Cyberculture

Peter Sachs Collopy
collopy@sas.upenn.edu
Cohen 332

Overview

This is a syllabus for Cyberculture (STSC/SOCI 260), a course on histories and cultures of the internet offered in summer 2013 at the University of Pennsylvania. The course might also be called "Several Ways of Looking at the Internet," "Histories and Cultures of the Internet," or "Introduction to Internet Studies." In this course, we will explore how people use the internet to develop new conceptions of identity, build virtual communities, and affect political change. Each class we'll study an aspect of the history and culture of the internet, covering topics such as hackers, virtuality, sovereignty, and algorithms. We'll read books, articles, and blogs about historical and contemporary cultures of computing, from Spacewar players and phone phreaks in the 1970s to Google, Facebook, World of Warcraft, WikiLeaks, and Anonymous today. In addition, we'll explore some of these online communities and projects ourselves, and develop our own analyses of them.

The course will meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00 to 4:10, from May 21 to June 27 in Claudia Cohen Hall room 392. It will be a discussion-based seminar, though I will punctuate it with occasional presentations. I will be available for office hours before class on Thursdays from 12:00 to 1:00 in Claudia Cohen Hall room 332, and encourage you to come by and talk.

Assignments

As a seminar, this course is primarily based on learning by discussing the required readings (listed below), so it's essential that you read and think about them before each class meeting.

The main component of this course other than discussions is a final project, which will involve developing your own analysis of an online community or phenomenon incorporating some ways of looking at the internet from the course. Such a project could take the form of a traditional research paper of 10–15 pages or an online presentation involving a similar amount of research and analysis; possibilities range from videos and webcomics to Twitter or Tumblr experiments and beyond. Although you are not required to make your project publicly available online, I can suggest from my own experience that it can be more exciting to produce for an audience beyond your instructor and would be happy to talk with you about appropriate online venues for sharing your project.

In order to help you progress toward completing your project over the course of the semester, I will ask that you meet with me to discuss your ideas for your project on May 28 or 30, submit a short (one to three page) proposal by June 6, present a progress report to the class June 11 or 13, submit a draft to me by June 20, and submit the final project on June 27, the last day of class. I will provide feedback at each of these stages. Your grade for the course will be based 20% on your proposal, 20% on your presentation, 30% on your final project, and 30% on your engaged and insightful participation in discussions.

News

One of the things we'll do in this course is use recent history to find ways to think about current events. Accordingly, you may find it interesting or useful for your project to follow some news. *The Atlantic*'s technology channel is among the best sources. *Wired* has many sections and blogs of varying quality, and their security blog Threat Level is particularly good.

The best source for cyberculture news might be Twitter, though, provided you follow the right people. My account is @collopy, and I've made a list of some Twitter users relevant to this course that you can subscribe to, including the authors of texts on this syllabus. If you find anything online you'd like to share with the class, please tweet it using the (admittedly silly) hashtag #cyberpenn.

Reading

Please find a list of required readings below. Many readings are freely available online (and linked here), and I will make most of the others available to students. The exception is *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* by Fred Turner, the one book we'll be reading in its entirety, which is available for sale at the Penn Book Center and for borrowing at Van Pelt Library's Rosengarten Reserve Room. Other books are also available at the Penn Book Center for those who would like to own them.

Foundations

May 21: Introduction
  Mitchell Kapor and John Perry Barlow, "Across the Electronic Frontier" (1990).
  John Perry Barlow, "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace" (1996).
  Bruce Schneier, "Power and the Internet" (2013).

May 23: Hackers
  Steven Levy, *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution* (1984), chapters 1 and 2.
  Adrian Johns, *Piracy: The Intellectual Property Wars from Gutenberg to Gates* (2009), chapter 16.
  Stewart Brand, "Spacewar: Fanatic Life and Symbolic Death Among the Computer Bums" (originally in *Rolling Stone*, 1972).

May 28: Cybernetics
  Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (2006), introduction and chapters 1–4.

May 30: Networks ("The New Economy")
  Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, chapters 5–8.

Virtual Community

June 4: Virtuality
  Julian Dibbell, "A Rape in Cyberspace: How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Spirit, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database Into a Society" (originally in *The Village Voice*, 1993).
  Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (1995), chapters 7–9.

June 6: Identity
  Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (2002), introduction and chapters 1, 2, and 5.

June 11: Play
  Bonnie Nardi, *My Life as a Night Elf Priest: An Anthropological Account of World of Warcraft* (2010), prologue, chapters 1, 2, and 6–9, and coda.

June 13: Networks (Social Network Sites)
  danah boyd, "Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life" (2007).
  danah boyd, "White Flight in Networked Publics? How Race and Class Shaped American Teen Engagement with MySpace and Facebook" (2011).
  Nathan Jurgenson, "When Atoms Meet Bits: Social Media, the Mobile Web and Augmented Revolution" (2012).

Politics

June 18: Sovereignty
  Lawrence Lessig, *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace, Version 2.0* (2006, revised from 1999), prefaces and chapters 1–5.

June 20: Resistance
  Andy Greenberg, *This Machine Kills Secrets: How WikiLeakers, Cypherpunks, and Hacktivists Aim to Free the World's Information* (2012), prologue and chapters 1, 3, and 4.
  Gabriella Coleman, "Our Weirdness Is Free" (2012).

June 25: Algorithms
  Tarleton Gillespie, "The Relevance of Algorithms" (2012).
  Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web Is Changing What We Read and How We Think* (2011), introduction and chapters 1, 4, and 6.

June 27: Networks (Infrastructure)
  Andrew Blum, *Tubes: A Journey to the Center of the Internet* (2012), prologue and chapters 1, 2, and 7.