The Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
(Department of Political Science)

Christopher Parsons
2007 University of Guelph MA (Philosophy)
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Friday, October, 25, 2013
1:00 PM
David Turpin Building, Room A136

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Colin Bennett, Department of Political Science, UVic (Supervisor)
Dr. Arthur Kroker, Department of Political Science, UVic (Member)
Dr. Andrew Clement, Faculty of Information, University of Toronto (Outside Member)

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Dr. Milton Mueller, School of Information Studies, Syracuse University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Matthew Murphy, Peter B. Gustavson School of Business, UVic
Abstract

Surveillance on the Internet today extends beyond collecting intelligence at the layer of the Web: major telecommunications companies use technologies to monitor, mediate, and modify data traffic in real time. Such companies functionally represent communicative bottlenecks through which online actions must pass before reaching the global Internet and are thus perfectly positioned to develop rich profiles of their subscribers and modify what they read, do, or say online. And some companies have sought to do just that. A key technology, deep packet inspection (DPI), facilitates such practices.

In the course of evaluating the practices, regulations, and politics that have driven DPI in Canada, the US, and UK it has become evident that the adoption of DPI tends to be dependent on socio-political and economic conditions. Simply put, market or governmental demand is often a prerequisite for the technology’s adoption by ISPs. However, the existence of such demand is no indication of the success of such technologies; regulatory or political advocacy can lead to the restriction or ejection of particular DPI-related practices.

The dissertation proceeds by first outlining how DPI functions and then what has driven its adoption in Canada, the US, and UK. Three conceptual frameworks, path dependency, international governance, and domestic framing, are used to explain whether power structures embedded into technological systems themselves, international standards bodies, or domestic politics are principally responsible for the adoption or resistance to the technology in each nation. After exploring how DPI has arisen as an issue in the respective states I argue that though domestic conditions have principally driven DPI’s adoption, and though the domestic methods of governing DPI and its associated practices have varied across cases, the outcomes of such governance are often quite similar. More broadly, I argue that while the technology and its associated practices constitute surveillance and can infringe of individuals’ privacy, the debates around DPI must more expansively consider how DPI raises existential risks to deliberative democratic states. I conclude by offering some suggestions on defraying the risks DPI poses to such states.
Awards, Scholarships, Fellowships

2013-Present – Centre for Global Studies Graduate Student Fellowship, University of Victoria
2009-2012 – Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship

Presentations


Publications


2. Bennett, C.; Parsons, C.; Molnar, A. (Forthcoming) “Forgetting and the right to be forgotten.” In Serge Gutwirth et al. (Eds.), *Computers, Privacy, and Data Protection: Reloading Data Protection.*


