

VO/UE Critical Theory

E-mail: katta.spiel@tuwien.ac.at

Web: katta.mere.st

Office Hours: FR 2-4pm and upon request

Office: Argentinierstraße 8/2nd floor (TU Wien)

Time: TH 9-13.00

no lecture on 23.4., 30.4., 4.6.

Place: Favoritenstraße 9-11, FAV Hörsaal 2 (from week 2)

Course Description

This course introduces strands of Critical Theories as they relate to Media Theory and Computer Science. It spans across positions from the Frankfurt School and early critique on mass media to examples of critique within today's technological make-up. Within the course, students will engage with different axes of critique along surveillance, gender, race and disability, among others. Each session will consist of an introduction into the core ideas, a discussion of an associated text in a seminar style and hands-on exercises engaging with different forms of critique, criticism and critical theory on current technological trends. Students can propose individualised forms of assessment or write an essay to pass the class.

Learning Goals

After successful completion of the course, students are able to...

1. name core historical and current-day approaches to critical theory and applications thereof
2. demonstrate sensitivity towards complex issues surrounding equity regarding gender, class, race, disability and colonialism
3. analyse and discuss the potential effects and impacts of technological design around different notions of exclusion
4. formulate and argue for critical alternatives in technological design
5. critically reflect on technological developments and current trends
6. evaluate and communicate trade-offs in the design and development of technology

ECTS Breakdown

Successful completion of the course counts for 6 ECTS, relating to 150 hours of work. These are expected to be allocated as follows:

40h – In-class attendance

80h – Individual and Group Work

30h – Final Essay (or alternative)

Individual and Group Work includes preparatory reading for the seminar, reflective blogging and preparation of seminar presentations as well as continuous development of a personal reference booklet.

Code of Conduct

The following Code of Conduct illustrates how I tend to speak to students about the learning environment. Hence, it also directly addresses the students.

During the course

You may use a laptop or similar digital device for digital note taking. Though, as an interest to your learning process and success, I generally prefer handwritten notes. If you choose a digital device, though, I am asking you to not use it for anything else. However, you absolutely may knit, crochet, draw and anything else that supports your focus. Please silence your phones. If you have to take a phone call, you can leave the room at any point. You may eat and drink in this seminar. When you do so, though, please consider everyone else in the room and, therefore, stay away from strong smells in your food (No Leberkäse rule).

Attendance

You are expected to attend every time, but there is no strict rule for attendance. I assume you are able to individually assess how important attendance is for your learning. If you come late or leave earlier, please try to keep the disruption for others to a minimum.

Overall Conduct

You are as responsible as I am for a positive learning environment that allows every one to learn independently from their academic or personal background. Many social structures in our daily lives make this already more difficult for marginalised people. Assume the best. I encourage you to not just allow, but encourage and invite critique. If you don't like someone's tone, take a step back and try to ignore it. Reflect your privileges and allow space for others (including their mistakes). I am also striving towards this goal. Additional parameters will be defined in our first meeting.

Preliminary Schedule

Week 1 – March 5th Introduction

- Introduction of basic terms
- Presentation of schedule
- Discussion of mutual expectations
- Finding working groups and assigning topics

Week 2 – March 12th Virtual Reality

- Mass production and digital culture
- Reality constructions
- Virtuality and intangibility
- Simulacrum and Simulacra

Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of Simulacra". in Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (ed.): *Media and Cultural Studies*. Blackwell Publishing. (2006): 453-481

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". in Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (ed.): *Media and Cultural Studies*. Blackwell Publishing. (2006): 18-40

Langman, Lauren. "From virtual public spheres to global justice: A critical theory of internet-worked social movements." *Sociological Theory* 23, no. 1 (2005): 42-74.

Giddings, Seth. "Virtual reality." *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy* (2016): 1-5.

Week 3 – March 19th Cameras

- Privacy
- Surveillance
- Automated Image Analysis
- Politics of Vision

Sambasivan, Nithya, Garen Checkley, Amna Batool, Nova Ahmed, David Nemer, Laura Sanely Gaytán-Lugo, Tara Matthews, Sunny Consolvo, and Elizabeth Churchill. " "Privacy is not for me, it's for those rich women": Performative Privacy Practices on Mobile Phones by Women in South Asia." In *Fourteenth Symposium on Usable Privacy and Security (SOUPS 2018)*, pp. 127-142. 2018.

Habermas, Jürgen. "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article" in Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (ed.): *Media and Cultural Studies*. Blackwell Publishing. (2006): 73-78

Keyes, Os. "The misgendering machines: Trans/HCI implications of automatic gender recognition." *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 2, no. CSCW (2018): 1-22.

Lyon, David, Kevin D. Haggerty, and Kirstie Ball. "Introducing surveillance studies." In *Routledge handbook of surveillance studies*, pp. 33-44. Routledge, 2012.

Week 4 – March 26th (asynchronous) Social Media

- Identity
- Selfies
- Connectivity and the Noosphere
- Online Sociality

McRobbie, Angela. "Feminism, Postmodernism and the "Real Me"". in Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (ed.): *Media and Cultural Studies*. Blackwell Publishing. (2006): 520-532

De Chardin, Teilhard "The Threshold of the Terrestrial Planet: The Noosphere" *The Phenomenon of Man* (1955): 180-184

Duguay, Stefanie. "Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer visibility through selfies: Comparing platform mediators across Ruby Rose's Instagram and Vine presence." *Social Media+ Society* 2, no. 2 (2016).

Kirman, Ben, Conor Lineham, and Shaun Lawson. "Exploring mischief and mayhem in social computing or: how we learned to stop worrying and love the trolls." In *CHI'12 Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, pp. 121-130. 2012.

Week 5 – April 2nd Robots & Cyborgs

- Transhumanism
- Robot Laws
- Cyborgs as Metaphor and lived experience
- Voice Agents

Huxley, Julian. "Transhumanism." *Ethics in Progress* 6, no. 1 (2015): 12-16.

Haraway, Donna. "A cyborg manifesto: Science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late 20th century." In *The international handbook of virtual learning environments*, pp. 117-158. Springer, Dordrecht, 2006.

Weise, Jillian. "Common Cyborg." *Granta*. September 2018. [Online](#)

Hannon, Charles. "Gender and status in voice user interfaces." *interactions* 23, no. 3 (2016): 34-37.

Week 6 – May 7th Databases

- Forms and Infrastructures
- Categories and Counting
- Stereotyping
- Encoding/Decoding

Stuart Hall. "Encoding/Decoding". in Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (ed.): *Media and Cultural Studies*. Blackwell Publishing. (2006): 163-173

Bowker, Geoffrey C., and Susan Leigh Star. "Introduction: To classify is human." *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (1999): 1-32.

Dyer, Richard. "Stereotyping." In Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (ed.): *Media and Cultural Studies*. Blackwell Publishing. (2006): 353-365

Spiel, Katta, Os Keyes, and Pınar Barlas. "Patching gender: non-binary utopias in HCI." In *Extended Abstracts of the 2019 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, pp. 1-11. 2019.

Week 7 – May 14th Big Data

- Accumulation of data
- Material Consequences
- Datafication
- Leaking and Whistleblowing

Boyd, Danah, and Kate Crawford. "Critical questions for big data: Provocations for a cultural, technological, and scholarly phenomenon." *Information, communication & society* 15, no. 5 (2012): 662-679.

Van Dijck, José. "Datafication, dataism and dataveillance: Big Data between scientific paradigm and ideology." *Surveillance & society* 12, no. 2 (2014): 197-208.

Crawford, Kate, Mary L. Gray, and Kate Miltner. "Big Data— critiquing Big Data: Politics, ethics, epistemology — special section introduction." *International Journal of Communication* 8 (2014): 10.

Allhutter, Doris, Florian Cech, Fabian Fischer, Gabriel Grill, and Astrid Mager. "Algorithmic profiling of job seekers in Austria: how austerity politics are made effective." *Frontiers in Big Data* 3 (2020): 5.

Week 8 – May 28th Games

- Rhetorics of Online Addiction
- Privilege of Immersion
- Online Harassment (Gamer Gate)
- FUN FUN FUN

Ruberg, Bonnie. "No fun: The queer potential of video games that annoy, anger, disappoint, sadden, and hurt." *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* 2, no. 2 (2015): 108-124.

Gray, Kishonna L., Bertan Buyukozturk, and Zachary G. Hill. "Blurring the boundaries: Using Gamergate to examine "real" and symbolic violence against women in contemporary gaming culture." *Sociology Compass* 11, no. 3 (2017): e12458.

Passmore, Cale J., Max V. Birk, and Regan L. Mandryk. "The privilege of immersion: Racial and ethnic experiences, perceptions, and beliefs in digital gaming." In *Proceedings of the 2018 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, pp. 1-19. 2018.

Cover, Rob. "Gaming (ad) diction: Discourse, identity, time and play in the production of the gamer addiction myth." *Game Studies* 6, no. 1 (2006).

Week 9 – June 18th Personal Tracking

- Technologies of the self
- Quantified Self
- Tracking Others
- Fitter, Happier, More Productive

Foucault, Michel. *Technologies of the self: A seminar with Michel Foucault*. Univ of Massachusetts Press, 1988: 16-49

Lupton, Deborah. "The diverse domains of quantified selves: self-tracking modes and dataveillance." *Economy and Society* 45, no. 1 (2016): 101-122.

Spiel, Katta, Fares Kayali, Louise Horvath, Michael Penkler, Sabine Harrer, Miguel Sicart, and Jessica Hammer. "Fitter, Happier, More Productive? The Normative Ontology of Fitness Trackers." In *Extended abstracts of the 2018 CHI conference on human factors in computing systems*, pp. 1-10. 2018.

Gabriels, Katleen. "'I keep a close watch on this child of mine': a moral critique of other-tracking apps." *Ethics and Information Technology* 18, no. 3 (2016): 175-184.

Week 10 – June 25th Critical Views on Research

- Understanding Paradigms
- Epistemological Power Dimensions
- Agency
- Minority Perspectives

Ihudiya Finda Ogbonnaya-Ogburu, Angela D. R. Smith, Alexandra To, Kentaro Toyama. Critical Race Theory for HCI. To appear at CHI 2020.

A. Ymous, K. Spiel, O. Keyes, C. Bennett, R. Williams, E. Hornecker, J. Good. “I am just terrified of my future” — Epistemic Violence in Disability Related Technology Research. To appear at CHI 2020 - alt.chi.

Tedre, Matti. ”Computing as a science: A survey of competing viewpoints.” *Minds and Machines* 21, no. 3 (2011): 361-387.

Spiel, Katta, Christopher Frauenberger, Os Keyes, and Geraldine Fitzpatrick. ”Agency of Autistic Children in Technology Research—A Critical Literature Review.” *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction (TOCHI)* 26, no. 6 (2019): 1-40.