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SOCIOLOGY 120T
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Office hours: Time TBD - Social Sciences Building 474

Note that this is a live document: always return to this page for updates and changes

AI, Economy, and Society

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, frame and pursue their social mission and economic purpose; and how they sort, slot, and know populations and individuals. This course will analyze the specificity and power of digital technology as a driver of capital accumulation, a technique of government, an engine of social difference, and a cultural force with a politics and moral lexicon of its own.

Class goals and expectations

This course draws on research from a wide range of fields beyond sociology. 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!

GSI's

Your GSI's for this course are Maria Smith (mariasmith@berkeley.edu, sections 101 & 102) and Timothy Ahn (timahn7@berkeley.edu, sections 103 & 104).

Assignments

- Two short papers: 10% each
- Active participation in class and section: 30%
- Midterm exam, in class: 25%
- Final exam, in class: 25%.
- NOTE: in the event of a strike, the midterm or the final exam (or both) will be replaced by a test using multiple choice questions.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance

Attendance to both sections and lectures is mandatory.

Important: we will take attendance at every class during the first two weeks of classes, and randomly afterwards. If you miss a class during the first two weeks without notifying me, you will be automatically dropped from the course on September 12.

Academic honesty

You must in no way misrepresent your work or be party to another student's failure to maintain academic integrity. It is your responsibility to check the code of academic integrity at <https://conduct.berkeley.edu/integrity/>. The standard penalty for violations of academic integrity in this course will be an F grade for the course. Written assignments must include complete bibliographies and follow proper citation practices (including page numbers for direct quotes from scholarly texts). AI writing tools are not permitted in the midterm exam and in the final exam. They are permitted in the memos, as long as you provide a clear explanation of how and where you used them, as well as a personal reflection on the pertinence / non-pertinence of the automatically-generated portions of text.

Grading

You will accumulate points throughout the semester. The total # of points for all assignments is 100. Your course grade will be calculated as follows:

Grade	Points	
A	100	to 93.33
A-	< 93.33	to 90.0
B+	< 90.0	to 86.66
B	< 86.66	to 83.33
B-	< 83.33	to 80.0
C+	< 80.0	to 76.66
C	< 76.66	to 73.33
C-	< 73.33	to 70.0
D+	< 70.0	to 66.66
D	< 66.66	to 63.33
D-	< 63.33	to 60
F	< 60	to 0.0

Late assignments

Assignments submitted late will be subject to a one-notch grade deduction for every day they are late (e.g. B+ to B).

Grievances

If you wish to contest a grade, you must come first to your section leader and the head GSI submit an explanation of why you think the grading is unfair. Only if you are still dissatisfied should you come to me. Before I will listen to your case, however, I will first want to hear from your GSIs. I will not change any grade without first discussing it with them. Please bear in mind that your grade may move upwards or downwards should I decide to re-grade your paper.

DSP Accommodations

If you have an accommodation letter from the Disabled Students Program (DSP), please contact me or sign up for office hours as soon as possible so that we can make early arrangements for these accommodations.

Mental Health and Wellness

All students — regardless of background or identity — may experience a range of issues that can become barriers to learning. These issues include, but are not limited to, strained relationships, anxiety, depression, alcohol and other drug problems, difficulties with concentration, sleep, and eating, and/or lack of motivation. Such mental health concerns can diminish both academic performance and the capacity to participate in daily activities. If you need mental health support, or are concerned about a friend, UC Berkeley offers many services, such as free short-term counseling at University Health Services. An excellent campus website having links to many resources is: <http://recalibrate.berkeley.edu/>. Another campus website addressing mental health services in specific reference to this time of the coronavirus pandemic is: <https://uhs.berkeley.edu/coronavirus/student-mental-health>.

COURSE SCHEDULE

August 29, first day of classes – December 7, last day of classes - Fall recess, November

Note: Everything marked “here” is also on bCourses.

PART I. THE AGE OF INFORMATION

August 29: Introduction. The Digital Condition.

Brubaker, Rogers. 2022. “Introduction.” Pp1-19 in *Hyperconnectivity and Its Discontents*. Medford: Polity. (bCourses)

Recommended

Jones, Matthew L. “AI in History.” *The American Historical Review* 128, no. 3 (September 1, 2023): 1360–67. [here](#)

Winner, Langdon. “Do Artifacts Have Politics?” *Daedalus* 109, no. 1 (1980): 121–36. [here](#)

Assignment: fill out anonymous survey (due 11:59pm)

September 3. Movie in class. (Professor Fourcade out of town).

Documentary: [The People's Republic of Desire](#)

Mandatory showing. Please take notes.

September 5. Desire and Profit.

Discussion of *The People's Republic of Desire*.

Fourcade, Marion, and Kieran Healy. 2024. “The Box of Delights.” In *The Ordinal Society*. Harvard University Press. (bCourses)

Recommended:

Andrejevic, Mark. 2013. *Infoglut*. Routledge.

Bogost, Ian. 2015. “The Cathedral of Computation.” *The Atlantic*, January 15. [here](#)

September 10. The Shadow of Karl Marx and Max Weber

Wark, McKenzie. 2004. “Abstraction” and “Class.” In *A Hacker Manifesto*. Harvard University Press. (bCourses)

O’Gieblyn, Meghan. “Image.” Pp1-40 in *God, human, animal, machine: Technology, metaphor, and the search for meaning*. Anchor 2021. (bCourses)

Recommended

Wiener, Norbert. 1948. “Cybernetics.” *Scientific American* 179(5): 14-19. [here](#)

September 12. Nothing is Virtual.

Sadowski, Jathan. 2018. “Potemkin AI.” *Real Life Magazine*. [here](#)

Ensmenger, Nathan. “The Environmental History of Computing.” *Technology and Culture* 59, no. 4 (2018): S7–33. [here](#)

Recommended

Crawford, Kate. 2021. *Atlas of AI*. Yale University Press.

Dourish, Paul. “A History of Interaction.” Pp1-23 in *Where the Action Is. The Foundations of Embodied Interaction*. MIT Press (bCourses)

Ensmenger, Nathan. 2021 “The Cloud is a Factory.” Pp29-47 in *Your Computer is on Fire*, ed. By T. Mullaney, B. Peters, M. Hicks and K. Philip. Ecco. (bCourses)

Gonzalez-Monserrate, Steven. “Downtime Is Not an Option – Meet the Stewards of the Cloud.” *Aeon*. [here](#)

September 17. Myth and culture in Silicon Valley

Winner, Langdon. 1997. “Cyberlibertarian Myths and the Prospects for Community.” *ACM SIGCAS Computers and Society* 27(3): 14–19. [here](#)

Asparouhova, Nadia. 2022. “Idea Machines.” Blog post, May 12. [here](#).

Recommended

Barlow, John Perry. 2016. “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace.” Electronic Frontier Foundation. [here](#)

Barbrook, Richard, and Andy Cameron. 1996. “The California Ideology.” *Science as Culture* 6(1): 44–72. [here](#)

Mosco, Vincent. 2005. “Myth and Cyberspace.” Pp14-22 in *The Digital Sublime. Myth, Power, and Cyberspace*. The MIT Press. (bCourses)

PART II. GENESIS OF THE DATA ECONOMY

September 19. Controlling Labor

Whittaker, Meredith. 2023. “Origin Stories: Plantations, Computers, and Industrial Control,” *Logics Magazine* 19. [here](#)

Fred Turner. 2023. You Call This ‘Flexible Work’? *The New York Times Magazine*, April 12. [here](#)

Recommended

Dubal, Veena. 2023. “On Algorithmic Wage Discrimination.” *Columbia Law Review* 123(7). [here](#)

Rahman, Hatim A. 2024. “A New Labor Market Paradigm.” Pp28-54 in *Inside the Invisible Cage*. University of California Press.

Teachout, Zephyr. “Surveillance Wages: A Taxonomy.” LPE Blog. [here](#)

Memo 1 due, 11:59pm

September 24. Calculating Risk

Bouk, Dan. 2015. "Insurance and the Origin of Big Data." *Le Monde diplomatique*, November 1. [here](#)

Lauer, Josh. 2020. "Plastic Surveillance: Payment Cards and the History of Transactional Data, 1888 to Present." *Big Data & Society* 7(1). [here](#)

Recommended

Bogost, Ian. 2015. "The Cathedral of Computation." *The Atlantic*, January 15. [here](#)

Bouk, Dan. 2017. "The History and Political Economy of Personal Data over the Last Two Centuries in Three Acts." *Osiris* 32(1): 85–106. [here](#)

O'Dwyer, Rachel. 2019. Review of *Stained in Red*, by Josh Lauer. *London Review of Books*, April 4. [here](#)

September 26. Identifying People

Funk, McKenzie. 2023. "The Man Who Trapped Us in Databases." *The New York Times*, September 22, sec. Magazine. [here](#)

Hill, Kashmir. 2023. "Tech Issues." Pp302-308 in *Your Face Belongs to Us. A Secretive Start-up's Quest to End Privacy As We Know It*. Random House. (bCourses)xs

Recommended

Stalder, Felix, and David Lyon. 2003. "Electronic Identity Cards and Social Classification." Pp77-93 in *Surveillance as Social Sorting: Privacy, Risk, and Digital Discrimination*, by David Lyon. Psychology Press. (bCourses)

Brensinger, Jordan and Gil Eyal. 2021. "The Sociology of Personal Identification." *Sociological Theory* 39(4): 265–92. [here](#)

October 1. Selling Stuff

Turow, Joseph. "What Marketers See in Voice." Pp 70-109 in *The Voice Catchers: How Marketers Listen In to Exploit Your Feelings, Your Privacy, and Your Wallet*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021. (bCourses)

Recommended

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

PART III. CONCEPTUAL INTERLUDE: TECHNOLOGY AND POWER.

October 3. The Nature of Power

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

del Nido, Juan. 2022. "On Gladatorial Truths." Pp89-112 in *Taxis vs. Uber. Courts, Markets, and Technology in Buenos Aires*. Stanford University Press. (bCourses)

Recommended

Galloway, Alexander R. 2006. "Protocol." *Theory, Culture & Society* 23(2–3): 317–20. [here](#)

October 8: Data Capitalism as Racial Capitalism

Couldry, Nick, and Ulises A. Mejias. 2019. "Data Colonialism: Rethinking Big Data's Relation to the Contemporary Subject." *Television & New Media* 20(4): 336–49. [here](#)

McMillan Cottom, Tressie. 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. [here](#)

Recommended

Christin, Angèle, and Yingdan Lu. 2023. "The Influencer Pay Gap: Platform Labor Meets Racial Capitalism." *New Media & Society*. [here](#)

Hammer, Ricarda, and Tina M. Park. 2021. "The Ghost in the Algorithm: Racial Colonial Capitalism and the Digital Age." In *Global Historical Sociology of Race and Racism*, edited by Alexandre I.R. White and Katrina Quisumbing King, 38:221–49. *Political Power and Social Theory*. Emerald Pub. [here](#)

October 10. Concentration and Network Power

Srnicek, Nick. 2022. "Data, Compute, Labor." Pp241-261 in Graham Mark and Fabian Ferrari eds. *Digital Work in the Planetary Market*. MIT Press. (bCourses)

October 15. Surveillance Capitalism and Review

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

Recommended

Andrejevic, Mark. 2013. "Future Glut." Pp62-76 in *Infloglut. How Too Much Information is Changing the Way We Think and Know*. Routledge. (bCourses)

October 17. Midterm exam (in class)

PART IV. DIGITAL CAPITALISM AT WORK

October 22. The Great Unbundling

Fourcade, Marion, and Kieran Healy. 2024. "The Great Unbundling." In *The Ordinal Society*. Harvard University Press 2024. (bCourses)

Doctorow, Cory. 2023. "The Enshittification of Tiktok." *Wired Magazine*. January 23. [here](#).

Recommended

Doctorow, Cory. 2023. "The enshittification of garage-door openers reveals a vast and deadly rot." *Pluralistic*. November 9. [here](#)

October 24. The Great Rebundling.

Fourcade, Marion, and Kieran Healy. 2024. "Layered Financialization." In *The Ordinal Society*. Harvard University Press 2024. (bCourses)

Jackson, Trevor. 2022. "The Crypto Crisis." *Dissent Magazine* (blog), August 8. [here](#)

Recommended

Bogost, Ian. "The Internet Is Just Investment Banking Now." *The Atlantic*, February 4, 2022. [here](#)

Sadowski, Jathan, and Kaitlin Beegle. 2023. "Expansive and Extractive Networks of Web3." *Big Data & Society* 10(1). [here](#)

October 29. Disciplined and Commodified Selves

Schüll, Natasha Dow. 2016. "Data for Life: Wearable Technology and the Design of Self-Care." *BioSocieties* 11(3): 317–33. [here](#)

Marwick, Alice E. 2015. "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy." *Public Culture* 27, no. 1 (75): 137–60. [here](#)

Recommended

Rogers Brubaker. 2023. "Selves" in *Hyperconnectivity and Its Discontents*. Politics. Medford: Polity.

Jin, Dal Yong. "Online Game Fans: New Audience Commodities in the New Media Era?" 2010. *Korea's Online Gaming Empire*. MIT Press. (bCourses)

Klein, Naomi. 2023. "My Failed Brand, Or Call Me By Her Name." Pp 46-67 in *Doppelgänger: A Trip into the Mirror World*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. (bCourses)

October 31. Visible and Invisible Selves

Noble, Safiya Umoja. 2018. "Searching for Black Girls." In *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. NYU Press. (bCourses)

Stuart, Forrest. 2020. "Code of the Tweet: Urban Gang Violence in the Social Media Age." *Social Problems* 67(2): 191–207. [here](#)

Recommended

Bucher, Taina. 2012. "Want to Be on the Top? Algorithmic Power and the Threat of Invisibility on Facebook." *New Media & Society* 14(7): 1164–80. [here](#)

November 5. Deskilling

Levy, Karen. 2015. "The contexts of control: Information, power, and truck-driving work." *The Information Society* 31(2): 160-174. [here](#)

Eubanks, Virginia. 2018. "A Child Abuse Prediction Model Fails Poor Families." *Wired*. January 15. [here](#)

Recommended

Vertesi, Janet, Adam Goldstein, Diana Enriquez, Larry Liu, and Katherine Miller. 2020. "Pre-Automation: Insourcing and Automating the Gig Economy." *Sociologica* 14(3): 167-193. [here](#)

Eubanks, Virginia. 2018. *Automating Inequality*. St Martin's Press.

November 7. Labor Coordination and Resistance

Lei, Ya-Wen. “Delivering Solidarity: Platform Architecture and Collective Contention in China’s Platform Economy.” *American Sociological Review* 86, no. 2 (April 1, 2021): 279–309. [here](#)

Christin, Angèle, and Rebecca Lewis. 2021. “The Drama of Metrics: Status, Spectacle, and Resistance Among YouTube Drama Creators.” *Social Media + Society* 7(1). [here](#)

Recommended

Kellogg, Katherine C., Melissa A. Valentine, and Angèle Christin. 2020. “Algorithms at Work: The New Contested Terrain of Control.” *Academy of Management Annals* 14(1): 366–410. [here](#)

PART V. THE FUTURE OF POLITICS?

November 12. Politics and Social Media

Fred Turner. 2019. “Machine Politics. The Rise of the Internet and a New Age of Authoritarianism.” *Harper’s Magazine* January, 25-33. [here](#)

Heath, Joseph. 2023. “A Simple Theory of Cancel Culture.” Substack newsletter. *In Due Course* (blog), December 2. [here](#)

Recommended

Brubaker, Rogers. 2022. *Hyperconnectivity and Its Discontents*. Chapter 5. Politics. Medford: Polity. (bCourses)

Davies, William. 2021. “The Politics of Recognition in the Age of Social Media.” *New Left Review* 128: 83–99. [here](#)

Tufekci, Zeynep. 2017. *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. Yale University Press.

November 14. Life on the Edge

Muniesa, Fabian. 2022. “Paranoid finance.” *Social Research* 89(3) [here](#)

Ebner, Julia. 2020. “Meme Wars. Undercover in Europe’s Biggest Trolling Army” Pp113-133 in *Going Dark. The Secret Social Lives of Extremists*. Bloomsbury. (bCourses)

Recommended

Arendt, Hannah. 1957. “Truth and Politics.” *The New Yorker*, February 17. (bCourses)

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

Memo 2 due, 11:59pm

November 19. How the Machine Thinks

Chiang, Ted. 2023. “ChatGPT Is a Blurry JPEG of the Web.” *The New Yorker*. February 9. [here](#)

Aastish Bhatia. 2024. “When AI output is a Threat to AI itself.” *The New York Times*. August 25, 2024. [here](#)

Recommended

Burrell, Jenna. 2019. "How the Machine Thinks." *Big Data and Society*. [here](#)

Pasquinelli, Matteo. 2023. *The Eye of the Master. A Social History of Artificial Intelligence*. Verso.

November 21. Speculative Futures

Morozov, Evgeny. 2023. "The True Threat of Artificial Intelligence." *The New York Times*, June 30. [here](#)

Chiang, Ted. 2023. "Will AI be the new McKinsey?" *The New Yorker*. May 4. [here](#)

Recommended

O'Gieblyn, Meghan. 2021. *God, human, animal, machine: Technology, metaphor, and the search for meaning*. Anchor. Chapter 5.

November 26. NO CLASS. THANKSGIVING.

PART VI. LOOKING AHEAD

December 3. Brave New Worlds

Salman Khan. 2024. Excerpt from *Brave New Words. How AI will Revolutionize Education*. Penguin.

Wang, Xiaowei. 2020. "Behind China's 'Pork Miracle': How Technology Is Transforming Rural Hog Farming," *The Guardian* October 8. [here](#)

December 5. Conclusion of the course

Acemoglu, Daron, and Simon Johnson. 2023. "Artificial Struggle" and "Redirecting Technology." In *Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity*. PublicAffairs. (bCourses)

Recommended

Ruckenstein, Minna. 2023. "Care for Algorithmic Futures." Pp164-191 in *The Feel of Algorithms*. University of California Press.

December 18, 8-11 am. Final exam, in class.