

THE FUTURE OF WORK

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Course Description:

The purpose of this course is to examine how work has been fundamentally altered by the dramatic rise of digital technologies, and to explore how this increasingly turbulent relationship may continue to evolve into the future. In the last thirty years, the revolution in digital communications, robotics and algorithmic automation has massively changed the structure of labor across the globe. How we work, where we work, perhaps even the meaning of work itself has undergone profound change. The boundaries that previously defined labor in the postwar 'Fordist' economy (such as the separation between work and leisure, housework and officework, etc.) have been upended. Today, technologies such as smart phones, laptops and tablet computers have radically changed when and where the act of labor takes place. Perhaps more critically, these advances have also displaced many populations from being able to find work in the global labor market altogether. This course will map how and why these monumental changes have occurred, and where they might be going. To be able to understand these shifts will require perspectives from a diversity of disciplines. In this way, the course will focus on key debates and conversations surrounding labor, technology and automation within fields such as Marxism, media studies, posthumanist and feminist theory. From this strong theoretical and historical basis, the course will conclude by exploring how labor and its tumultuous relationship to digital technology may transform in the near and distant future.

Course Requirements:

There will be a weekly response paper of 200-250 words to be uploaded on the course's Sakai website (further instructions will be given in class). The response papers will be due every Tuesday no later than 12:00am. In addition, there will be a short essay of 1000-1500 words due by the end of week 8. A longer essay of 2500-3000 words will be due on the last day of class. Finally, students will be evaluated on the basis of their participation in class discussions.

Required Texts:

Dyer-Witherford, Nick. *Cyber Proletariat*. University of Chicago (2015)

Scholz, Trebor, ed. *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*. Routledge (2012).

READING SCHEDULE

PART I: THE MEANING OF WORK

Intro to Course:

Jan 13th: Peter Frase: *Four Futures* (2016) **Introduction**

What is Work?

Jan 18th: Marx: *Wage, Labor and Capital* **pp. 7-26**
Kathi Weeks: *The Problem With Work*, **pp. 1-11**

Jan 20th: Marx: *Wage, Labor and Capital* **pp. 33-34, 39-60**
Paul Mason: *Postcapitalism* **Ch. 6**

Deskilling and the Division of Labor

Jan 25th: David Harvey: *17 Contradictions of Capital*; **pp. 112-131**
Karl Marx: *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (read from Third Manuscript; "Human Needs and The Division of Labor Under the Rule of Private Property" **pp. 358-375**

Alienation

Jan 27th: Karl Marx: "Estranged Labor" from *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* **pp. 322-334**
Franco 'Bifo' Berardi: *The Soul at Work* **pp. 21-?**

Feb 1st: Franco 'Bifo' Berardi: *The Soul at Work* **pp. 74-106**
David Graeber "On The Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs"
<http://strikemag.org/bullshit-jobs/>

PART II: WORK TODAY

Affective, Immaterial and Care Labor

- Feb 3rd: Silvia Federici: "Wages Against Housework"
E. Alex Jung: "Wages for Facebook."
<https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/wages-for-facebook>
- Feb 8th: Maurizio Lazarrato: "Immaterial Labour" in *Radical Thought in Italy; a Potential Politics* (1996)
Michael Hardt: "Affective Labor" (1999)
- Feb 10th: Ivor Southwood: *Non-Stop Inertia*. Emotional Labor
Kathi Weeks: "Life Within and Against Work" (2007)

Digital Labor

- Feb 15th: Trebor Scholz: *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory* **Read Intro**
"Inside Amazon: Wrestling Big Ideas in a Brutal Workplace."
New York Times. 2015
<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/16/technology/inside-amazon-wrestling-big-ideas-in-a-bruising-workplace.html>
- Feb 17th: Moshe Z. Marvit: "How Crowdworkers Became Ghosts in the Digital Machine"
<https://www.thenation.com/article/how-crowdworkers-became-ghosts-digital-machine/>
Ahyan Aytes: "The Return of the Crowds" in *The Internet as Playground and Factory* (2013)

Play and Labor

- Feb 22nd: Tiziana Terranova: "Free Labor" in *The Internet as Playground and Factory*
Marc Andrejevic: "Estranged Free Labor" in *The Internet as Playground and Factory* (2013)

Feb 24th: Lisa Nakamura: "Don't Hate The Player, Hate The Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft" in *The Internet as Playground and Factory* (2013)
Read Cory Doctorow's short story, "Anda's Game" (2004)

March 1st: *****MIDTERM PAPERS DUE*****
Watch *Black Mirror*, "15 Million Merits"

The Creative Class

March 3rd: Astra Taylor: *The People's Platform* (2015) **Ch. 2**
Richard Florida: "The Economic Geography of Talent"

Smart Phones and the Disappearance of the Work Day

March 8th: Ian Bogost: *The Geek's Chihuahua* (2015) **Read pp.1-34**
Jonathan Crary: 24/7 (2014). **Read Intro and Ch. 1**

PART III: WORK'S FUTURE

****SPRING BREAK****

The Cyber-Proletariat

March 22nd: Nick Dyer-Witheford: *Cyber-Proletariat*, 2014 **Ch. 1 & 2**

March 24th Nick Dyer-Witheford: *Cyber-Proletariat*, 2014. **Ch. 7**
Adrien Chen: "The Laborers Who Keep Dick Pics and Beheadings Out of Your Facebook Feed" in *Wired Magazine*(October;2014)<http://www.wired.com/2014/10/content-moderation>

Automation

March 29th: David Harvey: *Seventeen Contradictions of Capital* **pp. 91- 112**
Nick Dyer-Witheford: *Cyber-Proletariat* **Ch. 3**

March 31st: Watch: *Sleep Dealer*, Dir. Alex Rivera (2008)

Automation Continued

- April 5th: Nick Dyer-Witheford: *Cyber-Proletariat*, 2014 **Ch. 9**
Altha Cravey: "Imagining The Future From The Margins: Cyborg Labor in Alex Rivera's Sleep Dealer" in *GeoJournal* (2015).
- April 7th: Julia Kirby: "Human Work" *Harvard Business Review*; 2015
<https://hbr.org/2015/06/an-inside-look-at-facebooks-approach-to-automation-and-human-work>
Will Oremus: "The Prose Of The Machines".
http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2014/07/automated_insights_to_write_ap_earnings_reports_why_robots_can_t_take_journalists.html

Cyborg Labor

- April 12th: Watch *Her*, dir. Spike Jonze (2013).
- April 14th: Donna Haraway "Cyborg Manifesto" *Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late 20th Century* (2006)
Alla Ivanchikova: "Mechanical Intimacies and Mechanical Brides" *Camera Obscura* (2016)

The End of Work

- April 19th: Peter Frase: *Four Futures* **Ch. 1**
Bertrand Russell: "In Praise of Idleness"
<http://www.zpub.com/notes/idle.html>
- April 21st: Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams: *Inventing the Future* (**Ch. 6**)
Kathi Weeks, *The Problem With Work*, 2011. (**Read Epilogue**)
- April 26th: FINAL PAPER/PROJECT