Barrows
Sign up at: https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/lajra

COURSE OVERVIEW

"Computers and automation have captured man's imagination. That is to say, like the psychiatrist's ink blot, they serve the imagination as symbols for all that is mysterious, potential, portentous. For when man is faced with ambiguity, with complex shadows he only partly understands, he rejects that ambiguity and reads meanings into the shadows. And when he lacks the knowledge and technical means to find the real meanings of the shadows, he reads them into the meanings in his own heart and mind, uses them to give external shape to his private hopes and fears. So the ambiguous stimulus, the ink blot, becomes a mirror. When man describes it, he depicts not some external reality, but himself."
   - Herbert Simon, *The Shape of Automation* (1965)

Technological change is a fundamental feature of capitalist economies. The introduction of new machinery transforms production processes; technology changes how employers control workers and how workers evade employer control; and innovative products generate new consumer demand.

Throughout the history of industrial capitalism, technology has been an "ink blot"—or, more recently, a "black box"—onto which people project their hopes and fears about how we work and live. To some, technological innovations hold the promise of liberating us from painful or tedious toil, leveling inequalities between workers and management, elevating our skills, and helping us realize our potential as human beings. To others, technology promises to degrade our experiences of work, alienate us from ourselves and nature, increase inequality, and rob us of our livelihoods.

Today, questions surrounding the relationship between work and technology remain as vital as ever. Software companies are creating new ways of connecting buyers and sellers of labor online. The rise of "big data" and "machine learning" underlie new forms of artificial intelligence and robotics that could have implications for nearly every aspect of work and employment. How do software algorithms affect how employers hire and monitor their workforces? How are technology companies like Uber changing what it means to be an employee? Or will these questions soon be irrelevant when smart machines take over all of our jobs?

This course draws on sociological and social scientific research and theorizing to conceptualize the complex and dynamic relationship between work and technology. Rather than viewing technology as an immutable force that sweeps across societies and leaves social change in its wake, we will examine how the design, implementation, and outcomes of technological change are imbricated in political, economic, and social forces. We will mostly, though not exclusively, focus on developments in and case studies of work and technology in the United States.

We will begin by examining theoretical perspectives on the historical interplay between work and technology. Then, we will consider contemporary issues, building dialogues between our theoretical groundwork and empirical evidence to trace continuities and disjunctures. By the end of the course, you will be equipped to interrogate the role of technology in capitalism's past, understand its relation to our present age of digital disruption, and imagine the possibilities for our uncertain future.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course is organized around close readings of texts, analytic writing, and deliberate thought and discussion. Each of the topics that we study will offer a new lens—indeed, a new language—for viewing and describing the world around us. Just like learning any language, it is impossible to fully grasp the vocabularies of sociology without speaking them! Our seminar setting affords us the opportunity to build our fluency in the texts and concepts covered in the readings through dialogue with one another.

Our general goals for class meetings are threefold. First, we will solidify our comprehension of the core concepts of the course and the arguments presented in our readings. Second, we will hone our skills as critical thinkers, analytical writers, and active discussants. And third, we will develop our sociological imaginations to bring sociology to life in our world and our own lives.

Course Texts
You will find virtually all of our readings in a course reader, available for purchase at Copy Central (2576 Bancroft Way). The only exception is Peter Frase's *Four Futures*, which is available for purchase from both online and brick-and-mortar booksellers. Please let me know as soon as possible if you need assistance ordering a copy and I will secure one for you.

Please note that our reading list will be subject to change as the semester proceeds. This will allow us to modify our readings to adapt to our ongoing discussions and to track new developments in technology and scholarship. I will inform you at least a week in advance of any changes to the reading list.

Grade Breakdown
- Class Participation: 20%
- Reading Responses: 30%
- Research Paper: 50%

Class Participation
Attending class and participating in our discussions are vital components of your experience in this course. Your questions, comments, and ideas are what will bring our course materials to life.

Your participation begins with coming to class having carefully completed and annotated the readings. Because our discussions will be grounded in these texts, it is imperative that you bring the assigned readings to each class session. I encourage you to briefly browse through the text and your notes before class to ensure that you are ready to participate in a discussion of our course materials. We will begin each class with an opportunity for everybody to share the questions pertaining to the reading that they are most interested in discussing.

To receive a high participation grade, you need to demonstrate your engagement with course materials. There are many of ways to do this, including: sharing thoughts during discussions and small-group activities, active listening, thoughtful preparation, helping a classmate understand a concept, bringing a relevant news article or example to the class' attention, or attending office hours to discuss content in a more individualized setting.

Attendance
It won't be possible for you to actively participate if you aren't in class. *For each unexcused absence, your final participation grade will decrease by 20 percent*. In order for an absence to be considered excused, I require prior notification of your absence and a clear explanation as to why you are not able to attend class. Note that while this is necessary, it does not guarantee that your absence will be counted as excused. You may be asked to provide documentation to verify the cause of your absence (e.g., doctor's notes).

Attendance will be taken during each class; students who repeatedly arrive late to class may be considered absent. If you anticipate any scheduling conflicts that may affect your attendance, please discuss these with me at the beginning of the semester.

Discussion Guidelines
Some students will already feel comfortable speaking in class. For others, it will require courage. My hope is that, regardless of where you start, this class will challenge you to push yourself beyond your comfort zone, whether that means speaking more, becoming a more active listener, or both. The sooner you speak out in class, the easier it will be for you to continue to thoughtfully participate in our discussions. I encourage you to speak with me in office hours so that I can help support your participation goals.

Our course materials may be open to a variety of interpretations, and yours may differ from those of your colleagues or your instructor. *There are no "wrong" comments or questions in our seminar*, so long as they are respectfully offered and contribute to a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere for all participants. We are here to learn from each other and to support one another's learning.

Reading Responses
Writing is thinking! Because our class meets on Mondays, we will miss two meetings due to

holidays. This means that you will complete ten sets of readings. Each week, you will be expected to complete a brief reading response essay of 250 words (and no more!). You must cite or (very briefly) quote one or more of our texts, including page number(s), in your response. Please use parenthetical citation, e.g. (Smith 4) to cite page 4 of the text by Smith. Questions will be provided to guide your responses. These essays will help you synthesize, analyze, assess, and engage with the arguments and evidence presented in the readings. Developing these skills will help you successfully complete your research paper. Your reading responses must be submitted via the Assignments page on bCourses by noon every Sunday (24 hours before our class meetings).

Research Paper
You will also complete a seminar paper (12-15 pages) due a week after our last class. In this paper, you will attempt to explore and answer a significant sociological question about work and technology. You may wish to examine a topic that we covered during the semester in greater depth, or you may want to bring our analytical tools to bear on a topic that was not covered.

The research paper will be broken into smaller components. This should help to mitigate the dangers of procrastination while allowing you to receive written feedback from me and from your colleagues in periodic in-class writing workshops. These components will include: 1) a proposal, 2) a review of the state of knowledge related to your topic, 3) an annotated outline, and 4) a final paper. Each of the first three assignments will account for five percent of your grade, and the final paper will account for 35 percent. Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade per day.

RESOURCES

Academic Integrity
Please read and familiarize yourself with UC Berkeley's Code of Student Conduct regarding academic dishonesty: http://students.berkeley.edu/osl/sja.asp?id=1143. Note that plagiarism is not limited to copying an entire paper. Using quotes without properly citing them or using ideas without acknowledging their source also constitute plagiarism. Any form of cheating or plagiarism will result in disciplinary action.

Disabled Students Program and Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
If you have a documented need for special accommodations in class or on assignments, I will be happy to work out these arrangements with you. If this applies to you, please bring me a letter from your DSP specialist as soon as possible. Student athletes, parents, and others whose commitments might affect their ability to attend class or complete assignments on time should also speak with me at the beginning of the semester about potential conflicts.

Writing Resources

The UC Berkeley Department of Sociology has published a writing guide to promote sociologically informed college writing. It includes useful tips for composing strong and effective analytic papers and for improving your general writing skills. You may want to purchase a hard copy at Copy Central; a free online version is available at: http://sociology.berkeley.edu/documents/student_services/Writing%20for%20Sociology%20Guide%20Second%20Edition.pdf.

Student Learning Center (SLC)
The Student Learning Center (SLC) Writing Program operates under the assumption that all writers, regardless of their experience and abilities, benefit from informed, individualized, and personal feedback on their writing. The program's professional staff and trained peer tutors work with writers engaged in any stage of the writing process—from brainstorming paper topics, to formulating and organizing arguments, to developing editing skills. While tutors will not "proofread" students' papers, they will help students learn to address issues of style, syntax, grammar, and usage in their writing. Tutors are trained to work with non-native speakers of English and with writers from a variety of disciplines. For more information call (510) 642-7332 or visit http://slc.berkeley.edu/writing.

Office Hours
Each member of the class is required to visit me for a quick ten-minute meeting during the first two weeks of class so that we can get to know each other and I can learn more about your interests and about how I might help you with aspects of the course that you anticipate finding most challenging. After that, I *strongly* encourage everybody to attend office hours as frequently as possible, either individually or in small groups. This means you! These meetings can be to clarify topics from readings or discussion, for help with writing, or to discuss anything else related to the course topic. Even if you don't have anything pressing to discuss, a quick chat will help me get to know you better, will improve my understanding of how you're finding the course material, and will allow me to give you feedback on how you're doing in the course. Just as important, office hours provide me with an invaluable opportunity to get feedback from you about how our class is going, and how well I'm doing with helping you meet our course goals.

I use a signup system for office hours so that we can all schedule our time more effectively. To attend office hours, please sign up for a time slot *before office hours have begun* here: https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/lajra. I will announce any open office hours that will not require signups.

If you need to reach me regarding setting up appointments or other administrative matters, you may e-mail me at shesta.berkeley@gmail.com. I will respond to you in as timely a manner as possible. Please allow up to 24 hours for my response on weekdays and up to 48 hours on weekends or during breaks.

Week 1: January 22
Introductions

Week 2: January 29
Work in the 21st Century
- Appelbaum, Binyamin. 2017. "The Jobs Americans Do." *The New York Times Magazine*.
- Sweet, Stephen and Peter Meiksins. 2017. "New Products, New Ways of Working, and the New Economy." Pp. 27-56 in *Changing Contours of Work: Jobs and Opportunities in the New Economy*, 3rd ed.
- Levy, Frank, and Richard J. Murnane. 2004. "New Divisions of Labor." Pp. 1-10 in *The New Division of Labor*.

Week 3: February 5
What is Technology, and How is it "Social"?
- Nye, David E. 2006. "Can We Define 'Technology'?" Pp. 1-15 in *Technology Matters: Questions to Live With*.
- Bailey, Diane and Paul Leonardi. 2015. "Explaining Technology Choices in the Workplace: Proposing an Occupational Perspective." Chapter 1 in *Technology Choices*.
- Wajcman, Judy. 1995. "Feminist Theories of Technology. In *SAGE Handbook of Science and Technology Studies*.

Week 4: February 12
Technology and Work I: De-skilling or Up-skilling?
- Braverman, Harry. 1974. "Scientific Management" "The Primary Effects of Scientific Management." Pp. 85-138 in *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*.
- Zuboff, Shoshanna. 1988. "The Abstraction of Industrial Work." Pp. 58-96 in *In the Age of the Smart Machine*.

NO CLASS FEBRUARY 19: President's Day Holiday

ONE-PAGE RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20

Week 5: February 26
Technology and Work II: Labor-saving or -intensifying?
- Keynes, John Maynard. 1930. "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren." From *Essays in Persuasion*.
- Samuel, Raphael. 1977. "Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in mid-Victorian Britain." *History Workshop Journal* 3(1):6-72.
- Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. 1983. "Twentieth-Century Changes in Household Technology." Chapter 4 in *More Work For Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*.

Week 6: March 5
Technology and Globalization: The Production of Placelessness
- Aneesh, A. 2015. "Neutral Accent." Pp. 53-76 in *Neutral Accent: How Language, Labor, and Life Become Global*.
- Graham, Mark, Isis Hjorth, and Vili Lehdonvirta. 2017. "Digital Labour and Development: Impacts of Global Digital Labour Platforms and the Gig Economy on Worker Livelihoods." *Transfer* 23(2):135-162.

Week 7: March 12
Technology and the Acceleration of Work Time
- Wajcman, Judy. 2015. "Working with Constant Connectivity." Pp. 87-109 in *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism*.
- Snyder, Benjamin H. 2016. "Chapter 3: The Financialization of Time-Space" and "Chapter 4: The Deregulation of Time-Space." Pp. 55-127 in *The Disrupted Workplace: Time and the Moral Order of Flexible Capitalism*.

Week 8: March 19
Algorithmic Management: Accountability, Bias, Inequality, and Resistance
- Peck, Don. 2013. "They're Watching You at Work." *The Atlantic*.
- O'Neil, Cathy. 2016. "Ineligible to Serve: Getting a Job" and "Sweating Bullets: On the Job." Pp. 105-140 in *Weapons of Math Destruction*.
- Irani, Lilly C. and M. Six Silberman. 2013. "Turkopticon: Interrupting Worker Invisibility in Amazon Mechanical Turk." *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*.

THREE-PAGE REVIEW OF STATE OF KNOWLEDGE DUE

NO CLASS MARCH 26: Spring Break

Week 9: April 2
The Platform Economy and the "Uber-ization" of Work: New Efficiencies, Hidden Costs
- Bennhold, Katrin. 2017. "On London's Streets, Black Cabs and Uber Fight for a Future." *New York Times.*
- Rosenblat, Alex and Luke Stark. 2016. "Algorithmic Labor and Information Asymmetries: A Case Study of Uber's Drivers." *International Journal of Communication.*
- Schor, Juliet B. and William Attwood-Charles. 2016. "The Sharing Economy: Labor, Inequality and Sociability on For-Profit Platforms." *Sociology Compass* 11(8):1-16.

Week 10: April 9
Artificial Intelligence and the End of Work?
- Brynjolfsson, Erik and Andrew McAfee. 2014. " The Skills of the New Machines:

Technology Races Ahead." Pp. 13-37 in *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*.
- Spencer, David. 2017. "Work in and Beyond the Second Machine Age: The Politics of Production and Digital Technologies." *Work, Employment and Society*.
- Goodman, Peter S. 2017. "The Robots Are Coming, and Sweden is Fine." *The New York Times*.
- Autor, David H. 2015. "Why Are There Still So Many Jobs? The History and Future of Workplace Automation." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 29(3):3-30.

Week 11: April 16
Imagining Future Worlds of Work
- Bernhardt, Annette. 2017. "Beyond Basic Income: Claiming Our Right to Govern Technology." *Boston Review*.
- Frase, Peter. 2016. *Four Futures: Life After Capitalism*. (*Not in reader: Please purchase book*.)

ANNOTATED OUTLINE OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE

Week 12: April 23
Student Symposium: Presentation and Discussion of Research Papers (Part I)

R&R Week: April 30
Student Symposium: Presentation and Discussion of Research Papers (Part II)

RESEARCH PAPER DUE MONDAY, MAY 7th, 12:00PM