

CUS525 The Cultural Politics of Labour : Digital Labour 勞工的文化政治：數字勞工

Course Title	: The Cultural Politics of Labour: Digital Labour 勞工的文化政治：數字勞工
Course Code	: CUS525
Recommended Study Year	: Any
No. of Credits	: 3 credits
Mode of Tuition	: 3 hours of lecture
Class Contact Hours	: 3 hours per week, 42 hours for the whole course
Category in Major Prog.	: MCS (Core course for Digital and Cultural Innovation (DCI) Concentration)
Discipline	: Cultural Studies
Prerequisite(s)	: N/A
Co-requisite(s)	: N/A
Exclusion(s)	: N/A
Exemption Requirement(s)	: N/A

Brief Course Description

This course focuses on digital labour, technology, and the cultural and creative industry. From a theoretical standpoint, the course engages with various theoretical frameworks such as Marxist feminism, autonomist Marxism, and classic Marxism to examine the concept of digital labour and the digital worker within the context of capitalism. In an analytical sense, the course employs case studies and examples from literature, media, and popular culture to illuminate how the meanings, ideologies, and rhetoric surrounding digital labour and network technology are shaped, manipulated, negotiated, and contested. For instance, it scrutinizes the portrayal of tech companies as 'fun,' 'playful,' and 'creative' workplaces, while also exposing the power dynamics and social inequality underlying these representations through cultural analysis and criticism. Moreover, the course delves into resistance movements that challenge dominant discourses and meanings, such as the anti-work movements and the '996, ICU' project initiated on GitHub. By completing this course, students will acquire a comprehensive understanding of digital labour and network technology, enabling them to analyse the discourse and underlying meanings constructed within the media sector and everyday life.

Aims

1. To provide a radically contextualised understanding of the trajectories, experiences, ambivalences and inequalities digital labourers face, including their struggles, agencies, visions, actions and futures.
2. To enhance students' analysis of labour issues and their relationship with broader social trends globally and in China
3. To introduce different approaches to the cultural politics of labour so as to allow students to undertake the analysis of different groups of labourers in their respective contexts
4. To inform possible practices and actions to help build a fairer world of work and society at large

Learning Outcomes (LOs)

On completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Apply critical insights/analysis on issues related to the cultural politics of labour globally and in China.

2. Analyse critical issues pertaining to different groups of labourers in their respective contexts
3. Critically evaluate practices and actions regarding helping disadvantaged labourers to improve their conditions and build a fairer world of labour

Indicative Contents

This course will consist of three blocks.

****Block I: Understanding Digital Labour****

- Introduction to the concept, historical backdrop, and global significance of digital labour, emphasizing China's role in the global digital matrix.
- A feminist perspective on digital labour, discussing the nuances between productive and reproductive labour and how women have historically navigated these spheres.
- Exploration of the intersection of race within digital labour, emphasizing cultural and racial representation of digital workers.

****Block II: Internet, User Labour, and Associated Myths****

- Discussion on audience labour from Marxist and feminist perspectives, highlighting its potential in challenging dominant corporations like Facebook.
- Dissection of the often perceived 'playful' nature of online work, introducing the concept of 'playbour'.
- Critical examination of online participation and an in-depth look into fandom as a variant of digital labour.

****Block III: Delving into Protest Cultures and Diverse Digital Labour Forms****

- Case studies on diverse types of digital labour such as programmers, their challenges, and contributions.
- Insights into the world of internet celebrities, shedding light on the unique nature of their labour and the associated challenges.
- Unpacking the life and professional politics of Digital Nomads.
- Highlighting digital activists, emphasizing their commitment and investments in online platforms.
- In-depth discussion on crowd workers from platforms like Mechanical Turk, underscoring their cultural significance and challenges.
- Exploration of the world of content moderators or 'Cleaners', illuminating the often-overlooked significance of their roles for major internet companies.
- Future-forward discussion on envisioning a more equitable digital landscape, challenging the present exploitative norms.

Teaching Methods

This course will be taught in lectures and tutorials.

- The lectures facilitate students' learning of the cultural politics of digital labour through theoretical discussion, sharing examples, and summaries of the week's topic.
- Student *weekly news sharing, group presentations, guided discussion of readings* take place in tutorials.

- The end-term paper is an individual assignment where the students draw on theoretical foundations and real-world cases to demonstrate their critical reflections and analytical ability in handling a contextualized problem or case related to digital labour.

Measurement of Learning Outcomes:

LO:	Assessment:	Group News sharing and class discussion (formative assessment)	Group presentation	Individual end-term Paper
		(10%)	(2 x 20%)	(50%)
LO1		v	v	v
LO2		v	v	v
LO3				v

Assessment:

1) Group News sharing and class discussion (formative assessment) (10%, same mark for all group members)

- students are expected to collect news related to different digital labour groups and provide some comments, ideally in relation to that week's topic.
- Students are expected and encouraged to participate in class/group discussions, interpreting readings, answer questions and express their own views and critical reflections on the topic.

2) Group presentation (20%, 5% out of which is peer assessment) *2

- Each student will be expected to present on assigned readings, in groups, **twice** throughout the semester (once in the first half of semester, and once in the second half)
- The presentation should be presented and prepared by all group members, contributor(s) of each section of the presentation should be clarified.

- Each presentation is expected to last for 30 mins.
- As the presentation is a teamwork, the grade given by professor will be the same for the whole group. 5% out each presentation will be given based on peer assessment from the group members.
- Each group presentation makes up 20% of the final grade.

3) Individual end-term Paper (50%)

- A well-focused study of a specific cultural politics issue related to a specific group of labourers.
- of approximate length of 6,000 characters in Chinese or 4,000 words in English.
- An outline proposal of the Term Paper (300-500 words).

Assessment Rubrics

1) Group news sharing and class discussion (10%)

Criterion	Excellent (90-100%)	Good (60-89%)	Pass (30%-59%)	Failure (0-29%)
Level of participation (1.5%)	Participates actively and constructively all the time.	Participates actively most of the time	Participates most of the time but sometimes requires prompting.	Student does not attend tutorial.
Engagement with course materials (2%)	Engages constructively with, all course material (assigned readings, issues, concepts).	Demonstrates a good understanding of, and engages constructively with course material.	Demonstrates a basic understanding of most of the course material and engages with it, though not always successfully.	Student demonstrates little or no understanding of course material, lacks engagement with it
Quality of analysis and discussion (5%)	Provides insightful analyses, raises critical points, and advances and deepens group discussion.	Frequently provides helpful points or asks questions that advance and deepen group discussion.	Sometimes makes positive contributions that advance group discussion.	Little or no engagement / participation in group discussion even with prompting.
Engagement with others (1.5%)	Consistently appreciates others' contribution and engages with their ideas sensitively.	Generally appreciates others' contribution and engages with their ideas sensitively.	Attempt to appreciate others' contribution and to engage with their ideas sensitively, with some success.	Shows no appreciation of others' knowledge and skills.

2) Group Presentation (20%*2)

*Peer assessment will be conducted as a reference for assessment of one's contribution to the group presentation or project.

Criterion	Excellent (90-100%)	Good (60-89%)	Pass (30%-59%)	Failure (0-29%)
Content (15%)	Identifies clearly the main issues to be addressed Examines the issues from all important perspectives. Overall logic is clear.	Identifies most of the main issues to be addressed Examines the issue / problem from most of the important perspectives but not all relevant arguments and counter arguments are fully examined.	Identifies an issue area, but without specific delineation of the main issues to be addressed Examines the question/ issue/ problem from some of the important perspectives.	Fail to identify an issue area and the main issues to be addressed No critical engagement with issues, and themes. Presentation characterized by serious inaccuracies and misunderstanding
	Presenter(s) engage the audience at all times, actively seeking for suggestions from the audiences and incorporate these insights into the final project in thoughtful ways	Presenter(s) engage the audience most of the time, consistently seeking for suggestions from the audiences, and incorporate these insights into the final project	Presenter(s) attempts to engage the audience, tries to seek for suggestions from the audiences, and to incorporate these insights into the final project	Presenter(s) seem to make little attempt to engage the audience.
Team-work (5%)	Excellent performance of teamwork. Demonstrates full communication with formal roles for each group member. Equal distribution of workload.	Good performance of teamwork. Demonstrates some communication with roles for each group member. Moderate distribution of workload.	Fair performance of teamwork. Demonstrates limited communication with informal roles for each group member. Some distribution of workload.	Poor performance of teamwork. Demonstrates no communication with unclear roles for each group member. Unequal distribution of workload.

3) Individual end-term paper (50%)

Criterion	Excellent (90-100%)	Good (60-89%)	Pass (30%-59%)	Failure (0-29%)
Understanding of	Comprehensive	Clear discussion of	Shows some	Very little or no

Topic (12%)	understanding and coverage of issues. Insightful and well-informed. Clearly answers the question.	relevant issues. Shows good insight into the subject. Answers the question.	coverage and understanding of main issues. Does not answer the question fully/directly enough.	understanding of the issues. Does not answer the question.
Use of evidence (17%)	Wide range of evidence used to support arguments. Thoroughly researched. Use of primary sources.	Good use of evidence to support arguments. Have researched and drawn on some evidence.	Adequate range of evidence used. Could have drawn on more suitable evidence.	Inadequate use of evidence to support argument. No use of evidence to support argument
Critical analysis (17%)	Excellent critical awareness of subject matter and current issues. Shows original thinking and analysis.	Goes beyond description. Analyses material to develop argument.	More description than analysis in content. Needs to draw material together to develop argument.	Describes the issues but shows significant misunderstanding of basic issues.
Structure of Argument (2%)	Clear structure. Presents a convincing and well developed argument.	Clear structure. Develops a sound argument.	Argument needs further development. Structure needs more clarity.	Poor structure. No clear argument. No clear linkage from point to point.
Writing & Referencing (2%)	Uses references correctly. Demonstrates excellent writing skills.	Generally uses references correctly but some parts less well referenced. Competent writing skills.	Some parts not referenced correctly. Writing skills could be improved.	Not referenced correctly. Poor writing skills. Needed proof reading.

Important Notes:

1. Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e., 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
2. Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations

Governing University Examinations and Course Work. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.

3. Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin, and to Moodle.

4. To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>.

5. Students must adhere to the University’s guidelines and practices when using Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. The official documents “*Guidelines for Using GAI Tools at Lingnan University*” and “*Best Practices for Ethical and Responsible Use of GAI Tools in Course Assessments*” can be found here: <https://www.ln.edu.hk/tlc/generative-artificial-intelligence/gai-guidelines-best-practices>.

Required/Essential Readings :

Fuchs, C. (2014). *Digital labour and Karl Marx*. Routledge.

Qiu, J. L. (2017). *Goodbye iSlave: A manifesto for digital abolition*. University of Illinois Press.

Recommended/Supplementary Readings:

Books:

Fuchs, C. (2014). *Digital labour and Karl Marx*. Routledge.

Mosco, V., & McKercher, C. (2009). *The laboring of communication: Will knowledge workers of the world unite?*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2005). *Multitude: War and democracy in the age of empire*. Penguin.

Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*. Profile Books.

Journal Articles:

Fuchs, C. (2014). Theorising and analysing digital labour: From global value chains to modes of production. *The Political Economy of Communication*, 1(2), 99–124.

Schiller, D. (2005). Poles of market growth? Open questions about China, information and the world economy. *Global Media and Communication*, 1(1), 79–103. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766505051603>

Huws, U. (2019). The hassle of housework: Digitalisation and the commodification of domestic labour. *Feminist Review*, 123(1), 8–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0141778919879725>

Nakamura, L. (2009). Don't hate the player, hate the game: The racialization of labor in *World of Warcraft*. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 26(2), 128–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295030902979189>

Chapters:

Qiu, J. L. (2019). Goodbye iSlave: Making alternative subjects through digital objects. In *Digital objects, digital subjects: Interdisciplinary perspectives on capitalism, labour and politics in the age of big data* (pp. 151–164). University of Westminster Press.

Ferrer-Conill, R. (2018). Playbour and the gamification of work: Empowerment, exploitation and fun as labour dynamics. In P. Bilić, J. Primorac, & B. Valtýsson (Eds.), *Technologies of labour and the politics of contradiction* (pp. 221–241). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76279-1_11

Other Formats:

Swartz, A. (2008). *Guerilla open access manifesto*. <https://archive.org/details/GuerillaOpenAccessManifesto>

Orlowski, J. (Director). (2020). *The social dilemma* [Film]. Netflix.

Ghonim, W. (2020). *Let's design social media that drives real change* [Video]. TED

Conferences. https://www.ted.com/talks/wael_ghonim_let_s_design_social_media_that_drives_real_change

Peer Assessment Form

Team: _____

Instruction: Evaluate your peer team members, on their participation in the course group work. Due on submission day with the group work.

	Name	Criterion	Ratings (1-10)	Further comments (optional)
1		Participation in project activities	e.g. 8/10	
		Fulfilment of her/his roles	6/10	
		Leadership	7/10	
		Overall	21/30 = 3.5 in final grade	
2		Participation in project activities		
		Fulfilment of her/his roles		
		Leadership		
		Overall		
3		Participation in project activities		
		Fulfilment of her/his roles		
		Leadership		
		Overall		
4		Participation in project activities		
		Fulfilment of her/his roles		
		Leadership		
		Overall		
5		Participation in project activities		
		Fulfilment of her/his roles		

		Leadership		
		Overall		