

# The Politics of Information: Theory, Critique, & History

**Instructor:**

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**Instructor Contact:**

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**Course Number(s):**

PHIL 407/507

**Course Website & Password:**

<http://lore.com/Infopolitics/> & 4QD6HQ

**Course Meetings and Location:**

MW at 1000-1150 in WIL112 (room subject to change)

**Course Description:**

This graduate-level seminar (also open to advanced undergraduates) will survey a number of approaches to an emerging theme of inquiry gaining importance across a range of contemporary disciplinary formations including: new media studies, science and technology studies, the history and philosophy of technology and science, and political philosophy and social theory. Our guiding questions throughout the course concern the transforming (or transitional) status of information, the emergence of new informational paradigms, the political import of these changes, and how contemporary theory and methodology can serve as facilities for fashioning ourselves into critics equipped to intervene into the conceptual struggles surrounding the internet, social media, big data, privacy, protocological control, and all other manner of emergent 'info-politics'. Our focus will be divided into three broad topics: first, political theories of new media (from the liberal theory of Lawrence Lessig's *Code* to the Marxist theory of McKenzie Wark's *Hacker Manifesto*), second, the critical new media theory of a number of contemporary theorists inspired by Foucaultian-Deleuzian, but also Freudo-Marxist, approaches (focusing mainly on Alexander Galloway and Wendy Chun, but also others); third, histories of information also inspired, albeit differently, by various aspects of Foucaultian theory (focusing on work by Ian Hacking, Cornelia Vismann, and Wolfgang Ernst).

This course is intended to provide advanced students from a range of disciplinary backgrounds (in the humanities, social sciences, and arts) with an introduction to some of the major theoretical and methodological approaches to information as an object of critical inquiry. Our focus throughout will be the politics of information, but students interested in other fields of engagement (such as aesthetics, ethics, epistemology, ontology) will be encouraged to push our inquiries in that direction.

Note that this course is intended to fulfill requirements for the New Media and Culture graduate certificate (see <http://newmediaculture.uoregon.edu>) for those pursuing it.

### **Student Work & Grade Assessment**

**Participation** (15%) – Active participation in our seminar discussions is expected, as is consistent attendance at all class sessions and related events.

**Short Reading Responses** (10%) – You will bring to every class session a very short written response to the assigned reading for that day. In most cases, your response can simply consist of a question or two about the text you would like to pose for the group.

**Presentation** (25%) – Every student (in both 407 & 507) will make a short in-class presentation on a selected background reading. We have 9 students and 9 background readings for which we will need presenters (including texts by Jameson, Deleuze, Foucault, Habermas, Simondon, and a number more by Foucault) – we will not require presenters for our sessions in which Mill and Marx will be our background figures. The goal will be to familiarize your fellow students with some of the philosophical issues at stake in the background of our primary reading.

**Final Paper, First Version** (25%) with an *Extended Annotated Bibliography*. You will write a short argumentative essay that will be due at the beginning of class on Wednesday March 5th. This should be a polished piece of writing. Do *not* treat this as a draft!

- You are expected to develop your own essay topic, with the sole constraint being that the essay must address the subject matter of the course. Your essay can focus on a theme, problem, or interpretation arising in one of our assigned readings, or it can take the form of an engagement with an argument posted by our readings.
- The first version of your paper should be about 8-10 pages (or about 2500 words exclusive of notes and references).
- Your essay should include reference to assigned primary readings, and it should also indicate that you have done at least some research into additional secondary literature. Your extended annotated bibliography will be evidence of that. This bibliography should take the form of a list (in some standard citation format) of at least three secondary sources (one article or one book chapter counts as one source) relevant to your chosen essay topic as well as a short abstract of your selection in which you summarize each piece in your own words. (An abstract summarizes the piece in an objective fashion, and it does not describe how you (the student) will use the piece in your final paper.) Secondary sources for our purposes include writings about the primary literature we are reading in the class as well as additional writings referencing the themes of our primary readings.
- I will give you extensive feedback on your essay within one week's time. This feedback will be useful to you to the extent that you consider your essay to be finalized and polished. If you give me a piece of writing that you know to have flaws, my feedback will only reinforce what you already know. You will revise this essay and expand it into a longer final research essay that will be due at the end of the term.

**Final Paper, Final Version** (25%). You will write a final research essay, which will be a revision of, improvement upon, and expansion upon your shorter argumentative essay from earlier in the term. This essay should engage with one both the assigned primary literature and relevant secondary literature. This should be about 12 pages in length (aim for 3000-3500 words exclusive of notes and references, i.e. a conference-length paper). This is due by 1PM on Wednesday of exam week (as a hardcopy under the door of my office).

## Reading & Work Schedule:

	<b>Introduction: What is Information? Why is Information Political?</b>
1/6	Bruce Clarke, "Information" in Mitchell & Hansen (eds.), <i>Critical Terms for Media Studies</i> Bruce Clarke, "Communication" in Mitchell & Hansen (eds.), <i>Critical Terms for Media Studies</i> Also Recommended: N. Katherine Hayles, "Cybernetics" in Mitchell & Hansen (eds.), <i>Critical Terms for Med Stds</i>
1/8	John Durham Peters, "Information: Notes Toward a Critical History" Bernard Geoghegan, "The Historiographic Conception of Information: Critical Survey" Also Recommended: Daniel Rosenberg, "Data before the Fact"
	<b>Contemporary Political Theory in a Classical Vein: Politics and Information</b>
1/13	<b>Liberal:</b> Lawrence Lessig, <i>Code 2.0</i> , Chs. 1 & 2 (pp. 1-31) and choose one of Chs. 10-12 Background: John Stuart Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> , Parts I & II Also Recommended: Cass Sunstein, <i>Republic.com 2.0</i> or <i>Infotopia</i> Also Recommended: Biella Coleman, <i>Coding Freedom</i>
1/15	<b>Marxist:</b> McKenzie Wark, <i>A Hacker Manifesto</i> , pars. 1-4, 17-23, 26-30, 48-70, 126-139, 183-206 (31 pgs.) Background: Karl Marx, <i>Capital</i> , Volume 1, Part 8 Also Recommended: Jodi Dean, <i>Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies</i> Also Recommended: Jonathan Crary, <i>24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep</i>
1/17	<b>Extra Discussion Session with EFF</b> Optional discussion with visitors from Electronic Frontier Foundation (Fri 10a-11a, loc TBD)
	<b>Contemporary Critical Media Theory: A Politics of the Informational Present</b>
1/20	[No Class for MLK Day Jan 20] <b>Toward New Critical Approaches:</b> Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" – read this and post one question to our website by Tues at 4p
1/22	<b>Rewired Conference on Law, Technology, and Social Progress</b> Class will meet at JSMA at 9a (and again later in the day if you can) for a panel, details of which are available online at: [ <a href="http://waynemorsecenter.uoregon.edu/conferences-symposia/rewired-how-law-and-technology-shape-social-progress/">http://waynemorsecenter.uoregon.edu/conferences-symposia/rewired-how-law-and-technology-shape-social-progress/</a> ]
1/27	<b>Critical New Media Theory (I):</b> Alexander Galloway, <i>The Interface Effect</i> , Intro thru Chapter 2, pp. 1-77 Background: Frederic Jameson, <i>Postmodernism</i> (ix-xxii, 1-66), <i>Valences of Dial</i> (410-434), <i>Signatures of Vis</i> (9-34)
1/29	Alexander Galloway, <i>The Interface Effect</i> , Chapter 3 thru Postscript, pp. 78-143 Background: Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies" and "Control and Becoming" (on control societies)  Also Recommended: Galloway, <i>Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization</i> Also Recommended: Galloway and Eugene Thacker, <i>The Exploit</i>
2/3	<b>Critical New Media Theory (II):</b> Wendy Chun, <i>Programmed Visions</i> , Intro thru Part I, pp. 1-96 Background: Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures" (and other writings on governmentality)
2/5	Wendy Chun, <i>Programmed Visions</i> , Part II thru Epilogue, pp. 97-182 Background: Michel Foucault, <i>The Birth of Biopolitics</i> and <i>The Will to Know</i> (i.e., <i>Hist. Sex. Vol. 1</i> ) (on biopower)  Also Recommended: Chun, <i>Control and Freedom</i> Also Recommended: Chun, new project on networks and affects, preview at [ <a href="https://vimeo.com/29689577">vimeo.com/29689577</a> ]

2/10	<p><b>Critical New Media Theory (III):</b> Tiziana Terranova, "Communication beyond Meaning: On the Cultural Politics of Information" Background: Gilbert Simondon, TBD</p> <p>Also Recommended: Tiziana Terranova, <i>Network Culture: Politics for the Info Age</i>, "Communications Biopower" ch. Background: Jürgen Habermas, <i>The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere</i>, selections</p>
2/12	<p>Bernard Stiegler, "Teleologics of the Snail: The Errant Self Wired to a WiMax Network" Background: Gilbert Simondon, "Technical Mentality"</p>
<p><b>Other Recommended Contributions in Critical Media Theory (had we more time):</b> Friedrich Kittler, <i>Gramophone, Film, Typewriter</i> Marshall McLuhan, <i>The Gutenberg Galaxy</i> Mark Hansen, <i>New Philosophy for New Media</i> Lev Manovich, <i>The Language of New Media</i> N. Katherine Hayles, <i>My Mother Was a Computer</i> Grégoire Chamayou, "Fichte's Passport" Geert Lovink, <i>Networks without a Cause: A Critique of Social Media</i> Ben Kafka, "Medium/Media" in Apter (ed.), <i>Dictionary of Untranslatables</i> Adrian Mackenzie, <i>Wirelessness: Radical Empiricism in Network Cultures</i></p>	
<p><b>Critical Histories of Information: Historicizing Our Infopolitical Present</b></p>	
2/17 & 2/19	<p><b>Genealogical Conceptual History:</b> Ian Hacking, <i>The Taming of Chance</i> Background: Michel Foucault, <i>The Will to Know</i> (i.e., HSv1), Part V; and "Society Must be Defended", selections Also Recommended: Ian Hacking, "How to do the History of Statistics" Also Recommended: "Biopower and the Avalanche of Numbers" Also Recommended: Mary Beth Mader, "Sleights of the Norm" in <i>Sleights of Reason</i></p>
2/24 & 2/26	<p><b>Material History:</b> Cornelia Vismann, <i>Files</i> Background: Michel Foucault, <i>Discipline and Punish</i> and <i>Abnormal</i>, selections Also Recommended: Bruno Latour, <i>The Making of Law: An Ethnography of the Conseil d'Etat</i> Also Recommended: Ben Kafka, <i>The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork</i> Also Recommended: Oz Frankel, <i>States of Inquiry: Social Investigations and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century...</i></p>
3/3 & 3/5	<p><b>Media Archaeology:</b> Wolfgang Ernst, <i>Digital Memory and the Archive</i> (Intro, Chs. 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, Appndx) Background: Michel Foucault, <i>The Archaeology of Knowledge</i>, selections Also Recommended: Huhtamo &amp; Parikka (eds.), <i>Media Archaeology</i>, Intro, Chs. 2-4, 11-14, Afterword Also Recommended: Jussi Parikka, <i>What is Media Archaeology?</i> Also Recommended: Seigfried Zielinski, <i>Deep Time of the Media</i></p>
<p><b>Other Recommended Historical-Philosophical Accounts of Information (had we more time):</b> Mary Poovey, <i>A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences...</i> Mary Poovey, <i>Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864</i> Theodore Porter, <i>The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820-1900</i> Daniel Headrick, <i>When Information Came of Age</i> Lorraine Daston, <i>Classical Probability and the Enlightenment</i> Lisa Gitelman, <i>Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture</i> Lisa Gitelman (ed.), "Raw Data" is an Oxymoron Simon Cole, <i>Suspect Identities</i> Jane Caplan and John Torpey (eds.), <i>Documenting Individual Identity</i> Simon Szreter and Keith Breckenridge (eds.), <i>Registration &amp; Recognition</i></p>	
<p><b>Concluding</b></p>	
3/10	<p><b>Digital Politics On Campus</b> 10a-12p Knight Library Browsing Room: Roundtable with EFF, Librarians, Occupy, &amp;c. 2p: EFF Event for and by students in development 5p?: EFF Workshop on Tracking Technologies</p>

3/12

**Conclusion:**

Tbd – flex day or readings determined by student interest – or student paper workshops

**Books & Readings:**

- Our readings for the first two weeks (up through Lessig and Wark) will be made available as PDF on our course website. If you are like me, you may prefer to purchase hardcopies of these to read.
- You *will need to buy* book copies of our readings for the two big units that constitute the majority of the course. This means *you need to buy five books*: those by Galloway, Chun, Hacking, Vismann, and Ernst. You can get copies from your favorite local and online retailers but do this soon and do not put it off and suffer the embarrassment of showing up those days without a book. If you are able to locate digital copies from a site such as bookfi.org and you wish to share them – then that is your business. Additional readings in those units (namely those by Terranova and Stiegler) will be made available as a PDF.
- In addition, for your presentation you are responsible for locating the reading that you and I agree will be the subject of your presentation – in some cases I will have a PDF copy of this but in many cases I will not.
- Lastly, anyone interested in these topics will find it useful to own a copy of the Mitchell and Hansen volume, *Critical Terms for Media Studies*. Also useful but a little bit older is the Chun & Keenan volume, *New Media, Old Media*.