

Computers, Ethics, and Society

STSC 465 • Summer 2010



The electronic computer is the defining technology of the modern era. For many of us it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine life without computers: we use computers to do our work, to help us study, to create and access entertainment, and to communicate with friends and family. Computers pervade our homes, our workplaces, our schools, and even our own bodies.

But what does it mean to live in a computer-mediated "information society"? Computers and other information technologies pose difficult legal, social, and ethical challenges: how do we benefit from increased communications capability without losing our privacy? How do we enforce law, protect our citizens, and ensure justice for all in an increasingly global "cyberspace?"

STSC 465: Computers, Ethics, and Society

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Course Format:

This course will meet twice a week. Due to the compressed format of the summer sessions, preparation and attendance are particularly important. If you do need to miss class please let me know in advance. Grading will be based on three components: class participation (30%), short reading response assignments (40%), and a final paper (30%).

Week 1

Introduction

May 25: Technology as/is Culture

Issues/topics: a brief history of the information revolution; moving beyond technological determinism; introduction to computer ethics; the computerization of everything

You Say You Want a Revolution ...

May 27: Understanding The Structures of The Information Society

Issues/topics: the cultural and political values of communications systems: theories of technological change; the history of the future; cyberutopias

Langdon Winner, "Do artifacts have politics?," from *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology* (University of Chicago, 1986)

Julian Dibbell, "A Rape in Cyberspace: or How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Spirit, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database Into a Society," from *My Tiny Life: Crime and Passion in a Virtual World* (Holt, 1998)

Batya Friedman and Helen Nissenbaum, "Bias in Computer Systems," from *Human Values and the Design of Computer Technology* (Cambridge University, 1997)

Week 2

NERDS!!!

June 1: Hacker Ethics, Cyber-Criminals

Issues/topics: the origins of computing subculture; the Hacker Ethic; hackers as heroes/villians; lusers; victimless crimes; spam, fraud, and censorship.

Levy, Steve. "The Model Railroad Club," and "The Hacker Ethic," Chapters 1,2 in *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*.

Turtle, Sherry. "Hackers: Loving the Machine for Itself" from *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1984).

Ullman, Ellan. *Close to the machine: technophilia and its discontents: a memoir*. Excerpts.

Nugent, Benjamin. *American Nerd: the story of my people*. Excerpts.

The Open Society

June 3: Open Sources and Public Spheres

Issues/topics: free as in speech, free as in beer; open source and the free software movement; democracy in the digital domain.

Kelty, Christopher. *Two bits: the cultural significance of free software* (Duke University Press, 2008). Excerpts.

Gabriella Coleman, "The Politics of Open Source Adoption, NGOs in the Developing World" (SSRC Report, 2005)

Cass Sunstein, "The Future of Free Speech." Available [online](#).

Week 3

Information as Property

June 8: What Do Digital Pirates Pirate?

Issues/topics: copyright law in media, software, and biotechnology; legal precedents for the digital age; the Digital Millennium Copyright act; a case study in file-sharing.

James Boyle "The Second Enclosure Movement and the Construction of the Public Domain." Available [online](#).

Anderson, Chris. *Free: The Future of a Radical Price*. Excerpts. This book is not, unfortunately (and ironically) free.

Code Is Law

June 10: Who Controls the Internet?

Issues/topics: regulating the Internet, part I; who am I? who are you? how do I know? self-authenticating identity; strong cryptography; the Mark of the Beast.

Timothy Wu, James Goldsmith, *Who Controls the Internet?*. Excerpts.

Week 4

I know what you did last summer ...

June 15: Living in the Surveillance Society

Issues/topics: privacy; encryption; monitoring and surveillance; medical records; wire-tapping; cyber-stalkers; tin-foil hats.

Veronica Pinero, "On Panopticism, criminal records, and sex offender registries." Available [online](#).

Winner, Langdon. "Cybertarian Myths and the Prospects for Community." In *Cyberethics: Social and Moral Issues in the Computer Age* (Eds. Baird, Ramsower and Rosenbaum).

Various short online articles: "Why Health Insurers Want to Read your Facebook Page"; "Employers are Viewing Your Profile on Social Networking Sites"; "Work bill would create new ID database"; "SEXTORTION AT EISENHOWER HIGH"; "Judges fear dangers of online 'rat' database"; "Teen Tests Internet's Lewd Track Record"; "E-Mail Surveillance Renews Concerns in Congress"; "Stop the Internet, I want to get off!"; "How Google Earth Ate Our Town"; "China's All-Seeing Eye"; "U.S. corporations massively read employee e-mail"; "The Invasion of Privacy Through Your Mobile Phone"; "Tips for budding politicians on how to avoid embarrassment on Facebook"; "When Young Teachers Go Wild on the Web"; "Facebook, Twitter Revolutionizing How Parents Stalk Their College-Aged Kids"

Identity, Community, Responsibility

June 17: Cyberculture(s)

Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Selected chapters TBA. Available on the web at: <http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/2.html>
Sherry Turkle, "Tinysex and Gender Trouble," and "Virtuality and its Discontents," in *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*.

Various short online articles: "How Sticky Is Membership on Facebook? Just Try Breaking Free"; "Facebook can ruin your life ..."; "Oh Crap. My Parents Joined Facebook"; "Psychologist finds Wikipedians grumpy and closed-minded"; "Angry online divorcee 'kills' virtual ex-hubby"

Week 5

Nailing jello to the wall.

June 22: Regulating Cyberspace

Issues/topics: regulating the Internet, part II; who controls the Internet? nazis, anorexics, and steroid users; who falls for those Nigerian e-mails anyway? ask not what the Internet will do to China, but what China will do to the Internet.

Timothy Wu, James Goldsmith, *Who Controls the Internet?*. Read the rest.

You are your social network.

June 24: Living in a Wired World

Issues/topics: electronic frontiers; virtual communities; MUDS & MOOS; social networking; facebook; myspace.

boyd, danah. *Taken Out of Context: American Teen Sociality in Networked Publics*
Susan Herring, "Gender and Power in Online Communication." Available [online](#).
Eglash, Ron. "Race, Sex and Nerds: from black geeks to Asian American hipsters." *Social Text* 71(20), 49-64.

Week 6

Microserfs

June 29: Working the Internet

Issues/topics: labor and e-commerce; outsourcing; telecommuting; the dark side of high-tech; the Internet and the environment;

Paulina Borsook, "Cyberselfish" and "Cyberselfish Redux." They are available online [here](#) and [here](#).

Richard Howard, "How I 'Escaped' From Amazon.Cult." Available [online](#).

The Big Finish

July 1: In which all is made clear

Issues/topics: life; the universe; everything.