

Universität der Künste Berlin
Studium Generale
Sommersemester 2023

Bettine Josties (jostb343@newschool.edu)

Anna Thieser (akt2147@columbia.edu)

This syllabus describes the course curriculum for *Social Media and the Body in Capitalism*, offered at UdK Berlin Studium Generale during the summer semester of 2023. Our meetings will take place on two weekends: June 10th/11th, and June 17th/18th from 11-6pm in room 102 at Hardenbergstr. 33.

Social Media and the Body in Capitalism

What is it that we do when we produce and consume content on social media? This seminar invites students to explore social media as an economic force and as an experience. Social media and our smartphones mediate our daily rhythms, workflow, friendships, and thoughts. They shape our bodily experience of capitalism as they accompany and affect us in our most intimate spheres and at the same time connect us to the world economy.

How did we get here? How did social media become part of the economy and extend its influence over work, friendship, love and discourse, down to our personal views from our bodies to the world? Is producing and consuming content work? Framing social media as an economic sphere, a realm of production and labor and therefore as a bodily relation, we will explore how the body inhabits and is captured by social media – but also how it can serve as a source of resistance. The seminar also includes a practical component: students will creatively position themselves by creating, curating, and writing about content in the context of the course. We will use these exercises to broaden our bodily and intellectual understanding of how social media integrate the human body into digital capitalism and make use of it. At the same time, we explore the potential of our bodily interaction with smartphones to actively subvert the aesthetics and economic logic of capitalist social media.

Session structure

We meet for 7 hours on 4 days. The sessions will be broken up into two blocks each day, with a lunch break as well as occasional quiet reading and reflection time built in. A lot of the theory-heavy discussion will happen in the morning hours, and we will spend the afternoon watching content together, showing each other our dossiers (see below) and workshopping ideas.

Course requirements

Active participation

There is a set of preparatory readings and a practical component consisting of the creation of a dossier to be completed ahead of the first and second weekends. Both the readings and the creation of the dossier are supposed to be informative, inspiring, and fun. They will form the basis of our discussion in

class. You are expected to be present and actively participate in class discussions. Please let us know if you need accommodations.

Readings

All readings will be made available on the course's Moodle page in PDF or link form. If you have trouble accessing materials which are required or recommended, or you want to find free versions of other sources, try [Library Genesis](#) for books or [Sci-Hub](#) for research papers. Although these services are not legal in a strict sense, you will not get in trouble for using them.

The readings for this class are ambitious. If your study program does not normally involve reading (academic) texts, you might feel overwhelmed. That's okay. Read as much as you can, and come with questions – failing to get through the essays is fine but we do expect you to try.

Dossier

Ahead of our first meeting, we are asking you to create a dossier and submit it to the Moodle course page by June 9th. The dossier gives you the opportunity to begin thinking through some of the course themes, and to find out more about your own positions, intuitions and interests. It requires your intellectual and creative input on 6 sets of questions, listed further below. To respond to them, you have three options to choose from:

- Writing: write a short text response
- Posting: create social media content in response and save it (this can be a tweet, a TikTok, the recording of a live...)
- Curating: create collections of already existing social media content in response (i.e. select and showcase content for the purpose of answering the questions)

Be creative and adjust the questions as needed (i.e. answer only some of the questions, answer them in a fun, ironic, critical, or polemical way, etc.). It's up to you to decide how to present your materials. It can, for example, be a PDF containing a compilation of written texts and visual representations of social media content, or of links to social media content. Make sure to always indicate which questions you're responding to.

1. What are social media? How would you explain social media to a person that has no idea what they are? (Optional: Give an example of something you think is social media and explain why. Give an example of something that isn't social media and explain why.)
2. What is social media content? What isn't social media content? Give concrete examples. How does social media content relate to art, or to "older" media?
3. What social media do you use and how? What social media don't you use and why?

4. How do you use your body to engage with the different social media platforms you use? How else could you use your body to engage with them?
5. Do social media affect your body when you're offline? How? Give/show examples.
6. Are there things you'd like to do on social media but can't? If so, what? Give examples.
7. Did you have a recent experience with social media that you found striking, surprising, interesting, that stuck with you and occupied you?

CURRICULUM

June 10th: HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

[Kevin Driscoll: The Modern World](#) (chapter 5: Cultivating Community)

[Fred Turner: From Counterculture to Cyberculture](#) (Chapter 8: Triumph of the Network Mode)

[Vilem Flusser: Crisis of Linearity](#)

[Koray Caliskan & Michel Callon: Economization Part 1](#)

Short reads (1 page each)

[Mike Pepi: Elements of Technology Criticism](#)

[The US Military Built your iPhone](#)

June 11th: THE BODY ONLINE

[Marcel Mauss: Techniques of the Body](#)

[Bruno Latour: How to Talk about the Body?](#)

[Gilles Deleuze: Postscript on the Societies of Control](#)

[Jak Ritger: On Devirtualization](#)

Pick one or two of the topical tracks below.

Social Media Socialization and Play

[Alexandra Ruiz Gomez et al.: Playing YouTube: How the Nancy YouTuber Doll and App Position](#)

[Children as Aspiring YouTube Influencers](#)

[Benjamin Nicoll and Bjorn Nansen: Mimetic Production in You Tube Toy Unboxing Videos](#)

Social Media Diets, Body Image, and Fat Activism

[Alex Hawgood: What is Bigorexia? A social media diet of perfect bodies is spurring some teenage boys to form muscle dysmorphia.](#) (New York Times Article that can be listened to)

[What Students Are Saying About How Social Media Affects Their Body Image](#) (New York Times Conversation by "The Learning Network")

[Kaisu Hynnä and Katariina Kyrölä: "Feel in Your Body": Fat Activist Affects in Blogs](#)

Social Media, Racism, and Black Radicalism

[Safiya Umoja Noble: Algorithms of Oppression. How Search Engines Reinforce Racism](#) (Chapter 2: Searching for Black Girls)

[André Brock: From the Blackhand Side: Twitter as a Cultural Conversation](#)

[Between the Black Radical Tradition and the Digital](#) (discussion of contributors to a [special issue of the Logic Magazine](#))

Social Media, Gender, and Feminism

[Legacy Russell: Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto](#) (Introduction and Chapter 1: Glitch Refuses)

[Kylie Jarrett: The Relevance of “Women’s Work”: Social Reproduction and Immaterial Labor in Digital Media](#)

Social Media, Sex Work, and Digital Intimacy and Abuse

[Aella: Maximizing Your Slut Impact. An Overly Analytical Guide to Camgirling](#)

[Eduardo E.B. Martins: I’m the Operator With My Pocket Vibrator: Collective Intimate Relations on Chaturbate](#)

[Julian Dibell: A Rape in Cyberspace](#)

Social Media, Disability, and Disability Activism

[Kait Sanchez: ‘May be an image.’ What It’s Like Browsing Instagram While Blind](#)

[Aimi Hamraie and Kelly Fritsch: Crip Technoscience Manifesto](#)

Social Media Politics

[Zeynep Tufekci: How Social Media Took Us from Tahrir Square to Donald Trump](#)

[Joshua Citarella: Politigram and the Post-Left](#)

Social Media Addiction

[Natasha Dow Schüll: Addiction by Design. Machine Gambling in Las Vegas](#) (Introduction: Mapping the Machine Zone, pp. 1-2; Chapter One: A Human-Machine Addiccion, pp. 14-22, Modulating Affect: Sensory Atmospheric: pp. 46-51; Chapter 2: Engineering Experince: The Productive Economy of Player-Centric Design, pp. 52-58 and pp. 73-75, skim the rest of the chapter)

[Richard Seymour: The Machine Always Wins: What drives our addiction to social media](#)

Social Media and Web3

[Kei Kreutler: A Prehistory of DAOs](#)

June 17th: SOCIAL MEDIA AS SPACES OF LABOR

[Karl Marx: The Fragment on Machines](#)

[Nigel Thrift: The Insubstantial Pageant, Producing an Untoward Land](#)

[Tiziana Terranova: Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy](#)

[Christian Fuchs: Digital Prosumption Labour on Social Media in the Context of the Capitalist Regime of Time](#)

Optional/browse

[Trebor Scholz \(ed.\): Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory](#)

[Eran Fisher and Christian Fuchs \(eds.\), Reconsidering Value and Labor in the Digital Age](#)

[Christian Fuchs: Capitalism, Patriarchy, Slavery, and Racism in the Age of Digital Capitalism and Digital Labour](#)

[Christian Fuchs' website](#)

[tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society](#)

June 18th: REBELLING BODIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE EGDE

Subversion

[Banu Bargu: Starve and Immolate](#) (chapter 1: Biosovereignty and Necroresistance)

[Audre Lorde: Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic As Power](#)

[Michel Foucault: Friendship as a Way of Life](#)

Exit

[The Unabomber Manifesto](#)

[Chellis Glendinning: Notes toward a Neoluddite Manifesto](#)

[New York Times: Luddite Teens Don't Want Your Likes](#)

Alternatives

[Nick Couldry and José Van Dick: Researching Social Media as If the Social Mattered](#)

[American Artist: Black Gooey Universe](#)