AGAINST THE CURRENT

Refusal, Technlogy, and Neoliberalism

Technological advancement is frequently heralded as a solution to the challenges facing modern society. This course begins with critical approaches that demonstrate how technology can, in fact, reinforce and entrench neoliberal ideologies and existing power structures, all while promising radical improvement and change.

The next phase of thecourse explores various paradigms of rejecting the current state of affairs and the future promised to us (both near and distant). We will examine theories, protest movements, and alternative frameworks for existence in the digital age. Through discussions of key thinkers' writings, the lessons will focus on the intersections and disconnections between digital technologies, society, and power.

At the heart of our inquiry is the question of whether it is even possible to resist the status quo and, if so, what strategies are available to us (withdrawal, concealment, disruption, etc.). Throughout the semester, students will engage with the complexities of contemporary socio-technological systems and the possibilities for transformative and meaningful change.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To become familiar with key concepts and major thinkers in the study of the role of contemporary technologies.

- To acquire a critical toolkit for examining technologies and their impacts on the past, present, and future.

- To understand the social and political context of power structures and the resistance to them.

ELLA KLIK   **Office Hourse: By appt.**

WEEK 1 — INTRODUCTION

Screening:
Andrew Culp, *Machines in Flames* (2022, 50min)

WEEK 2 — Theories of Neoliberalism

Brown, Wendy. "Undoing Democracy," in Undoing the demos: Neoliberalism's stealth revolution (MIT Press, 2015), 17-45; 220-222.

Tiqqun. "1," The Cybernetic Hypothesis (semiotext(e), 2020), 21-32.

WEEK 3 — REBELLION & REVOLT

Scott, James C. "The Unwritten History of Resistance," in Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance (Yale university Press, 1985), 28-37.

Camus, Albert. "Rebellion and Art," in The rebel: An essay on man in revolt (Vintage, 2012).

WEEK 4 — Between Technological Criticism and Luddism

Jones, Steve. "The Mythic History of the Original Luddites," in Against Technology: From the Luddites to Neo-Luddism (Routledge, 2006), 45-76.

Illich, Ivan. "Convival reconstructions," in Tools for Conviviality (Fontana, 1975), 10-28.

WEEK 5 — Anarchy in the Machine

Bey, Hakim. TAZ The temporary autonomous zone. 1991.

WEEK 6 — REORGANIZATION

Lane, Jill, "Digital Zapatistas," TDR (2003): 129-144.

Gelsomino, Mark. "The Zapatista Effect: Information Communication Technology Activism and Marginalized Communities," Faculty of Information Quarterly 2, no. 3 (2010): 1-9.

WEEK 7 — OPACITY

Blas, Z., & Gaboury, J. (2016). "Biometrics and opacity: A conversation." Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies, 31(2), 155-165.

Glissant, Édouard . "For Opacity." In Poetics of Relation (University of Michigan Press, 1990), 189-194.

WEEK 8

HACKERS AND ANONYMITY

Wark, McKenzie. "Considerations on a hacker manifesto." In Digital labor (Routledge, 2012), 69-75.

Deseriis, Marco . "Anonymous, the Transducer," in Improper Names: Collective Pseudonyms from the Luddites to Anonymous (Minnesota university press, 2015), 165-212.

DIGITAL ALTERATIVES?

Atzori, Marcella. "Blockchain technology and decentralized governance: Is the state still necessary?" Journal of Governance and Regulation 6, no, 1 (2017): 45-62

Gehl, Robert W. "The case for alternative social media," Social Media + Society 1, no. 2 (2015): 1-12.

WEEK 9

WEEK 10

TECHNO-FEMINIST STRIKE

Sharma, S. (2020). A manifesto for the broken machine. Camera Obscura Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies, 35(2), 171-179.

Manifest-no https://www.manifestno.com/home

WITHRAWL

Kafka, Franz. The burrow (Penguin UK, 2017).

Odell, Jenny. "Anatomy of a Refusal," in How to do nothing: Resisting the attention economy (Melville House, 2020).

WEEK 11

WEEK 12
WEEK 13

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

- Active and constructive participation in class discussions: 10%
- Short analysis of a cultural phenomenon (mid-semester): 25%
- Research proposal for the final project/seminar paper: 5%
- Presentation of the final project/seminar paper topic: 10%
- Final project/seminar paper: 50%

FURTHER INTO

Submission of a short analysis of a phenomenon demonstrating your ability to use the concepts and topics learned in the course to understand a specific example of resistance to technology (up to 1,000 words). This can be submitted in the form of a zine.
- Delivery of a short presentation (about 10 minutes) to the class at the end of the course, presenting the topic of the final project.
- Submission of a final paper (10–15 pages) – the assignment is intended to assess the level of skill and understanding of the topics and texts analyzed during the semester, as well as a thoughtful use of the historical and theoretical knowledge acquired by the end of the course. The main goal of the final document is to demonstrate mastery and analytical abilities to support or challenge basic assumptions in technological, artistic, and political discussions through a case study of your choice.