Anthropology 315/515: Introduction to the Anthropology of Information and Networks

MWF 10-11
Sewall Hall 560
Christopher Kelty
ckelty@rice.edu

Introduction: This class is an exploration of contemporary society through its software and networks. We will examine the tightly coupled nature of social, technical, legal, and economic processes in a globally connected and information-rich world. Because it is an anthropology class, it will linger on questions concerning the role, status, development and necessity of human beings in a world now primarily populated by algorithms and radiowaves, silicon and plastic. Neither the ‘computer’ as an object, nor the ‘human’ as a subject will be taken for granted. The class will touch equally on the very practical concerns of everyday experience (e.g. how email works) as well as sometimes difficult theoretical problems (e.g. how email works) that can affect the public sphere, or individual subjective action.

Prerequisites: Many readings and assignments will require basic familiarity with computers, the internet, and email. You will be expected (with help) to teach yourself how to learn new techniques and tools.

Requirements:
1. Reading and Discussion of around 100 pages of reading per week.
2. Mandatory class and lab attendance.
3. One midterm examination and one final examination. These exams will happen during the class period. Plagiarism will be rewarded with failure. Learn to keep track of and properly cite your sources. This includes online sources.
4. Lab. During the course of the class, you will become familiar with a variety of aspects of software and networks. The goal is to teach you how to distinguish relevant information, understand where and from what source it comes, and discern how networks are connected. In order to do this you will need to develop basic computing skills (the lab classes are intended to teach them). There will be small assignments for each lab. Because this is the first iteration of this class, the infrastructure will necessarily be somewhat unstable. Apologies in advance.
Required Texts at the bookstore:


Class mailing list for Fall 2001: anth315@kelty.org

Preliminary Schedule

Section 1: Introduction. What information? Which Network?

- Aug 27: Introduction to the Class
- Aug 29: Networks and Information without Computers

  **Required:**

  **Optional:**

- Aug 31: Introduction to Lab, Sewell Hall 133.

Section 2: Where is the Internet?

- Sep 03: Labor Day, no meeting
• Sep 05: Where is the internet? Why Cyberspace is Not.
  
  Required:
  

  Optional:
  

• Sep 07: Lab: Visualizing the internet

**Section 3: History of Networks: Virtual, Actual, and Possible.**

• Sep 10: Networks and Public Spheres
  
  Required:
  

  Optional:
  
  – Jürgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, MIT Press, 1991 [orig. 1962]. Chapters 1,2

• Sep 12: The Network of Networks,
  
  Required:
  

• Sep 14: Lab: Understanding how the internet works

• Sep 17: Network of Networks Cont’d
  
  Required:

**Section 4: History of Information: Abstract Machines, Paper Machines, and Big Whirring Machines.**

- **Sep 19:** Abstract and Paper Machines, the universal story.  
  _Required:_  
  – Martin Davis *The Universal Computer*, W.W. Norton, 2000, chapter 7, Chapters 5, 6, 8 optional.  

- **Sep 21:** Information Machines, From Weaving to Xeroxing  
  _Required:_  
  – Eames and Eames, *A Computer Perspective*  

- **Sep 24:** War Machines  
  _Required:_  

- **Sep 26:** International Business Machines, for example.  
  _Required:_  
  – Aspray and Campbell-Kelley, Chs. 5-7  

  _Optional:_  
• Sep 28: Lab: More intro to networks and information.

**Section 5: Software**

*Required:*

• Oct 1: Around 1968
  
  – Aspray and Campbell-Kelly, chs. 8-9.
  


  *Required:*


  *Optional:*


• Oct 5: Lab: Offshore development, international migration of labor

  *Required:*


  – Discussion topics: Bodyshopping, H1-B Visas, outsourcing, concentration, personal networks, 24-hour production, etc.

  – Assignment: TBA

• Oct 8: Electronic and Outsourced Spaces

  *Required:*


• Oct 10: Midterm
• Oct 12: No Class (http://www.wizards-of-os.org)
• Oct 15: Midterm Recess

Section 6: Standards

• Oct 17: What is a standard? Classification, Standardization, and Compatibility

  Required:


  Optional:


• Oct 19: The Economic significance of standards

  Required:

• Oct 22: Political Significance of Standards: Law, Regulation, Standard, Custom.
  
  Required:
  

Section 7: Intellectual Property and Free Software.

• Oct 24: Copyright, Patent, Trademark
  
  Required:
  
  – Assignment: Go to http://www.uspto.org/ and familiarize yourself with the differences amongst copyright, trademark and patent.

• Oct 26: Lab: Intellectual Property
  
  Required:
  
  – Assignment: Intellectual Property and YOU!! Details TBA

• Oct 29: Commons, Public Domains, and Enclosures.
  
  Required:
  

• Oct 31: Content Control, DVDs, DMCA, DeCSS, Napster, etc. Assignment on P2P and security.
  
  Required:
  
  – David Touretsky’s “Gallery of CSS descramblers” at http://www-2.cs.cmu.edu/~dst/DeCSS/Gallery/
• Nov 02: Special Guest Speaker: Dr. Dan Wallach of the CS dept.

• Nov 05: No Class (http://firstmonday.com)

• Nov 07: The Free Software Movement
  
  **Required:**
  
  – As much FSF Philosophy as you can stomach:  
    http://www.fsf.org/philosophy/philosophy.html
  
  – As much libertarian wackiness as you can stomach: at least “The Cathedral and The Bazaar” and “Homesteading the Noosphere” by Eric Raymond at  
    http://tuxedo.org/esr/writings/

  **Optional:**
  

• Nov 09: Lab: where free software is and is not. A tour of free software and it’s uses. Example: crypto-signing software. SSH, GNUPG, etc. Freeware, Shareware, EULAs and other contracts.

**Section 8: Movements, networks, people and technology**

• Nov 12: Content is dead, Long live Content!
  
  **Required:**
  
  – “Content is not King” by Andrew Odlyzko, AT&T Research Labs, available at  
    http://www.research.att.com/
  
  – Selected Salon.com articles concerning Napster, p2p technology and the entertainment industry:  
    “The Music Revolution will not be Digitized” 1 June 2001:  
  
    “Revenge of the File-Sharing Masses!” 20 July, 2001:  
  
    “Courtney Love does the Math” 14 June, 2000:  
    http://www.salon.com/tech/feature/2000/06/14/love/index.html
  
    “Peer to Peer Terrorism” 26 September 2001:  
• Nov 14: Controlling content through Brands and Technology

  Required:
  
  
    http://www.economist.com/business/displayStory.cfm?Story_ID=770992
  
  – See Also: http://www.nologo.org/ for information on the book referred to by the above article.
  
    http://www.sciam.com/0397issue/0397stefik.html

• Nov 16: Lab/Discussion: Digital Rights Managment systems, Viral Marketing and Brand Recognition. Assignment TBA

• Nov 19: The Zapatistas and the return of RAND

  Required:
  
  – selections from The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico by Ronfeldt, Arquilla, Fuller and Fuller, RAND Corporation, 1998.
  

• Nov 21: Zapatistas cont’d

• Nov 23: Lab/Discussion: Social network technologies, independent media and networked communication tools.

• Nov 26: TBA

• Nov 28: Small World after all? Return to Milgram and Geertz.

  Required:
  
  
Optional:


• Nov 30: No Class

**Section 9: Conclusions**

• Dec 03: Student Presentations
• Dec 05: Student Presentations
• Dec 07: Final