

Faculty of Human, Social and Political Studies  
Sociology, Part IIB, 2023-24  
SOC 7: Media, Culture and Society

## Overview

### Course Organiser:

- Dr Meredith Hall, [mah247@cam.ac.uk](mailto:mah247@cam.ac.uk)

### Supervision Coordinator:

- Dr Rachell Sánchez-Rivera, [rs871@cam.ac.uk](mailto:rs871@cam.ac.uk)

### Lecturers:

- Dr Meredith Hall, [mah247@cam.ac.uk](mailto:mah247@cam.ac.uk)
- Dr Nomisha Kurian, [nck28@cam.ac.uk](mailto:nck28@cam.ac.uk)
- Ms Saide Mobayed, [sam270@cam.ac.uk](mailto:sam270@cam.ac.uk)
- Dr Ella McPherson, [em310@cam.ac.uk](mailto:em310@cam.ac.uk)
- Ms Ayala Panievsky, [ap2034@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ap2034@cam.ac.uk)
- Ms Flavia Saxler, [fs511@cam.ac.uk](mailto:fs511@cam.ac.uk)
- Ms Marisa Tangeman, [mt877@cam.ac.uk](mailto:mt877@cam.ac.uk)

### Aims and objectives of the paper:

- To equip students with the analytical skills and the theoretical and empirical knowledge to understand, navigate and change the rapidly-evolving dynamics between media, culture and societies;
- To critically examine approaches that put culture at the centre in our understanding of societies;
- To develop reflexivity around the intersection of power with media and technology as relates to political communication and everyday life;
- To deepen understanding through developing skills in the use of theory to analyse empirical cases and the use of these empirical cases to advance theory;
- To contribute to the decolonising and greening of media studies;
- To reflect critically on the cultural production that occurs in the academy;
- To build argumentation skills through essay writing, group discussions and collaborations.

### Course content:

This paper is concerned with the social analysis of culture, media, symbolic forms and information and communication technologies. This is manifested in a theoretical focus on approaches to the study of media and culture, including their relationships with capitalism; the norms that drive the production and study of media and culture, including technology; audiences; subcultures; visual culture; and storytelling. Lectures and accompanying seminars examine key concepts, theories and debates in these areas and apply them in the empirical areas of digital media and everyday life as well as media, technology and social change. The variety of SOC 7 topics are research-led and benefit from the range of expertise among the paper's lecturers; reflecting the Department's pedagogical concern with the climate emergency, literature and 'thinking and talking' questions are included to connect topics to the climate emergency. This is an advanced paper which builds on

foundations in the study of media, culture and technologies given in Parts I and IIA, particularly SOC 1, SOC 2 and SOC 3 – though these papers are not prerequisites.

#### Structure of the paper:

- **Theories and Concepts of Media and Culture**
  - Six two-hour sessions in Michaelmas, weeks 1-3 and 5-7
  - Lecturers: Dr Hall, Dr McPherson, Dr Kurian
- **Digital Media and Everyday Life**
  - Three two-hour sessions in Lent, weeks 1-3
  - Lecturers: Ms Mobayed, Ms Tangeman, and Dr Kurian
- **Media, Technology and Social Change**
  - Three two-hour sessions in Lent, weeks 5-7
  - Lecturers: Ms Saxler, Ms Panievsky, and Dr Kurian
- **Revision**
  - One two-hour Q&A session in Easter
  - Lecturer: Dr Hall

#### Mode of teaching and supervision arrangements:

- The paper will be administered via its **SOC 7 Moodle site**, where resources will be organised according to topic.
- Each topic will consist of a **one-hour lecture** and a **one-hour interactive seminar** that will consist of discussion and learning activities as detailed below in each topic description. This seminar activity will almost always be about applying the theory and concepts to a new empirical case to further our understanding of the case, and then, in turn, about applying this new knowledge to further our understanding of the theory and concepts. It is a space for third year students to exercise independent scholarship collaboratively.
- Students should have **six supervisions** over Michaelmas and Lent terms, of which at least four require students to submit essays. These should be sent by email to **supervisors at least 24 hours in advance of the supervision**. Essays should be **no more than 2,500 words**; this allows students to practice writing to wordcount and supervisors to manage their workloads. Students should answer the relevant supervision question in the paper guide and will receive written feedback on these essays from their supervisors ahead of the supervision.
- The remaining **two supervisions can involve alternative preparation** subject to agreement between supervisor and student; this may include a presentation on an empirical case, an analysis of a media artefact or a 500-word blog piece for the Department website. Students taking this option are particularly encouraged to make connections between the topic and the climate crisis.
- The **reading lists** for each topic are a starting point for students and supervisors. Starred readings are the core literature, but students are encouraged to explore beyond these lists as they form their views on these topics. Students are not expected to cover all of the topics, but rather to make a balanced selection in consultation with their supervisors.
- A **revision Q&A** session and two revision supervisions will occur in the first few weeks of Easter term.
- **Supervision is organised centrally** by the supervision coordinator.

- Because the paper is research-led, the **topics may change** year to year according to lecturers' expertise.

### Background reading:

The following texts provide an overview of the sociology of media and culture subfields as well as connect them to the Department of Sociology's overarching pedagogical theme of the climate crisis.

- P. du Gay et al. *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (SAGE, 1996) [[Introduction](#)]
- R. Maxwell and T. Miller, '[Greening Media Studies](#),' *Media and the Ecological Crisis* (Routledge, 2016)
- J. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity* (Polity, 2013) [Introduction]
- D. Thussu, 'Why Internationalize Media Studies and How?' in *Internationalizing Media Studies: Impediments and Imperatives* (Taylor & Francis, 2009)
- S. Waisbord, *Media Sociology: A Reappraisal* (Polity, 2014) [Introduction]
- R. Williams, '[Culture is Ordinary](#)', in *Studying Culture: An Introductory Reader* (Arnold, 1993)

**Thinking and talking question:** *Why has the study of the media so often overlooked connections to the climate crisis, and to what effect?*

## Series 1: Theories and Concepts of Media and Culture

Aims of this series:

- To provide students with an introduction to some of the key theoretical approaches and concepts in the study of culture and the media;
- To give students a sense of the value and the fruitfulness of these approaches and concepts, while at the same time alerting them to their shortcomings;
- To introduce students to some of the key debates in the field.

### 1. Culture and capitalism (Hall) (Week 1, 10 October)

**Summary:** One of the longest-standing concerns in this subfield of sociology is the connection between culture and capitalism, both with respect to who owns and controls cultural production – from cinema to social media platforms to app design – and with respect to how cultural products reinforce capitalist ideologies. This lecture introduces this critical approach, while also demonstrating how its emphasis on capitalism is just the first step in a broader understanding of media, culture and power that takes into account multiple axes of inequality. This lecture concludes by exploring intersectional, decolonial and environmental approaches to critical political economy.

**Seminar activity:** Choose a social media platform and analyse it using the concepts and critiques of the culture industry thesis.

#### Reading list:

- T.W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (Routledge, 1991) [Chapter 3: '[Culture Industry Reconsidered](#)']
- A. Appadurai, '[Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value](#)' in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986)
- W. Benjamin, *Illuminations* (Fontana, 1973) ['[The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction](#)']
- \*P. Chakravartty and Y. Zhao, '[Introduction: Toward a Transcultural Political Economy of Global Communications](#),' in *Global Communications: Toward a Transcultural Political Economy* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007)

- N. Dyer-Witheford, A. M. Kjøsen and J. Steinhoff, [Inhuman Power: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Capital](#) (Pluto, 2019) ['Introduction: AI-Capital']
- \*D. Freedman, [The Contradictions of Media Power](#) (Bloomsbury, 2013) [Chapter 1]
- S. Gangadharan, '[Digital Exclusion: A Politics of Refusal](#)' in *Digital Technology and Democratic Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 2020)
- \*M. Horkheimer & T. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Verso, 1979) ['[The Culture Industry](#)']
- J. Lewis and T. Boyce, '[Climate Change and the Media: The Scale of the Challenge](#),' in *Climate Change and the Media* (Peter Lang, 2009)
- T. D. Oyedemi, '[Global Digital Capitalism: Mark Zuckerberg in Lagos and the Political Economy of Facebook in Africa](#),' *International Journal of Communication* 13 (2019), pp. 2045–61
- L. Nakamura, '[Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft](#)' in *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory* (Routledge, 2014)
- \*A. Saha, '[Production Studies of Race and the Political Economy of Media](#)' *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*. 60/1 (2020), pp. 138–42
- S. Wagner and M. Fernández-Ardèvol, '[Local Content Production and the Political Economy of the Mobile App Industries in Argentina and Bolivia](#),' *New Media & Society* 18/8 (2016), pp. 1768–86
- F. Yang, '[China's "Fake" Apple Store: Branded Space, Intellectual Property and the Global Culture Industry](#),' *Theory, Culture & Society*, 31/4 (2014), pp. 71–96

**Supervision question:** How does capitalism impact the production of culture and how does culture, in turn, influence the operations of capital?

**Thinking and talking question:** What crucial insights do intersectional, decolonial, and environmental approaches offer to the study of media and cultural industries?

## 2. Media, design, and morality (McPherson) (Week 2, 17 October)

**Summary:** Morality is inherent not only to the design of media and technology but also to how we as scholars critically assess them. Yet, the norms that underpin our experience and understanding of media and technology are often so normalised that we fail to critically interrogate them. This topic will provide the tools for this interrogation, through understanding norms not only as moral frameworks but also as binaries and discourses and as fundamentally caught up in power and positionality. We will explore this topic through the conceptual case of the public sphere and the empirical case of algorithmic search engines.

**Seminar activity:** Identify a technology you relied on during the lockdowns and investigate the norms that shape it. Where do you think these norms come from? How are they built into this technology, implicitly and explicitly? Who is included, and who is excluded by these norms? How do these norms compare to your own normative framework? See, for example, Sachini Perera's [blog post about Zoom](#).

### Reading list:

- J.C. Alexander, '[The Meaningful Construction of Inequality and the Struggles Against It: A "Strong Program" Approach to How Social Boundaries Change](#),' *Cultural Sociology*, 1/1 (2007), pp. 23-30
- F. Banda, '[Negotiating Journalism Ethics in Zambia: Towards a "Glocal" Ethics](#),' in *Media Ethics Beyond Borders: A Global Perspective* (Routledge, 2010)
- R. Benjamin, [Race after Technology](#) (Polity, 2019) [Chapter 2: 'Default Discrimination']
- S. Costanza-Chock, [Design Justice](#) (The MIT Press, 2020) [Chapter 1: 'Design Values']
- \*C. D'Ignazio and L. Klein, *Data Feminism* (MIT Press Open, 2019) [[Chapter Two: 'On Rational, Scientific, Objective Viewpoints from Mythical, Imaginary, Impossible Standpoints'](#)]
- A. Escobar, [Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds](#) (Duke University Press, 2018) [Chapter 4: 'An Outline of Ontological Design']
- \*J. Habermas, [The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere](#) (Polity, 1989) ['Introduction']

- S. Harding, '[Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques](#)', in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy* (Routledge, 1996)
- V. Held, *The Ethics of Care* (Oxford University Press, 2005) ['Introduction']
- \*J. Landes, '[Women and the Public Sphere: A Modern Perspective](#),' *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 15 (1984): pp. 20–31
- \*S. U. Noble. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (NYU Press, 2018) [Introduction and Conclusion]
- G. Pough, *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere* (Northeastern University Press, 2015) [Chapter 2 – 'Bringing Wreck: Theorising Race, Rap, Gender, and the Public Sphere']
- M. Puig de la Bellacasa, '[Matters of Care in Technoscience: Assembling Neglected Things](#)', *Social Studies of Science*, 41/1 (2011), pp. 85–106
- J. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity* (Polity, 1995) [Chapter 2]

**Supervision question:** How do norms shape media systems? Illustrate with at least one example.

**Thinking and talking questions:** Why has safeguarding the planet not been a core norm of Western societies? Is this changing? If so, why, and to what effect?

### 3. Storytelling and social justice (Kurian) (Week 3, 24 October)

**Summary:** Storytelling has been called the oldest form of communication, and human beings have been dubbed the species 'addicted to story' (Gottschall, 2012). This lecture focuses on creative and digital media as sites where stories are born, shaped, re-negotiated, and contested. We will discuss narratives of oppression and resistance across both traditional media and more novel and innovative forms (e.g. comics and graphic novels authored by women of colour and digital storytelling archives to reclaim marginalised histories). Throughout, we will explore the transgressive and transformative potential of storytelling, as well as critical perspectives on its risks and limitations.

**Seminar activity:** In small groups, share a story that changed or broadened your perspective on any aspect of social, cultural, political, or economic life, in ways big or small. How was this narrative constructed? What was its medium of communication? What qualities of the story helped make it transformative?

#### **Reading list:**

- \*H. Chute, *Graphic women: Life narrative and contemporary comics*. (Columbia University Press, 2010) [Chapter: 'Introduction']
- N. Couldry, '[Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the emergent space of digital storytelling](#),' *New media & society*, 10/3 (2008), pp. 373-391
- D. Dowling, *Immersive longform storytelling: Media, technology, audience* (Routledge, 2019) [Chapter: 'Conclusion']
- T. Dreher, '[A partial promise of voice: Digital storytelling and the limits of listening](#),' *Media International Australia* 142/1 (2012), pp. 157-166
- \*L. Graham, *Negotiating Institutional Heritage and Wellbeing* (Brill, 2021) [Chapter 5: 'Recovery Projects: Haitian Memory, Humanitarian Response and the Affordances of the Digital Disaster Archive']
- J. Hess, '["Putting a face on it": The trouble with storytelling for social justice in music education](#),' *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 29/1 (2021), pp. 67-87
- K. Lane, '[Not-the-Troubles: Disinterring the Marginalised Stories of the Ordinary and the Everyday](#),' *Anthropological Forum*, 29/1 (2019), pp. 62-76
- N. Matthews & N. Sunderland, *Digital storytelling in health and social policy: Listening to marginalised voices* (Taylor & Francis, 2017) [Chapter: 'Introduction']

- R. E. Page, [Stories and social media: Identities and interaction](#) (Routledge, 2013). [Chapter: 'Introduction']
- \*Y. P. Pratt, [Digital storytelling in Indigenous education: A decolonizing journey for a Métis community](#) (Routledge, 2019) [Chapter 1: 'My Roots, My Story, My Positioning']
- T. Recuber, '[The Prosumption of Commemoration: Disasters, Digital Memory Banks, and Online Collective Memory.](#)' *American Behavioral Scientist*, 56/4 (2012), pp. 531-549
- L. Wånggren, '[Our stories matter: Storytelling and social justice in the Hollaback! movement.](#)' *Gender and Education*, 28/3 (2016), pp. 401-415

**Supervision question:** What possibilities and pitfalls emerge from using storytelling for social change?

**Thinking and talking question:** To what extent has environmental activism relied on storytelling, and with what effects?

#### 4. Subcultures and cultural studies (McPherson) (Week 5, 7 November)

**Summary:** Building on the approach in cultural studies to seeing culture as 'ordinary' (Williams, 1993), this topic turns towards the study of subcultures, focusing in particular on their style and how scholars have read subcultural style in relation to the concept of resistance. We start with the early studies that understood subcultures as resisting dominant classes, interrogating these studies using standpoint theory to examine how these mechanisms for coping with exclusion might themselves have been exclusionary. We then turn to more contemporary subcultures and ask if we can still read these as sites of resistance in an era of commodification and consumption – or if, by focusing on resistance, we are overlooking the creativity of these subcultures in imagining alternative futures.

**Seminar activity:** Identify a contemporary subculture and analyse it with the theories and concepts of this topic, paying particular attention to the subculture's relationship to the idea of resistance.

#### Reading list:

- A. Bennett, '[Subcultures or Neo-Tribes? Rethinking the Relationship between Youth, Style and Musical Taste](#)', *Sociology* 33/3 (1999): pp. 599–617
- A. Cohen, '[Youth Gangs, Violence, and Local Culture in Chiang Mai, Northern Thailand](#)', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 47/4 (2018), pp. 484–507
- S. Cohen, [Folk Devils and Moral Panics](#) (Blackwell, 1980) ['Deviance and Moral Panics']
- S. Hall, '[Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies](#),' in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (Routledge, 1996)
- \*S. Hall and T. Jefferson (eds), [Resistance through Rituals](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Routledge, 2006) [Chapters 1 and 6]
- D. Hebdige, [Subculture: The Meaning of Style](#) (Methuen, 1979) ['One']
- \*S. Q. Jensen, '[Towards a Neo-Birminghamian Conception of Subculture? History, Challenges, and Future Potentials](#),' *Journal of Youth Studies* 21/4 (2018), pp. 405–421
- A. King and D. Smith, '[The Jack Wills Crowd: Towards a Sociology of an Elite Subculture](#),' *The British Journal of Sociology*, 69/1 (2018), pp. 44–66
- \*A. McRobbie, [Feminism and Youth Culture](#) (Palgrave, 1991) ['Settling Accounts with Subculture: A Feminist Critique']
- B. Schiermer, '[Late-Modern Hipsters: New Tendencies in Popular Culture](#),' *Acta Sociologica* 57/2 (2014): pp. 167–81
- S. Thornton, [Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital](#) (Polity, 1995) ['The Distinctions of Culture without Distinction']
- R. Weinzierl and D. Muggleton, [The Post-Subcultures Reader](#) (Berg Publishers, 2003) ['What is Post-subcultural Studies Anyway?']
- R. Williams, '[Culture is Ordinary](#),' in *Studying Culture: An Introductory Reader* (Arnold, 1993)

**Supervision question:** Are youth subcultures forms of resistance to mainstream culture?

**Thinking and talking question:** *If we put culture at the centre, how does this help us think about the climate crisis?*

## 5. Visual culture (Hall) (Week 6, 14 November)

**Summary:** Drawing inspiration from bell hooks' observation that '[t]here is power in looking,' this topic serves as an introduction to the study of visual culture, a scholarly enterprise dedicated to 'showing seeing' as a site of power relations. Our analytical lens, thus, shifts from *vision* to *visuality*—sight reconceived as a social fact. From this perspective, we will examine the social construction of subjectivities through visual representations. We will then turn to the cultural codes embedded within different 'ways of seeing' and the profound influence diverse media technologies have on the creation, dissemination, and consumption of images. Throughout, the focus will be on structural patterns of privileged looking and blindness within visual culture, specifically in relation to race, gender, sexuality, and colonialism.

**Seminar activity:** Bring two images from different ad campaigns with contrasting representations of race, gender, and/or sexuality. Be prepared to discuss.

### Reading list:

- \*R. Barthes, '[Rhetoric of the Image](#)' in *Visual Culture: The Reader* (Sage & The Open University, 1999)
- R. Dyer, [White](#) (Routledge, 2017) ['The Light of the World']
- F. Fanon, [Black Skins, White Masks](#) (Paladin, 1986) ['The Fact of Blackness']
- J. Halberstam, '[Queer Faces: Photography and Subcultural Lives](#)' in *The Visual Culture Reader* (Routledge, 2012)
- \*S. Hall, '[Introduction: Looking and Subjectivity](#)' in *Visual Culture: The Reader* (Sage & The Open University, 1999)
- S. Hall, '[The Spectacle of the "Other"](#)' in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Sage & The Open University, 1997)
- b. hooks, '[The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators](#)' in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Routledge, 2015)
- S. Jhally, '[Image-based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture](#)' in *Gender, Race and Class in Media: A Critical Reader* (Sage, 2011)
- L. Nakamura, [Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet](#) (Minnesota, 2008) ['Introduction: Digital Racial Formations and Networked Images of the Body']
- N. Mirzoeff, [The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality](#) (Duke, 2011) ['Introduction: The Right to Look; Or, How to Think With and Against Visuality']
- N. Mirzoeff, '[Visualizing the Anthropocene](#)', *Public Culture* 26/2 (2014), pp. 213-32
- C. Pinney, *Photography and Anthropology* (Reaktion Books, 2011) ['[The Double History of Photography and Anthropology](#)']
- \*Said, E. [Orientalism](#) (Vintage 1979) [Introduction]
- A. Sekula, '[The Body and the Archive](#)', *October* 39 (1986), pp. 3-64
- \*M. Struken and L. Cartwright, [Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture](#) (Oxford, 2018) ['Introduction' and 'Chapter 1: Image, Power, and Politics']

**Supervision question:** *How has the emergence of new visual media shaped the racialization process and/or the reification of gender/sexuality?*

**Thinking and talking question:** *Hall argues that seeing is a cultural practice. What might be some implications of this statement for how we view nature and the environment in the midst of the environmental crisis?*

## 6. Audiences (McPherson) (Week 7, 21 November)

---

**Summary:** This topic covers how the understanding of audiences has evolved in media sociology, from the passive audiences of mass media to the active prosumer (producing consumer) of the social media era. We will interrogate how much the dominant technology of the time has shaped this understanding. Throughout, we will focus on how views on audiences relate to broader sociological questions around agency and power, and we will interrogate why more passive understandings of audiences are resurfacing just when our media are becoming ever more interactive.

**Seminar activity:** Find some media coverage of the phenomenon of fake news. Which understanding of the audience is represented? Why?

### Reading list:

- \*I. Ang, '[Wanted: Audiences. On the Politics of Empirical Audience Studies](#)', in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* (Wiley-Blackwell 2006)
- S. Banaji, '[Slippery Subjects: Gender, Meaning and the Bollywood Audience](#)', in *The Routledge Companion to Media & Gender* (Routledge 2013)
- \*S.E. Bird, '[Are We all Producers Now? Convergence and Media Audience Practices](#)', *Cultural Studies*, 25/ 4-5 (2011), pp. 502-516
- \*R. Butsch '[Agency, Social Interaction, and Audience Studies](#),' in *Media Sociology: A Reappraisal* (Polity, 2014)
- N. Couldry, '[Theorising Media as Practice](#)', *Social Semiotics* 14/2 (2004): pp. 115–32.
- S. Gunster, '[Engaging Climate Communication](#)', in *Journalism and Climate Crisis: Public Engagement, Media Alternatives*. (Routledge, 2017)
- \*S. Hall, '[Encoding/Decoding](#)' in *Culture, Media, Language* (Hutchinson, 1980)
- S. Livingstone, '[Active Audiences? The Debate Progresses but it is Far from Resolved](#)', *Communication Theory* 25/4 (2015), pp. 439-46.
- S. Livingstone, '[Relationships between Media and Audiences: Prospects for Audience Reception Studies](#)', in *Media, Ritual and Identity: Essays in Honor of Elihu Katz* (Routledge, 1998)
- E. McPherson, '[The Digitally Mediated Freedom of Assembly](#)' in *Oxford Handbook of Peaceful Assembly* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming)
- S. L. Nielsen & P. Sheets (2019) '[Virtual Hype Meets Reality: Users' Perception of Immersive Journalism](#)', *Journalism*, pp. 1-17
- D. Smythe, '[On the Audience Commodity and Its Work](#),' in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* (Wiley-Blackwell 2006)
- S. Srinivasan & S. Diepeveen, '[The Power of the "Audience-Public": Interactive Radio in Africa](#)', *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 23/3 (2018), pp. 389–412
- S. S. Sundar and A. M. Limperos, '[Uses and Grats 2.0: New Gratifications for New Media](#)', *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 57/4 (2013): pp. 504–25

**Supervision question:** Does the active audience approach advance our understanding of media reception?

**Thinking and talking question:** How does how audiences are understood impact how we communicate climate change?



## Series 2: Digital Media and Everyday Life

### Aims of this series:

- To further students' understanding of the ways in which digital media affect different aspects of people's everyday lives, from the conduct of interpersonal relationships to the use of digital technologies to enhance self knowledge;
- To support students in their abilities to describe, compare and evaluate some of the main concepts and theories that have been used to study digital media and everyday life;
- To help students use relevant theories of culture and the media to assess how digital media can be empowering as well as disempowering for people in their everyday lives;
- To encourage students to critically assess the opportunities and threats that arise from digital media for people's everyday lives.

### 1. Digital media, everyday life and inequality (Mobayed) (Week 1, 23 January)

**Summary:** Commencing with an introduction to the sociology of everyday life, this topic will go on to explore the relation between digital media, everyday life and social inequality. Using the concept of 'labour' as a lens for critical investigation, we will examine how labour is distributed in and through digital media and will scrutinise how this distribution intersects with old and new inequalities. Focusing on 'data as a form capital', we will empirically broach the exploitative consequences of the new 'datafied' social order produced by AI, social platforms, and large-scale data collection.

**Seminar activity:** In small groups, pick a social media platform (or other AI tools, such as ChatGPT) from your everyday life and discuss the labour that your use of this app/platform generates, for whom, and how this labour might feed off/into social inequalities.

### Reading list:

- C. Archer, '[Social Media Influencers, Post-Feminism and Neoliberalism: How Mum Bloggers' 'Playbour' is Reshaping Public Relations](#)', *Public Relations Inquiry*, 8/2 (2019), pp. 149–166
- d. boyd, '[Inequality: Can Social Media Resolve Social Divisions?](#)', in *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (Yale University Press, 2014)
- N. Couldry & U. Mejías, '[Chapter 1. The Capitalization of Life Without Limit](#)' in *The Costs of Connection: How Data is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating it for Capitalism* (Stanford University Press, 2019)
- A. Deck, '[The workers at the frontlines of the AI revolution](#)', rest of the world (11 July 2023)
- \*C. Fuchs & S. Seignani, '[What Is Digital Labour? What is Digital Work? What's their Difference? And Why Do These Questions Matter for Understanding Social Media?](#)', *tripleC*, 11/2, pp. 237-293
- M. Graham, I. Hjorth & V. Lehdonvirta, '[Digital Labour and Development: Impacts of Global Digital Labour Platforms and the Gig Economy on Worker Livelihoods](#)', *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research* 23/2 (2017), pp. 135–162
- L. Hjorth, '[Ambient and Soft Play: Play, Labour and the Digital in Everyday Life](#)', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 21/1 (2018), pp. 3–12
- J. Kücklich, '[Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry](#)', *The Fibreculture Journal* 5 (2005)
- U. A. Mejias, '[The Privatization of Social Life](#)', in *Off the Network: Disrupting the Digital World* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013)
- \*J. Sadowski, '[When data is capital: Datafication, accumulation, and extraction](#)', *Big Data & Society*, 6/1 (2019), pp. 1-12.

- \*P. Sztompka, '[The Focus on Everyday Life: a New Turn in Sociology](#)', *European Review* 16/1 (2008), pp. 23–37
- J. Wajcman, '[How Silicon Valley Sets Time](#)', *New Media and Society*, 21/6 (2019), pp. 1272-1289
- \*A. Williams, M. Miceli & T. Gebru, '[The Exploited Labor Behind Artificial Intelligence](#)', NOÉMA (13 October 2022)
- A. J. Wood, M. Graham, V. Lehdonvirta & I. Hjorth, '[Good Gig, Bad Gig: Autonomy and Algorithmic Control in the Global Gig Economy](#)', *Work, Employment and Society* 33/1 (2019), pp. 56-75
- A. J. Wood, M. Graham, V. Lehdonvirta & I. Hjorth, '[Networked but Commodified: The \(Dis\)Embeddedness of Digital Labour in the Gig Economy](#)', *Sociology* 53/5 (2019), pp. 931–950

**Supervision question:** What implications do the new forms of labour generated by the digital age have for social inequality? Discuss using examples.

**Thinking and talking question:** Have digital media created new forms of grappling with the climate crises? Discuss using examples.

## 2. Mediated intimacy (Tangeman) (Week 2, 30 January)

**Summary:** This topic explores the increasing incorporation of digital media into our intimate lives and practices. We will examine how digital media affect practices and experiences of interpersonal closeness and address the opportunities and obstacles to intimacy that these create.

**Seminar activity:** Think of an app or digital platform that you relied on for intimacy during the pandemic. Consider how this app or platform helped you to foster intimacy, its limitations, and how it might mitigate and/or reproduce inequalities and relations of power. Discuss with a partner.

### Reading list:

- R. Amundsen, "'[A Male Dominance Kind of Vibe](#)": Approaching Unsolicited Dick Pics as Sexism', *New Media & Society* (2020), pp. 1–16
- J. Archambault, 'Love and Deceit' in *Mobile Secrets: Youth, Intimacy, and the Politics of Pretense in Mozambique* (University of Chicago Press, 2017)
- \*F. Attwood, J. Hakim & A. Winch, '[Mediated Intimacies: Bodies, Technologies and Relationships](#)', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 26/3 (2017), pp. 249–253
- P. Byron, K. Albury & T. Pym, '[Hooking up with friends: LGBTQ+ young people, dating apps, friendship and safety](#)', *Media, Culture & Society* 43/3 (2020), pp. 497-514
- D. Chambers, 'Technologically Mediated Personal Relationships' in *Social Media and Personal Relationships: Online Intimacies and Networked Friendship* (Palgrave Macmillan 2013)
- L. Clarke, J. Cummings, J. Hakim, F. Lanka, L. Redfern, I. Young, *Digital Intimacies 'Zine*, London: King's College, London (2021)
- J. Hakim, '[The Celebrity Male Nude Leak: Value Creation, Precarity and the Naked Male Body](#)' in *Work That Body: Male Bodies in Digital Culture* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2019)
- M. Hobbs, S. Owen & L. Gerber, '[Liquid Love? Dating Apps, Sex, Relationships and the Digital Transformation of Intimacy](#)', *Journal of Sociology*, 53/2 (2017), pp. 271–284
- C. E. Lawson, '[Platform Vulnerabilities: Harassment and Misogynoir in the Digital Attack on Leslie Jones](#)', *Information, Communication & Society* 21/6 (2018), pp. 818–833
- S. Livingstone, '[On the Mediation of Everything](#)', *Journal of Communication*, 59/1 (2009), pp. 1–18
- \*S. McGlotten, '[Introduction](#)' in *Virtual Intimacies: Media, Affect, and Queer Sociality* (State University of New York Press, 2013)

- \*M. Niesen, '[Love, Inc.: Toward Structural Intersectional Analysis of Online Dating Sites and Applications](#)', in *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online* (Peter Lang Publishing 2016)
- S. Philip, 2018. '[Youth and ICTs in a "New" India: Exploring Changing Gendered Online Relationships Among Young Urban Men and Women](#)', *Gender & Development*, 26/2 (2018), pp.313-24

**Supervision question:** Does the expansion of digital technologies into the intimate sphere amplify and/or address social inequalities?

**Thinking and talking question:** How does our turn towards digital media for intimacy relate to consumerism and fast-fashion?

### 3. The quantified self (Kurian) (Week 3, 6 February)

**Summary:** Starting with the concept of the 'quantified self' and its commercial history, this lecture is focused on the use of digital technology for self-tracking and to enhance self-knowledge. Returning to the classic sociological balance between structure and agency, we will first look at self-tracking technologies as a site of control by focusing both on their relationship with surveillance capitalism and on their normalisation of normative structures around neoliberalism, gender and able-bodiedness. By drawing on literature that takes a more ethnographic approach, we will then explore a more ambivalent view of power in the relationship between technologies and users, one which uncovers opportunities for resistance and new imaginaries.

**Seminar activity:** In small groups, decide on an app or digital platform that can be used for self-tracking and think about how using this app can inform how we think about ourselves and others.

#### **Reading list:**

- V. Barassi, '[BabyVeillance? Expecting Parents, Online Surveillance and the Cultural Specificity of Pregnancy Apps](#)', *Social Media + Society* 3/2 (2017), pp. 1–10
- K. Barta & G. Neff, '[Technologies for Sharing: Lessons from Quantified Self about the Political Economy of Platforms](#)', *Information, Communication & Society* 19/4 (2016), pp. 518–531
- N. Couldry & A. Powell, '[Big Data from the Bottom Up](#)', *Big Data & Society*, (2014), pp. 1-5
- \*K. Crawford, J. Lingel & T. Karppi, '[Our Metrics, Ourselves: A Hundred Years of Self-Tracking from the Weight Scale to the Wrist Wearable Device](#)', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 18 (2015), pp. 4–5
- A. S. Elias & R. Gill, '[Beauty Surveillance: The Digital Self-Monitoring Cultures of Neoliberalism](#)', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 21/1 (2018), pp. 59-87
- \*J. P. Elman, '["Find Your Fit": Wearable Technology and the Cultural Politics of Disability](#)', *New Media & Society* 20/10 (2018), pp. 3760–3777
- D. Lupton, '[Quantified Sex: A Critical Analysis of Sexual and Reproductive Self-Tracking Using Apps](#)', *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 17/4 (2015), pp. 440–453
- D. Lupton, '[Australian Women's Use of Health and Fitness Apps and Wearable Devices: A Feminist New Materialism Analysis](#)', *Feminist Media Studies* (2019), pp. 1–16
- D. Nafus & J. Sherman, '[This One Does Not Go Up to 11: The Quantified Self Movement as an Alternative Big Data Practice](#)', *International Journal of Communication*, 8 (2014), pp. 1784–1794
- G. Neff & D. Nafus, '[Self-tracking and the Technology Industry](#)', in *Self-Tracking* (MIT Press 2016)
- \*M. Ruckenstein & N. D. Schüll, '[The Datafication of Health](#)', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 46/1 (2017), pp. 261–278
- \*R. Sanders, '[Self-Tracking in the Digital Era: Biopower, Patriarchy, and the New Biometric Body Projects](#)', *Body & Society* 23/1 (2017), pp. 36-63

- B. Williamson, '[Algorithmic Skin: Health-Tracking Technologies, Personal Analytics and the Biopedagogies of Digitized Health and Physical Education](#)', *Sport, Education and Society* 20/1 (2015), pp. 133–151

**Supervision question:** *What can we learn about the self and society from self-tracking and big data? Discuss using examples.*

**Thinking and talking question:** *What is the relationship between quantification and the climate crisis?*

## Series 3: Media, Technology, and Social Change

### Aims of this series:

- To introduce students to some of the key concepts, theories, and debates around visibility, populism, and 'ICT4D'
- To encourage students to argue with and apply these concepts, theories, and debates;
- To inspire students to think critically about media, technologies and social change

### 1. Visibility (Saxler) (Week 5, 20 February)

**Summary:** Mediation has always afforded opportunities for visibility, but these opportunities are also always embedded in power relations that inflect who is seen by whom. In this topic, we will follow the concept of visibility in media sociology as the subdiscipline moves from considering the mass media to thinking about new visibilities in the era of social media and machine learning; we will theorise beyond visibility to think about invisibility and hypervisibility and how these relate to inequality. In so doing, we will not only look at how the status quo vis-à-vis visibility is maintained, including through considering the perils of visibility, but we will also look at how it is being challenged.

**Seminar activity:** Choose a struggle over mediated visibility from current events and investigate the relationships between visibility and power that characterise it, using the concepts and arguments from the topic.

#### Reading List:

- O. Al-Ghazzi, '["Forced to Report": Affective Proximity and the Perils of Local Reporting on Syria](#)'. *Journalism* 24(2) (2023), pp. 280–94.
- K. Andén-Papadopoulos, '[Citizen Camera-Witnessing: Embodied Political Dissent in the Age of "Mediated Mass Self-Communication"](#)'. *New Media & Society* 16(5) (2014), pp. 753–69.
- S. Banet-Weiser and K.C. Higgins, '[Television and the "Honest" Woman: Mediating the Labor of Believability](#)'. *Television & New Media* 23(2) (2022), pp. 127–47.
- \*R. Benjamin, *Race after Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (Polity, 2019) [["Coded Exposure: Is Visibility a Trap?"](#)]
- B., Cammaerts, 'Technologies of Self-Mediation: Affordances and Constraints of Social Media for Protest Movements' in *Civic Engagement and Social Media: Political Participation Beyond Protest* (Uldam & Vestergaard, 2015)
- L. Cervi and T. Divon, '[Playful Activism: Memetic Performances of Palestinian Resistance in TikTok #Challenges](#)'. *Social Media + Society* 9(1): 20563051231157610 (2023).
- \*L. Chouliaraki, '[The Symbolic Power of Transnational Media: Managing the Visibility of Suffering](#)'. *Global Media and Communication* 4(3) (2008), pp. 329–51.
- L. Chouliaraki, and T. Stolic, '[Rethinking Media Responsibility in the Refugee "Crisis": A Visual Typology of European News](#)'. *Media, Culture & Society* 39(8) (2017), pp. 1162–77.

- S. Duguay, '[Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer Visibility Through Selfies: Comparing Platform Mediators Across Ruby Rose's Instagram and Vine Presence](#)', *Social Media + Society* April-June (2016), pp. 1-12
- R. B. Eagle, '[Loitering, Lingerin, Hashtagging: Women Reclaiming Public Space Via #BoardtheBus, #StopStreetHarassment, and the #EverydaySexism Project](#)', *Feminist Media Studies*, 15/2 (2013), pp. 350-3
- B.N., Jacobsen, '[Regimes of Recognition on Algorithmic Media](#)'. *New Media & Society*: 14614448211053556 (2021)
- C. Kelley, '[Playing the Visibility Game: How Digital Influencers and Algorithms Negotiate Influence on Instagram](#)'. *New Media & Society* 21(4) (2019), pp. 895–913.
- E. McPherson, '[Risk and the Pluralism of Digital Human Rights Fact-Finding and Advocacy](#),' in *New Technologies for Human Rights Law and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2018)
- K. Mendes, J. Ringrose and J. Keller, '[#MeToo and the Promise and Pitfalls of Challenging Rape Culture through Digital Feminist Activism](#)', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 25/2 (2018), pp. 236-46
- J. Nummi, C. Jennings & J. Feagin, '[#BlackLivesMatter: Innovative Black Resistance](#)', *Sociological Forum*, 34/S1 (2019), pp. 1042-64
- \*J. B. Thompson, '[The New Visibility](#)', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 22/6 (2005), pp. 31–51
- J. B. Thompson, '[Mediated Interaction in the Digital Age](#)', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 37/1 (2018), pp. 3–28

**Supervision question:** *Who benefits from the new politics of visibility in the digital age?*

**Thinking and talking question:** *How has who and what are visible as concerns the climate crisis changed in recent years? Why?*

## 2. Populism, Media, and Democracy (Panievsky) (Week 6, 27 February)

**Summary:** This topic introduces the disputed relationship between media, populism, and democracy. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature, it raises questions like what populism actually is? Who are “the people”? How do algorithms and journalists shape populist politics today? Why does the media amplify populist leaders who call it “fake news” and “enemies of the people”? And is there a way to reshape the relationship between exclusionary and polarising politics and different forms of media? A variety of global cases will be used to demonstrate the challenges and opportunities that populism poses to the future of media and society.

**Seminar activity:** Choose a case of populism you are interested in – it can be a politician, a movement, a news organisation, etc – and analyse its relationship with (news and social) media. What are the potential implications/opportunities for the future of democracy?

### **Reading list:**

- \* P. Gerbaudo, '[Social Media and Populism: An Elective Affinity?](#)' *Media Culture & Society* 40/5 (2018), pp. 745-753
- \* V. Pickard, '[Media Failures in the Age of Trump](#),' *The Political Economy of Communication* 4:2 (2016) pp. 118–122
- \* S. Waisbord, '[Why Populism is Troubling for Democratic Communication](#),' *Communication, Culture and Critique* 11/1 (2018), pp. 21–34
- \* R. Wodak, *The Politics of Fear* (Sage, 2015) [[Populism and Politics: Transgressing Norms and Taboos](#)']
- C. Cimaglio, '[“A Tiny and Closed Fraternity of Privileged Men”: The Nixon-Agnew Anti-Media Campaign and the Liberal Roots of the U.S. Conservative “Liberal Media” Critique](#),' *International Journal of Communication* 10 (2016), pp. 1-19

- D. Freedman, 'Populism and Media Policy Failure,' *European Journal of Communication* 33:6 (2018), pp. 604–618
- B. Krämer, 'Populism, Media and the Form of Society,' *Communication Theory* 24/1 (2014), pp. 42–60
- A. Macaraig, M. Hameleers, '#DefendPressFreedom: Paradigm Repair, Role Perceptions and Filipino Journalists' Counterstrategies to Anti-Media Populism and Delegitimizing Threats,' *Journalism Studies* 23:16 (2022) 2078–2096
- G. Mazzoleni, *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) ['Populism and the Media']
- B. Ohm, 'Organizing Popular Discourse with and against the Media: Notes on the Making of Narendra Modi and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as Leaders-without-Alternative,' *Television & New Media*, 16/4 (2015), pp. 370–7
- A. Panievsky, 'Covering Populist Media Criticism: When Journalists' Professional Norms Turn Against Them,' *International Journal of Communication* 15 (2021), pp. 2136–55
- S. Rao, 'Making of Selfie Nationalism: Narendra Modi, the Paradigm Shift to Social Media Governance, and Crisis of Democracy,' *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 42/2 (2018), pp. 166–83
- J. E. Relly, *The Routledge Companion to Media Disinformation and Populism* (Routledge, 2021) ['Online Harassment of Journalists as a Consequence of Populism, Mis/disinformation, and Impunity']
- G. Sbaraini Fontes, F. P. J. Marques, 'Defending democracy or amplifying populism? Journalistic coverage, Twitter, and users' engagement in Bolsonaro's Brazil,' *Journalism* (2022)
- H. Van den Bulck and A. Hyzen, 'Of Lizards and Ideological Entrepreneurs: Alex Jones and Infowars in the Relationship Between Populist Nationalism and the Post-Global Media Ecology,' *International Communication Gazette* 82/1 (2020) 42–59

**Supervision question:** How does news media advance populist politics, and what may be the implications for democracy, inclusion, and equality?

**Thinking and talking question:** How does the political economy of social media affect populist politics?

### 3. ICT4D and the Environment (Kurian) (Week 7, 5 March)

---

**Summary:** We turn to the field of research and practice known as 'ICT4D' (Information Communication Technologies for Development) and the more recent version known as 'Tech for Social Good'. In particular, we will focus on the environmental dimension of ICT4D, assessing the effects of 'green technologies' for sustainable development. This includes critical perspectives on the environmental damage caused by seemingly transformative technology, and alternative visions for development. Students will explore the connection between technology, communities and the environment.

**Seminar activity:** Before the seminar: Pick and read one of the 'transformative initiatives' in Kothari et al.'s *Post-Development Dictionary*. In the seminar: discuss in pairs (1) how the initiatives that you chose could provide an alternative horizon for technology development, and (2) how does this alternative horizon compare to that of development. Be prepared to share your thoughts in a plenary discussion.

#### Reading List:

- M. Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Cornell University Press, 1989) [Chapter: 'Introduction']

- Y. E. Aguilar Gil, '[A Modest Proposal to Save the World](#)', *Rest of World: Reporting Global Tech Stories* (2020)
- P. Arora, *The Next Billion Users: Digital Life Beyond the West* (Harvard University Press, 2019) [Chapter 5: 'Slumdog Inspiration']
- \*B. Brevini, [Black boxes, not green: Mythologizing artificial intelligence and omitting the environment](#). *Big Data & Society*, 7/2 (2020), pp. 1-5
- A. S. Chan, [Networking Peripheries: Technological Futures and the Myth of Digital Universalism](#) (MIT Press, 2013) [Chapter: 'Introduction: Digital Reform—Information-Age Peru']
- A. Escobar, [Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds](#) (Duke University Press, 2018) [Chapter 5: 'Design for Transition']
- L. Irani, [Chasing Innovation: Making Entrepreneurial Citizens in Modern India](#) (Princeton University Press, 2019) [Chapter 7: 'Can the Subaltern Innovate?']
- \*A. Kothari, A. Salleh, A. Escobar et al. [Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary](#) (Tulika Books, 2019) [Chapter: 'Introduction: Finding Pluriversal Paths']
- J. C. Magalhães & N. Couldry, '[Giving by Taking Away: Big Tech, Data Colonialism and the Reconfiguration of Social Good](#)', *International Journal of Communication* 15 (2021), pp. 343–362
- T. Nothias, '[Access granted: Facebook's free basics in Africa](#)', *Media, Culture and Society* 42/3 (2020), pp. 329–348
- \*T. D. Oyedemi, '[Digital coloniality and 'Next Billion Users': the political economy of Google Station in Nigeria](#)', *Information Communication and Society* 24/3 (2021), pp. 329–343
- \*P. Peña, '[Bigger, More, Better, Faster: The Ecological Paradox of Digital Economies](#)' in *Technology, the Environment and a Sustainable World: Responses from the Global South* (Global Information Society Watch, 2019)

**Supervision question:** *To what extent can 'technology for development' and 'technology for social good' programmes facilitate sustainable development?*

**Thinking and talking question:** *Some countries and international organisations see green technologies as enablers of sustainable development. What are your thoughts on this vision?*