



DIGITAL TRANSITION AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN SOCIETIES

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE OF THE LECTURERS

Stefana Broadbent is an anthropologist of digital practices. She is a Professor at the Politecnico di Milano in the Department of Design. Between 2014 and 2016, she directed the Collective Intelligence unit at Nesta in London. Previously Stefana was Professor of Digital Anthropology in the Department of Anthropology at the University College London. She is a member of the CNIL Foresight Committee and the co-founder of Cleanweb, an organization that uses the web to support the climate transition. Her recent publications include chapters in the Values of Attention (2019) The Onlife Manifesto (2015) and Digital Anthropology (2012) and the book Intimacy at Work (Routledge 2016). Stefana received her PhD in Cognitive Science from the University of Edinburgh, and a BA in Genetic Psychology from the University of Geneva.

Since December 2019, **Nicole Dewandre** is policy coordinator in the cabinet of President von der Leyen, in charge of foresight. She studied applied physics engineering, economics, operations research and philosophy in Belgium (UC Louvain and ULB) and in the USA (UC Berkeley). She joined the European Commission in 1983 in DG Research in the "Forecasting and Assessment of Science and Technology" (FAST) programme, led by Riccardo Petrella. She then joined Jacques Delors' think tank, where she was in charge of research and industry between 1986 and 1992. Since 1993, she focused on science and society issues. As head of unit in DG RTD, she developed policies on (i) gender equality in research, (ii) partnership between civil society and researchers, and (iii) harnessing EU-funded research to sustainable development. In 2011, she joined DG CONNECT as advisor for societal issues, in charge of fostering a human-centric digital transition. There, she convened the so-called Onlife Initiative, -to which Stefana Broadbent took an active part- in order to explore the deep conceptual shifts arising from the digital transition, and impacting the conditions of policy-making. Since 2016 and before joining the President's cabinet on December 1, 2019, she has developed a research project in the Joint Research Centre, based on a critical analysis of the language use in EU policy-making, deeply inspired by the work of Hannah Arendt. Among her notable publications, she contributed to The Online Manifesto (2015).

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course aims at providing a multidisciplinary critical approach to some of the questions arising from the evermore pervasive hyper-connectivity of societies and economies. Major current debates around data, artificial intelligence, participation, attention and addiction are so highly complex because they are embedded in longstanding perspectives and discussions on fundamental social and philosophical issues. Identifying the framework in which these debates are set seems to be ever more relevant, as the responses to present and future technological developments will have a strong impact on the way in which (European) societies function.

In the first part of the seminar, we focus on digital anthropology as a framework to understand the nature of the digital transition. By discussing some ethnographic studies of digital practices we will analyse what are the critical aspects of the social transformations and the implications for regulations. In the second part we will unveil the philosophical layers underpinning digital transition: why the digital transition calls for reconsidering what it means to be human (notably, foreground human relationality over human rationality) and how we position ourselves in the world (notably, embrace uncertainty as a state of being). The second part is dedicated to



engaging a discussion about freedom and what it means and entails in a hyperconnected society. In the third block, we analyze the concept of fairness in the broader context of a hyperconnected society, engaging in issues such as AI and transparency, open source and hacking, among others. The focus in the final part of the seminar is on responsibility, particularly discussing policy frameworks and emerging social practices in public participation.

SUBJECT

Course contents:

The policy approach to the digital transition is fundamentally couched in technical and ethical terms, so that when we think of a digital transformation, we are always drawn into discussions about how to promote technology and innovation, while mitigating the downsides and “risks” arising from this technological development. This leads to a perennial game of cat and mouse between regulation, legal frameworks and technological advances. In this approach, the social analysis tries to balance between the “reality” of actual practices and the unveiling of social phenomena that are apparently unexpected. In this course, we aim to offer another analytical grid that provides more grip for understanding – and therefore addressing – the challenges brought about by the digital transition.

The course is made of 8 sessions of 3-hours, during which the two professors will address the same issues from parallel theoretical perspectives. Each professor will present her general theoretical framework, and then explore what freedom, fairness and responsibility entail in a digital society. Indeed, they refer to essential conditions for human beings to thrive individually and form society with others. In a pre-digital society, transparency and control came to be two important necessary–yet not sufficient– means to enable freedom, fairness and accountability. In the digital age, the abundance of information and solicitation undermine the effectiveness of transparency and control in delivering on these more fundamental qualities, that were essential in the pre-digital society and remain so in the digital society. In this sense, they can be seen as “pivots”. They remain important but the way to enable them changes radically, from what it was in pre-digital societies. For example, nobody likes to be fooled, and never liked to be. Yet, the means to fool each other are different in a digital society from what they were in a pre-digital one. More generally, in the pre-digital age, social interactions were –by default–evanescent, so that traces of them had to be constructed, if and when wished. With hyperconnectivity, we are heading towards an age where, by default, social interactions leave a trace. Hence, in the digital age, it is evanescence that needs to be constructed instead. None of this will happen overnight. It is a long social, economic and political process, which is taking place. We are updating the mix of policies, norms and social practices, which will protect us against the risk of being fooled, which will allow evanescence, in some instances, and accountability, in others.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the course, the students will have:

- studied some philosophical and anthropological perspectives involved in the digital transformation.
- developed an aptitude towards critical thinking and reflexive approaches on digital issues.
- understood the two-way dynamic relationship between EU policymaking and the digital transformation.

CONTENTS



BLOCK 1 – Prof. Broadbent

Session 1 – Introduction

In this first session of the course, Prof Broadbent will present the theoretical underpinning of digital anthropology as a framework for analysing the societal transformations that are being engendered by the digital transition.

Session 2 – Freedom

This session is dedicated to the first theme of the course, freedom discussed from an anthropological perspective. Case studies on emerging practices in data sharing, social networking and online content sharing.

BLOCK 2 – Prof. Dewandre

Session 3 – Introduction

In her first taught session, Prof Dewandre will discuss the theoretical framework used throughout her analysis of the three main themes.

Session 4 – Freedom

Prof Dewandre will critically assess the language used in official documents addressing the general theme of freedom.

Block 3 – Prof. Broadbent

Session 5 – Fairness

Fairness analysed from an anthropological perspective is the main theme of this session. The cases studies analysed will look at material culture, digital labour and education in digital environments.

Session 6 – Responsibility

Prof Broadbent will analyse the topic 'responsibility' from an anthropological point of view with a particular focus on open source development as a case for new forms of digital governance.

Block 4 – Prof. Dewandre

Session 7 – Fairness

In session 7, the professor will adopt a philosophical and regulatory perspective to discuss the topic 'fairness'.

Session 8 – Responsibility

In this final session, the students will discuss the topic of responsibility from a philosophical and regulatory point of view, basing her analysis on the analysis of languages and texts.

EVALUATION METHODS

- Presentation and participation(20%).
- Essay (40%);
- Oral exam in English (40%)

Presentation and participation: Students are expected to attend each class and to engage fully with class discussions. Working in groups, students will prepare and deliver an oral presentation related to a book which is an anthropological account of some online activity (using social media, developing software, living online as an avatar etc.). The objective of the presentation is to quickly summarise but more importantly to identify what would be the regulatory issues that these online behaviours could generate. Questions such as which rights should be protected; or what are the issues that needs to be regulated will be at the core of the students' reflection. The reading is aimed at extracting and reflecting on the relation between online practices and



regulations. Specific expectations and guidelines for these presentations will be reviewed in class; however, they should be approx. 15 to 20 minutes long (5 minutes per person) presenting the students' take on the issue, followed by a discussion in class. Groups and topics will be decided during the second session. Each student will be evaluated individually for their presentation.

Written Assignment: Students will submit an essay of around 3000 words choosing from a series of proposed themes. An example could be a critical review of one of the readings. The review will loosely follow academic book review style and content, with students required to include mention of an additional 2-4 relevant academic sources.

Oral exam: students will be asked to discuss a question addressed in the lectures and readings.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BLOCK 1 (Prof. Broadbent)

Session 1

Compulsory readings

Ingold, Tim. "Eight Themes in the Anthropology of Technology." *Social Analysis*, 41, no. 1 (March 1997): 106-137.

Kropp, Kristoffer. "The EU and the social sciences: A fragile relationship." *The Sociological Review*, 69, no. 6 (2021): 1325-134.

Additional readings

Boellstorff, Tom. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist explores the virtually human*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Clark, Andy. *Supersizing the mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Haraway, Donna E. "The Cyborg Manifesto." In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, edited by Donna E. Haraway. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Knox, Hannah and Dawn Nafus. *Ethnography for a datasaturated world*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019.

Marx, Leo. "'Technology': The Emergence of a Hazardous Concept." *Technology and Culture*, 51, no. 3 (July 2010): 561-577. www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/.../Marx-TC-2010-51.pdf

Miller, Daniel and Heather Horst. *The Digital and the Human: A Prospectus for Digital Anthropology*. August 2013.

Pink, Sarah, Elisenda Ardévol and Dèbora Lanzeni. *Digital Materialities: Design and Anthropology*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.

Turner, Fred. "Burning Man at Google: A Cultural Infrastructure for New Media Production." *New Media & Society*, 11, no.1-2 (April, 2009): 145-166.

Session 2

Compulsory readings

Couldry, Nick and Jun Yu. "Deconstructing Datafication's Brave New World." *New Media & Society*, 20, no. 12 (2018): 4473-4491.

Additional readings



Boyd, Danah. *It's complicated. The social life of networked teenagers*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.

Burrell, Jenna. *Invisible Users: Youth in the Internet Cafes of Urban Ghana*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012.

CNIL. "Scènes de la Vie Numérique." *Cahiers IP, Innovation et Prospective*, n. 08, avril 2021.

Costa, Elisabetta. *Social Media in SouthEast Turkey*. London: UCL Press, 2016.

Hildebrandt, Mireille and Laura Tielemans. "Data Protection by Design and Technology Neutral Law." *Computer Law & Security Review*, 29, no. 5 (2013): 509-521.

Ito, Mizuko, et al. *Hanging Out, Messing Around, Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010.

Kröger, Jacob Leon, Milagros Miceli and Florian Müller. *How Data Can Be Used Against People: A Classification of Personal Data Misuses*. December 2021.

Lange, Patricia G. *Thanks for Watching. An Anthropological Study of Video Sharing on Youtube*. Louiseville: University Press of Chicago, 2019.

Madianou, Mirca and Daniel Miller. *Migration and new media: Transnational Families and Polymedia*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Wajcman, Judy, Emily Rose, Judith E. Brown and Michael Bittman. "Enacting Virtual Connections between Work and Home." *Journal of Sociology*, 46, no. 3 (2010): 257-275.

Wallis, Cara. *Techno-mobility in China: Young Migrant Women and Mobile Phones*. New York: NYU Press, 2013.

BLOCK 2 (Prof. Dewandre)

Session 3

Compulsory readings

Zuboff, Shoshana, the age of surveillance capitalism. Introduction : home or exile in the digital future

Additional readings

Cohen, Julie E. *Configuring the Networked Self: Law, Code, and the Play of Everyday Practice*. Yale University Press, 2012.

Pasquale, Frank. *The Black Box Society. The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and Information*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2016.

Dewandre, Nicole. « Rethinking the human condition in a hyperconnected society" in Onlife Manifesto

Dewandre, Nicole. "Political Agents as Relational Selves: Rethinking EU Politics and Policy-Making with Hannah Arendt." *Philosophy Today*, 62, no. 2 (2018): 493-519.

Session 4

Compulsory readings

Arendt, Hannah. *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought (Chapter 'What is*



Freedom?). New York: Penguin books, 2006.

Additional readings

Crawford, Kate. *Atlas of AI. The Real Worlds of Artificial Intelligence (Chapter on Classification)*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021.

Dewandre, Nicole. "Humans as Relational Selves." *AI and Society*, 34, no. 1 (2019): 95-98.

BLOCK 3 (Prof. Broadbent)

Session 5

Compulsory readings

Alaimo, Cristina and Jannis Kallinikos. "Computing the Everyday: Social Media as Data Platforms." *The Information Society*, 33, no. 4 (2017): 175-191.

Casilli, Antonio. "Is There a Global Digital Labor Culture? : Marginalization of Work, Global Inequalities, and Coloniality." *2nd symposium of the Project for Advanced Research in Global Communication(PARGC)*, Apr 2016, Philadelphia, USA.

Additional readings

Burrell, Jenna, Zoe Kahn, Anne Jonas and Daniel Griffin. "When Users Control the Algorithms: Values Expressed in Practices on the Twitter Platform." *Proc. ACM Hum.-Comput. Interact.*, 3, no. CSCW, Article 138 (November 2019), 138-158. <https://doi.org/10.1145/33592407>

Dourish, Paul. "Algorithms and their Others: Algorithmic Culture in Context." *Big Data & Society* (July-December 2016): 1-11.

Miller, Daniel and Jolynna Sinanan. *Visualising Facebook. A Comparative Perspective*. London: UCL Press, 2017.

Scholz, Trebor. "Platform Cooperativism. The New School.", 2016. <https://rosalux.nyc/platform-cooperativism-2/>

Scholz, Trebor. *Digital Labour : the Internet as Playground and Factory*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Session 6

Compulsory readings

Gerbaudo, Paolo. "Are Digital Parties more Democratic than Traditional Parties? Evaluating Podemos and Movimento 5 Stelle's Online Decision-making Platforms." *Party Politics*, 27, no. 4 (2021): 730-742.

Kelty, Christopher, Aaron Panofsky, Morgan Currie, Roderic Crooks, Seth Erickson, Patricia Garcia, Michael Wartenbe, and Stacy Wood. "Seven Dimensions of Contemporary Participation Disentangled." *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 66, no. 3 (2014): 1-15.

Additional readings

Barassi, Veronica. *Activism on the Web: Everyday Struggles Against Digital Capitalism*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

CNIL. "Civic Tech, Données et Demos." *Cahiers IP, Innovation et Prospective*, n. 07, décembre 2019.

Coleman, Gabriella. *Coding Freedom: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Hacking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.



Law, John. *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*. London, New York: Routledge, 1991.

Lane, Jeffrey. *The Digital Street*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Nicholas, Lydia and Stefana Broadbent. "Collective Intelligence in Patient Organisations." *Nesta*, July 2015.

Star, Susan L. "The Ethnography of Infrastructure." *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43, no. 3 (1999): 377-391.

Schüll, Natasha. D. *Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas*. Ithaca: Princeton University Press, 2012.

BLOCK 4 (Prof. Dewandre)

Session 7

Compulsory readings

Safak, Cansu and James Farrar. "Managed by Bots Data-Driven. Exploitation in the Gig Economy". *Report by the Worker Info Exchange*, December 2021.

Additional readings

Broadbent, Stefana and Lobet-Maris, Claire. "Towards a Grey Ecology." In *The Onlife Manifesto. Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era*, edited by Floridi, Luciano. London: Springer, 2015.

Wachter, Sandra, Brent Mittelstadt and Chris Russel. "Why Fairness Cannot Be Automated: Bridging the Gap Between EU Non-Discrimination Law and AI." *Computer Law & Security Review*, 41, 2021.

Session 8

Compulsory readings

Pasquale, Frank. *New Laws of Robotics. Defending Human Expertise in the Age of AI (Introduction and last chapter)*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2020.

Additional readings

Smits, Merlijn, Geke Ludden, Ruben Peters, Sebastian J. H. Bredie, Harry van Goor and Peter-Paul Verbeek. "Values that Matter: A New Method to Design and Assess Moral Mediation of Technology." *Design Issues*, 38, no. 1, 2022.

Simon, Judith. "Distributed Epistemic Responsibility in a Hyperconnected Era." In *The Onlife Manifesto. Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era*, edited by Floridi, Luciano. London: Springer, 2015.

BOOKS FOR PRESENTATIONS

Lecture 3

Nardi, Bonnie A. *My Life as a Night Elf Priest: An Anthropological Account of World of Warcraft*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010.

Lecture 4

Miller, Daniel, Elisabetta Costa and Nell Haynes. *How the world changed social media (Vol. 1)*. London: UCL Press, 2016.

Lecture 5

Floridi, Luciano. *The Onlife Manifesto. Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era*. London: Springer, 2015.



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Lecture 6

Kelty, Christopher M. *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

Lecture 7

Gerbaudo, Paolo. *Tweets and the Streets*. London: Pluto Press, 2012.

Lecture 8

Livingstone, Sonia and Julian Sefton-Green. *The Class: Living and Learning in the Digital Age*. New York: New York University Press, 2016.