

TRENDS

in Society and Information Technology

2016 Seminar Series



JUDITH DONATH, Writer, Designer and Artist

“Technology and Deception”

Friday, October 28, 2016

2 to 3 p.m.

6011 Donald Bren Hall

A reception will follow the talk in the 5th floor atrium.

Free and open to the public; no RSVP required.

ABSTRACT It can be quite profitable to lie – to claim to be smarter, faster, or nicer than you actually are. Yet if deception becomes too widespread, communication ceases to function. Signaling theory, as developed in evolutionary biology, shows how a working equilibrium between honesty and deception is maintained. Today, however, technology threatens to destabilize this balance. On the one hand, deception is rampant in online forums, where identities are fluid and disposable. Yet on the other hand, extensive personal databases, ubiquitous surveillance, and sophisticated bio-sensing promise (or threaten) to nearly eradicate deception. At the same time, advances in AI and robotics are bringing us new companions and confidants that can expertly mimic any human emotion – with none of the constraints that actual feelings and empathy place on real people. To understand these changes -- and assess what technologies we truly want -- we need to think about them in the context of big questions such as “What function does deception play in society?” and “When do we care what another thinks, and when are we only concerned with how they act?”

BIO Judith Donath is a writer, designer and artist; her work is about how technology transforms social interaction. She is the author of “The Social Machine: Designs for Living Online” (MIT Press) and is currently writing a book about signaling theory, technology and deception. She is an advisor to Harvard’s Berkman Center and was formerly the director of the Sociable Media Group at the MIT Media Lab.

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