

## **Geography 8400: Critical Issues in Human Geography**

**Spring 2017 - 'THE SOCIAL POWER OF ALGORITHMS'**

Tuesdays, 2:15-5:00, Derby 1116

Instructor: Nancy Ettlinger, 1144 Derby, [ettlinger.1@osu.edu](mailto:ettlinger.1@osu.edu); 292-2573; office hrs. by appt.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This graduate seminar takes its specific name from an apt title of a recently published article 'The Social Power of Algorithms.' Broadly, the point of the article and the course overall is that in the new millennium algorithms infuse social, work, political, and personal lives through firms, government, as well as the often unconscious participation of ordinary people engaged in daily practices of work, consumption, and digital sociality. Unconscious participation in the digital regime of governance reflects a particular feature of algorithmic life: the invisibility of power relations that underscore it, a post-panoptic reality. The course focuses on the socio-economic, political, and subjective dimensions of algorithmic life and engages topics ranging from how algorithms govern and shape our lives as consumers, citizens, and workers, to issues of subjectivity in relation to digital technologies and possible avenues of contestation and algorithmic resistance. The course approaches algorithms and big data more generally from a critical, not a technical vantage point, consistent with the burgeoning, interdisciplinary field of critical data studies.

**EVALUATION:** Students are evaluated on the basis of discussion facilitations (30%), posts on Canvas regarding assigned reading (20%), and a research paper (50%) that connects issues engaged in the course with students' research.

discussion facilitation: at least twice a semester each student will present assigned reading *collaboratively* with another student to the class and lead discussion. Presentations should not summarize the material; rather, they should work *across* readings to generate big points about the topic. Students are welcome to request particular topics to facilitate.

Canvas posts: all students (except when presenting) will post a comment for each assigned reading for a class *in advance of class*, at a time agreed upon by the class. The comment should 'look to the forest' rather than the 'trees,' that is, point to the big issues. Comments should be concise (no more than a few sentences – this is not a blog!). The pedagogical purpose of the Canvas posts are: (1) ensure that all students, even in not presenting, actively engage course material; (2) prompt students to think about the overall issues after having read for details; and (3) provide a forum by which students can learn from others --- read your peers' Canvas posts before class!

research paper: Student's connect course material with their research program via a research paper (those interested in media other than a paper are welcome to make a proposal). The paper should be around 20 pages double spaced with a bibliography that makes use of course material in addition to references pertinent to the topic of study. Students are encouraged to make the course work for their program – use the course to develop a paper that you can eventually submit for publication, or a research proposal, or a chapter of thesis/dissertation.

Proposals for papers are due by March 8; please send by email as a word attachment. Proposals should be brief (about 2 pp) and include: title, problem statement, research questions, situation of the paper in the literature, method/research strategy, and bibliography to date.

## **SYLLABUS: DATES, TOPICS, AND COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

To access reading other than books, go the Canvas page for the course, click on 'Modules,' and see material under 'e-reserves'.

All books have been ordered as hard copy through OSU Barnes & Noble; all are accessible as ebooks via OSU library/pdf online, as indicated in the bibliographic information below.

**January 10: how algorithms infuse everyday life; consequences**

- Turfekci, Z. 2014. Engineering the public: Big data, surveillance and computational politics. *First Monday* 19(7).
- Beer, D. 2017. The social power of algorithms. *Information, Communication & Society* 20: 1-13.
- Bolin, G. and Schwartz, J.A. 2015. Heuristics of the algorithm: Big data, user interpretation and institutional translation. *Big Data & Society*, DOI: 10.1177/2053951715608406.
- Lally, N. 2016. Crowdsourced surveillance and networked data. *Security Dialogue*, DOI: 10.1177/0967010616664459.
- (optional) Qiu, Y. 2016. The openness of open application programming interfaces. *Information, Communication & Society*. DOI.org/10.1080/1369118x.2016.1254268

**January 17: cont'd**

- Pasquale, F. 2015. *The black box society: The secret algorithms that control money and information*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (ebook, OSU libraries).

**January 24: the materiality of the cloud**

- Hu, T.-H. 2015. *The prehistory of the cloud*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press (ebook, OSU libraries)
- Pickren, G. 2016. The global assemblage of digital flow: Critical data studies and the infrastructures of computing. *Progress in Human Geography*, DOI: 10.1177/0309132516673241.

**January 31: cont'd. – on-the-ground labor issues**

- Dyer-Witheford, N. 2015. *Cyber-Proletariat: Global labour in the digital vortex*. Toronto: Pluto Press (ebook, OSU libraries).

**February 7: digital labor**

- Fisher, E. 2015. The dialectics of presumption in the digital age. In O. Frayssé and M. O'Neil, eds., *Digital labour and prosumer capitalism*, pp. 125-144. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Scholz, T. (ed.) 2012. *Digital labor: the internet as playground and factory*. New York: Routledge (ebook, OSU libraries).

**February 14: cont'd.**

- Richardson, L. 2016. Feminist geographies of digital work. *Progress in Human Geography*, DOI: 10.1177/0309132516677177.
- Ettlinger, N. The governance of crowdsourcing: Rationalities of the new exploitation. *Environment and Planning A*: 48: 2162-2180.
- Cheney-Lippold, J. 2011. A new algorithmic identity: Soft biopolitics and the modulation of control. *Theory, Culture & Society* 28: 164-181.
- Zuboff, S. 2015. Big other: Surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization. *Journal of Information Technology* 30: 75-89.

**February 21: homophily, algorithms & discrimination**

- Widmer, S. 2016. Experiencing a personalized, augmented reality: Users of *Foursquare* in urban space. In L.Amoore and V. Piotukh, eds. *Algorithmic life: Calculative devices in the age of big data*, pp. 57-71. New York: Routledge.
- McIlwain, C. 2016. Racial formation, inequality and the political economy of web traffic. *Information, Communication & Society*, DOI.org/10.1080/1369118x.2016137.
- Merz, S. 2016. 'Health and ancestry starts here': Race and presumption in direct-to-customer genetic testing services. *Ephemera* 16: 119-140.
- several news articles, tbd

**February 28, cont'd.**

Nakamura, L. and Chow-White, P., eds. 2012. *Race after the internet*. New York: Routledge (pdf available online; google: title and pdf)  
news articles, tbd

**March 7: affect and intimacy online**

Leese, M. 2016. 'Seeing futures:' Politics of visuality and affect. In L. Amoore and V. Piotukh, eds. *Algorithmic life: Calculative devices in the age of big data*, pp. 143-158. New York: Routledge.  
Andrejevik, M. 2013. Emotional glut: opinion mining and sentiment analysis. In M. Andrejevik, *Infoglut: How too much information is changing the way we think and know*. New York, Routledge (ebook, OSU libraries).  
Karpi, T. and Crawfordm K. 2015. Social media, financial algorithms, and the hack crash. *Theory, Culture & Society* DOI: 10.1177/0263276415583139.  
Stark, L. and Crawford, K. 2015. The conservatism of emoji: Work, affect, and communication. *Social Media + Society*, July-December: 1-11.

➤ **Thursday, March 8: paper proposals due – email as word attachment**

**March 14**

no class: spring break

**March 21: selected topics - smart cities, self-quantification**

Ho, E. 2016. Smart subjects for a smart nation? Governing (smart)mentalities in Singapore. *Urban Studies*, DOI: 10.1177/0042098016664305.  
Klauser, F., Paasche, T., and Söderström, O. 2014. Michel Foucault and the smart city: Power dynamics inherent in contemporary governing through code. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32: 869-885.  
Moore, P. and Robinson, A. 2015. The quantified self: What counts in the neoliberal workplace. *New Media & Society* 18: 2774-2792.  
Charitsis, V. 2016. Prosumenting (the) self. *Ephemera* 16: 37-59.

**March 28: digital resistance**

Schrock, A.R. 2016. Civic hacking as data activism and advocacy: A history from publicity to open government data. *New Media & Society*, DOI: 10.1177/1461444816629469.  
Sobré-Denton, M. 2015. Virtual intercultural bridgework: Social media, virtual cosmopolitanism, and activist community-building. *New Media & Society* 18: 1715-1731.  
Milan, S. 2015. From social movements to cloud protesting: the evolution of collective identity. *Information, Communication & Society* 18: 887-900.  
Baak, S. 2015. Datafication and empowerment: How the open data movement re-articulates notions of democracy, participation, and journalism. *Big Data & Society*, July-Dec., DOI: 10.1177/20539517155943634.

**April 4: cont'd.**

Tawil-Souri, H. and Aouragh, M. 2014. Intifada 3.0? Cyber colonialism and Palestinian resistance. *Arab Studies Journal* 22 (1): 102-133.  
Nafus, D., Sherman, J. 2014. This one does not go up to 11: The quantified self movement as an alternative big data practice. *International Journal of Communication* 8: 1784-1794.  
van der Velden, L. 2015. Forensic devices for activism: metadata tracking and public proof. *Big Data & Society* July-Dec., DOI: 10.1177/2053951715612823.  
Pybus, J. Coté, M. and Blanke, T. 2015. Hacking the social life of big data. *Big Data & Society* July-Dec., DOI: 10.1177/2053951715616649.

***April 11: reflections***

Harcourt, B.E. 2015. *Exposed: Desire and disobedience in the digital age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (ebook, OSU libraries)

***April 18:***

tbd

- *April 24: papers due*