Control and Resistance in the Digital Era

An Introduction to key issues and debates

Institut für Kommunikationswissenschaften (IfKW), Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (LMU)

Course responsible:
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Level: Bachelor

ECTS: 3

Language: English

Time and date:
SS 2020: June 8 & 10 (09:00 - 14:00 and 18:00 - 20:00) and June 12 & 13 (09:00 – 17:00)

Exam form:
Project essay about subject chosen by student (max. 4,000 words incl. references). Theme must be accepted by course responsible and has to be relevant for content of the course.

Project essays due:
July 1, 2020

Lecture plan and syllabus:

Summary:

The interdisciplinary course introduces critical approaches to the contemporary Internet. Drawing upon the work by Michel Foucault and literature on the political economy of media, we explain such phenomena as power and control in distributed networks, the nature of exploitation and oppression in digital domains, corporate and state surveillance, commodification of identities, or the increasing ecological footprint of allegedly green network technologies. Subsequently, these aspects are contrasted with contemporary practices of resistance and re-appropriation aiming at a progressive and collaborative approach to technology.
The course consists of a mixture of teacher-driven lectures and student-focused seminars. It is expected that participants have made themselves familiar with the readings prior to course start. Every student will have to choose one text and briefly summarize it in a seminar. A list of available texts can be found in the course plan below.

The exam consists of a written essay of approx. 4000 words over a topic chosen by the students. An outline of the planned essays will have to be presented in class.

**MONDAY, JUNE 8:**

09:00 s.t. - 09:30

**Welcome and introduction to the course**

We get to know each other and gain an overview over content of the course, work requirements, exams etc.

09:30 - 11:00

**Lecture 1: CONTROL**

**How Control Exists After De-Centralization: The History, Institutions, and Technologies Behind the Contemporary Internet (HP)**

The lecture explores the structures, institutions, and technologies forming the contemporary Internet. Offering a historical vantage point, multiple vectors of emergence of digital networks are studied and connected to questions of power and control. At a theoretical level, the lecture offers a concrete exemplification Foucault’s genealogical method and critically deploys his varied understandings of power to enable a better grasp of the political, social, and economic implications of today’s most dominant technologies.

**Required readings:**

**Recommended readings:**
11:00 - 12:00: Lunch

12:00 s.t. - 13:45

Lecture 2: WORK & EXPLOITATION

The Power of Platforms and Networks: New Forms of Accumulation, Commodification, and Labour in Digital Capitalism (KS)

This lecture deals with new forms of work, accumulation and commodification in digital capitalism and how these are mediated via platforms. Taking concrete examples such as Uber, AirBnB, or Amazon Mechanical Turk as departure point, the lecture offers an empirically grounded exploration of the contemporary, globally networked work ‘place’.

Required readings:

Recommended readings:

13:45 – 14:00: A few words about the next days and distribution of articles for student presentations

Break

18:00 - 20:00:

Seminar 1: Film screening (HP)

Laura Poitras *Citizenfour* (2014). With brief introduction and followed by q/a.
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10:

09:00 s.t. – 10:30:

Lecture 3: SUSTAINABILITY

Utopia, Myopia, Dystopia: Digital Dreams, Ideology, and the Corporate/State Takeover of the Internet (HP)

This lecture takes up issues of ideology in thinking about digital technologies. Continuing with themes highlighted in lecture 2 and reconnecting to the theoretical frames of lecture 1, we critique corporate and political new-speak about alleged potentials of the Internet and new learning algorithms in terms of economic opportunities, political liberation, and a greening of the economy. We will focus specifically on the carbon footprint of cloud-computing, the problem of identity, profiling, and commodification in corporate ‘social’ media, and questions of a political economy of fake news and propaganda in digital domains.

Required readings:


Recommended readings:


10:30 – 11:30

**Lecture 4: NETWORKS**

**Network of Networks: A Rough-Guide to Protocols, Security, and Anonymity Online (DL)**

The lecture offers an introduction to salient technical aspects of the Internet and internet-based communication. As such, it provides an important basis for an understanding of the dynamics between surveillance, control and resistance in digital domains, and prepares the grounds for practical cybersecurity practices taken up later in the course.

**Required readings:**


11:30 - 12:00: Lunch

12:00 – 14:00: Article presentations by students I (1-2 students per article)

13:30 – 14:00: Molleindustria. 2011. *Phonestory*. Molleindustria. (Introduce both the game and the controversy around it.)

**Break**

18:00 - 20:00:

**Seminar 2: Film screening (KS)**

FRIDAY, JUNE 12:

09:15 – 10:30

Lecture 5: RESISTANCE

From Global Panopticon to Pervasive Management: Resisting the Digital Surveillance and Exploitation Complex (HP)

Taking Foucault’s observation that all power is productive and with necessity generates its own intrinsic forms of counter-conduct, this lecture interrogates practices of resistance to the tight exploitation, surveillance, and control regimes characteristic of contemporary digital media ecologies. Closely connecting conditions, strategies, and tactics, both on- and offline, we aim at offering alternatives and facilitate self-empowerment and collective mobilization in the face of increasing oppression and alienation in digital domains.

Required readings:


Recommended readings:


10:30 – 11:30:

Seminar 3: Film screening (HP)


11:30 – 12:00 Lunch
12:00 – 13:45

Lecture 6: PRACTICE

CCC Cybersecurity workshop

Required readings & resources:


RiseUp: [https://riseup.net/](https://riseup.net/)

Electronic Frontiers Foundation: Surveillance Self-Defense: [https://ssd.eff.org/](https://ssd.eff.org/)

The Tor Project: [https://www.torproject.org/](https://www.torproject.org/)

14:00 - 18:00:

*Article presentations by students III (2 students per article)*


**SATURDAY, JUNE 13:**

09:30 - 11:00

**Summary, Q/A, and Project Design (HP & KS) OR Excursion?**

11:00 - 12:00: Lunch

12:00 - 13:45: Student project presentations: (work requirement)

Each student will have to present a succinct outline for their planned course essay. Please provide a draft disposition and table of contents as a hand-out. Each presentation should not last longer than 10 minutes (max. 5 minutes presentation and 5 minutes q/a and feedback).

14:15 - 15:30: Student project presentations: (continued)

15:30 - 16:00: Exam preparations

You will be able to ask questions and get feedback on practical issues regarding your planned course essays.