Task: The everyday archive of global capitalism

This seminar has introduced you to the I-PEEL approach, which uses everyday objects, everyday practices, and everyday sites as an entry point to the study of global capitalism. The following two sessions are dedicated to applying this perspective to an object, practice, or site from your everyday life. I ask you to create a visual reflection consisting of a picture and a short text (250-750 words) consisting of three parts:

- Part 1 introduces the picture of the object, practice, or site
- Part 2 introduces an academic concept to relate the picture to a broader theoretical concern.
- Part 3 draws on the previous part to offer some broader reflections on the relationship between global capitalism and everyday life

Here is a list of some of the topics and concepts we have discussed in this class, so far.

Topic	Object/Practice/Site	Theory/Concept
Clothes	Fast Fashion	• Feminisation • Social Construction • Corporate Social Responsibility
Food	Chocolate	• Neoliberalism • Gouvernmentality • Global Value Chain
Care	Military Spouse Appreciation Day	• Social reproduction • Heteronormativity • Commodification • Global care chain
City	Mega-Events	• Global city • Gentrification • Urban development • Development without the poor
Social Media	Fitness influencers	• Self-branding • Prosumer • Commodification • Attention economy

You can also try and find inspiration from the 'Everyday Archive of Global Capitalism' on my website: The Everyday Archive of Global Capitalism | Politische Ökonomie.

Visual Reflection

Lennart Beck[1]

Übersicht Speisekarte **Rezensionen** Fotos

L **Lenny Beck**
4 Rezensionen

★☆☆☆☆ vor 2 Monaten

Essen zum Mitnehmen | Abendessen | 1–10 €

Pflaster in der Pizza!!
Haben eine Pizza zum abholen bestellt. Beim Essen plötzlich ein zähes Stück im Mund... weiterlesen

❤️ 10

[1] AI-Labelling: I used DeepL to help improve the wording and enhance the vocabulary of this text, as English is not my native language.

The Picture I would like to reflect on is actually a screenshot of a google maps review which I wrote about a pizza place in Mainz a couple of months ago (the review also features a picture taken by me). I usually refrain from writing reviews about restaurants, especially not bad ones, since everybody has bad days and just because I did not have the most ideal experience there, other people might still enjoy their visit. In this case, after finding a plaster on my pizza I just had to make an exception. Chewing on a plaster that could have been anywhere before it landed under the cheese crust of that pizza is an experience that i would not wish upon anyone, and so I decided to warn everyone who might want to order a pizza there against it. As you can see in the bottom left of the image, my description of this very unpleasant experience gained quite some traction and is now the top review of this pizza place on google maps. While my first reaction to seeing this was a feeling of triumph, thinking about how many people I saved from eating at this place, it then also made me think how much of an impact google maps reviews can have on people's everyday decisions, how much power google as a single company holds over the way we navigate cities.

Of course, being able to read how other people before you experienced the place you intend to go to also creates transparency that can be very valuable for the customer, especially in tourist areas where most guests will most likely not return, no matter how good or bad the experience was. The App also allows us to get an overview of the supply there is in a place much more conveniently. Even the review system is more or less democratic, since it does not allow businesses to delete negative reviews but gives them an option to answer and their order of appearance is determined by the amount of people that found it helpful. For businesses - restaurants cafes and bars in particular-, visibility on google maps has become an important factor to succeed in the very competitive business-environment of larger cities. Google Maps exploits this issue by offering increased visibility for a fee. Businesses willing to pay that fee will receive greater exposure than the competition an probably increase their revenue. This monetization model, however, has implications not just for the businesses, but also for the customers: The money that restaurants and other venues pay to gain increased visibility on Google Maps in some way has to be reflected in their prices. In other words, the cost of standing out on the platform is not just borne by the business. It is ultimately passed on to the customer. While Google Maps appears to be a free and neutral tool on the surface, these hidden dynamics reveal that it might not be entirely costless. By prioritizing businesses that can afford to pay for better placement, Google distorts the competitive landscape. Smaller or newer establishments with limited marketing budgets are pushed further down the list, regardless of the quality they might offer. This undermines the democratic potential of user reviews and shifts the platform from a merit-based system to one influenced by financial leverage. In the long run, this could make the app less useful for users who rely on it to discover the best places, not just the most visible ones.

In conclusion, while my review may have helped some people avoid a truly unpleasant experience, it also made me more aware of the broader implications of platforms like Google Maps. What could be a tool to provide transparency and user-generated insight is increasingly shaped by commercial interests, raising questions about fairness, accessibility, and the real costs of convenience.

Lily Compton

Dr. Ruben Kremers

Sem. IPEEL

SoSe 2025

Germany's top airline, Lufthansa, services over 200 domestic and international destinations from its two main hubs in Frankfurt and Munich. Nearly 100 airlines service Frankfurt International Airport and in the summer season, Lufthansa alone can send out up to 800 flights daily. There are a dozen different reasons for taking a flight: vacation, visiting family, work trips, and so on. The picture to the left was taken on the tarmac at the Malta International Airport before an early, two-and-a-half-hour flight back to Frankfurt. But what does an innocent picture of a Lufthansa aircraft have to do with everyday life and global capitalism?

With the incredibly vast number of flights going from one destination to another in one day, you have an equally vast amount of passengers; among them, people labelled as "travel influencers" jetting off to any possible destination. Travel influencers are paid by a brand (for example a luxury resort) or airlines to advertise for their employer on social media and in return, receive benefits such as free business class tickets on the airline they promote. But what about the countries they visit?

Take Vietnam for example, a country that arguably depends heavily on tourism for revenue. A travel influencer visiting the country and chiefly promoting some sort of brand indirectly promotes tourism in said country as well, influencing their followers to pick Vietnam as a next travel destination, thereby ensuring and potentially even increasing tourism there. However, whilst this may seem positive at first glance, we must remember that travel influencers are paid to shed a good light on wherever they may be and any negative aspects certainly will not be included.

In 2024, nearly 20 million people visited Vietnam, but despite an increase in tourism, the country is still wracked by extreme poverty (a macabre aspect that makes Vietnam

attractive as a destination; for Western tourists, the costs of traveling there are absurdly low, whilst locals scrape by). Culturally exotic and cheap destinations such as Vietnam easily leads to exploitation of locals, whether intentionally or not, and this can be seen as commodification of the Vietnamese people; assigning commercial value to their culture.

This commodification, indirectly promoted by travel influencers encouraging people to travel to these poorer countries, is directly linked to global capitalism by turning everyday," normal" people and their labor into purchasable and tradeable "items" in the pursuit for profit and survival. All of this induced by a single flight.

Football fan

This photo was taken when I attended a Bayern Munich home game in person in Munich, Germany, and it shows a beer cup with the team's logo that I drank inside the stadium. Since the day before the game, there were a lot of people at the Munich store to buy team jerseys, mufflers, and souvenirs, and I was one of them. On the day of the match, there were many fans lined up in front of the stadium wearing team jerseys and mufflers, and the merchandise shop was packed to the brim. At first, these all felt like normal experiences as a fan, but after taking this class, I looked back and realized that they were all designed as capitalist acts of consumption.

This shows that I wasn't just watching the game, I was part of a structure that was monetizing me as a fan. A related concept is the “commodification of emotions” or “emotional capitalism”. This concept means that human emotions, belonging, and even passion are utilized as resources that can be monetized in capitalist markets. In the modern sports industry in particular, fan loyalty and emotional engagement is a key asset for profit. A soccer team doesn't just put on a game, it's a brand that connects emotionally with its fans. Fans don't just buy tickets to attend games, they also express their emotions by purchasing jerseys, merchandise, stadium food, and subscription services such as OTT platform broadcasts. Clubs capitalize on these emotions to encourage them to spend more.

I like Bayern Munich, and seeing my favorite team play in person was a very special and precious experience. But at the same time, it made me realize that this emotion is systematically packaged and sold as a product.

Furthermore, fans are no longer just spectators. They are key members of a team's identity, commercial value, and media presence, and they are prosumers, which means consumers who not only consume a product or service but also participate in its production. Their support contributes to the popularity of the team and the value of broadcast rights, which translates into views of YouTube highlights and likes on social media, which increases the brand value of the club. In other words, I live in a world where the very act of watching a game is a commodity.

This realization led me to reflect more deeply on the relationship between soccer and capitalism. There's nothing wrong with sharing emotions and loving your team. But I think it's important to recognize that even those emotions are absorbed into the logic of capital, and to reflect on my own attitudes within it.

On this picture we can see bikes on loan and an electric scooter. I would like to represent the activity of commuting and the increasing use of electric mobility. This increasing use of electric mobility also shows the increasing distance between home and workplace in our capitalist world, which changes deep the activity of commuting. Furthermore, the presence of loan bikes symbolizes the increasing use of bikes which are not directly owned by people, and the commodification of the city.

Indeed, we can link the presence of these loan bikes with the concept of commodification. The use of loan bikes has in a matter of fact one important consequence: we don't own our means of transport to go to work, but we must find and pay for one every time we need to commute. It's a commodification in the idea that employees must pay really frequently for commuting; on the contrary, going to work with his own bike means less commodification, as we just have to pay once to use it for a long period of time. The possible explanation for this commodification through commuting could be the increasing precariousness of the work in our neoliberal capitalist world: because the jobs and the workplaces are even more changing, the workers cannot choose one specific way of commuting, but they need to have flexible and different means of transport depending on the changing location of the job and the changing distance between home and work. Furthermore, these loan bikes are more and more electrical, and that shows another trend of global capitalism: the increasing distances between work and home, between shopping areas and home, and so on... This rise can be explained with the process of urbanization (cities are bigger and that is why we need electric bikes that go faster and farer as 'normal' bikes) and of gentrification (the workers cannot afford to live in the city center where they work). These bikes symbolize thus the social inequality in housing, which then produces commodification: concerns are in fact making money on employees who cannot afford to live closer to their workplace, and that means even more commodification.

I don't want to focus just on workers commuting but I also want to speak about the utility of loan bikes for cities. The presence and the development of such bikes become a part of place branding: these bikes are in a matter of fact an argument for the attractiveness of the city, for tourists, for businesspeople and for firms which have a spatially flexible workforce. The fact that cities offer these bikes takes part in the commodification of the city, because they are here to attract economic development: the city is yet branded in a way to support economic development. To put it in a nutshell, the city is today modelized among other things through bikes on loan in a way to facilitate economic activity, flexibility and attractiveness, on the one side by employees and on the

other side by businesspeople and tourists. These bikes on loan show in fact the commodification of the city, because they are here in order to support the economic attractiveness of the city.

Through the example of loan bikes, we see well that global capitalism shapes even the simple and everyday activity of commuting. Indeed, the trends of actual global capitalism have an important impact and role in a lot of aspects of our everyday life. Some abstract concepts like commodification concern us in fact concretely: every day when we commute. With the study of the changes and the structure of some everyday practices like commuting we can understand and conceptualize the trends of actual capitalism, and we can then decide if we agree to these trends or not. If not, we know exactly which effects these trends have on our lives and how we can individually fight them: in this example, if we have the possibility and if we don't agree with the commodification of cities, we can decide to stop using these loan bikes.

I chose this picture of my upcoming knit from earlier this year. A knit as an object is an interesting part of International Political Economy of Everyday Life, because at the same time you can see that as an “Slow Fashion” and probably as a protest for today’s Fast Fashion industry. Even though knit and knitting itself can be slow fashion and somehow more “sustainable” choice, you also need the yarn for the project. If you make your yarn yourself, then you can call that actually self-made product. Even the now finished knit is self-made, I have not made my own yarn but bought that from store, when the yarn has been part of the I-PEEL life. In most of my own knitting cases the yarn also comes somewhere outside of my home country.

You could use Sustainability of Yarn Industry as a theory or concept when it comes to knitting and knitted products. I chose that because the usual thought is that self-made clothes are more sustainable, but they also need their garments somewhere. If you are not aware of these kinds of things, the garment itself can be made quite unethically and in the end the difference for a product bought straight from the store can be minimal. Because yarn can be made from many things, natural (wool, silk or cotton for example) or non-natural (polyester or acrylic for example), the sustainability between yarns can differ a lot. You can put the question of yarn industry’s sustainability to a broader theoretical concern of the sustainability of the whole clothing industry. The yarn is almost every time part of the industry, and someone is getting money from your buying.

Usually, the yarn can be bought either from physical yarn store or from the company themselves. Physical yarn stores (at least in Finland) are usually private companies rather than bigger companies. You could feel better when you buy something from a smaller store and give your money for their company. That’s the everyday part of it. The thing that you’re probably not thinking when you’re buying the yarn, is the fact that the store/company itself have bought the yarns from the actual yarn companies or their re-sellers, when it comes to the global capitalism part. Most of the time the yarn is made by a company, who at least is trying to expand as many countries as possible to grow their company bigger. Sadly, at some cases, the growing means that the quality might get a little worse because they want to produce as much as possibly and they can some point forget their sustainability and see money over that. I’m not sure if the yarn industry has actually

reached that point yet or is it ever going to reach but it could be an outcome from the global capitalism.

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28.06.2025

Department of Political Science

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Summer term 2025

Sem (BA/MEd) Introduction to the International Political Economy of Everyday Life

Lecturer: Dr. Ruben Kremers

Max Kilburg

Visual reflection of the Everyday Archive of the Global Political Economy

Ziel des Seminars war es, zu zeigen, wie der globale Kapitalismus unseren Alltag beeinflusst. Dem entsprechend gab es schier unendliche Möglichkeiten, diesen Einfluss auf den eigenen Alltag fotografisch festzuhalten und zu reflektieren. Im Verlauf des Semesters ist mir jedoch schnell klar geworden, dass ich den deutlichsten Einfluss auf meinen Alltag im Supermarkt wahrnehme. Zunächst hatte ich dabei grundsätzlicher an den Überfluss von Waren und die damit verbundenen globalisierten Lieferketten gedacht.

Wie der globale Kapitalismus aber unser Essverhalten als Ganzes steuert, war mir vor der Lektüre von Brassett et. al. 2023 nicht bewusst. Als in einer westlichen Industrienation wie Deutschland sozialisierter Mensch habe ich den Konsum von Schokolade in seiner Menge oder im internationalen Vergleich nie hinterfragt. Das Konzept „diets are governed“ leuchtet jedoch ein und wird – hat man es einmal erkannt – bei jedem Gang in den Supermarkt deutlich.

Über den Vergleich von Brassett et. al. mit der Markterschließung der fünf großen Schokoladen-Produzenten in China, wurde mir klar, dass die Art und Weise, wie wir hier Schokolade konsumieren, nicht *organischer Teil unserer Kultur* ist, sondern auch das Resultat von kapitalistischen Strategien. Per Normalisierung und der Integration in jedes Supermarkt-Sortiment hat Schokolade einen festen Platz in der Ernährung der meisten Deutschen, obwohl es dafür natürlich überhaupt keinen tatsächlichen Bedarf gäbe.

Brassett et. al. thematisieren zudem die Vermarktungsstrategien der Schokoladen-Firmen und die gestiegene popkulturell Relevanz der Schokolade, die in ihrem Suchtpotential zwar anerkannt, aber zugleich verharmlost wird durch Begriffe wie „Chocoholic“. Die Präsenz der Marketing-Kampagnen der Unternehmen wird wohl nirgends so schön deutlich und in ihrem extremen Überfluss auch schon fast lächerlich treffsicher dargestellt, wie durch die Lebensgroße und per Motor mit dem Kopf schwenkende lila Milka-Kuh auf meiner Fotografie.

Zeitgleich soll die Kuh das idyllische und ländliche der Schokoladen-Produktion betonen, das natürlich überhaupt nicht existiert. Somit werden die eigentlichen dunklen Seiten der Schokoladen-Industrie übertüncht und im Hintergrund gehalten. Die aller wenigsten Menschen müssen wohl beim Kauf einer Tafel Milka an die Arbeitsbedingungen der Bauern oder die ungleiche Verteilung der Gewinne zwischen eben jenen Bauern und dem Mutter-Konzern Mondelez denken.

Zusammenfassend ist hier also repräsentiert, wie die Schokolade überhaupt ihren Weg in unsere Ernährung gefunden hat, wie sie heute vermarktet wird und welche Schattenseiten dabei ausgeblendet werden.

This photo shows a pack of "Buldak Ramen," a product by the Korean company Samyang Foods, that I found at a REWE supermarket in Germany. I arrived in Mainz this past March as an exchange student, and while grocery shopping, I was quite surprised to see this familiar ramen on the shelf. Buldak Ramen is a food I often enjoyed in Korea, and for me, it carries a sense of nostalgia. The fact that this product had made its way to a supermarket in a small German city was quite astonishing. Where was this one pack of Buldak Ramen produced, and through whose hands did it travel to finally arrive in distant Germany?

The concept of the “Global Value Chain (GVC)” developed from Michael Porter’s idea of the value chain, and it has evolved into a framework for understanding globalized systems of production and consumption. It refers to how corporate activities—such as design, production, marketing, and distribution—are dispersed and interconnected across national borders. Under the GVC framework, the journey of Buldak Ramen from production in Korea to distribution in Germany unfolds as follows:

Raw materials like flour or soup base are sourced domestically and internationally. The ramen is primarily manufactured in Korea, at Samyang’s factories in Wonju, Iksan, and Miryang. Due to the sharp rise in global demand, a second factory has recently been established in Miryang. Among the actors in this chain, Samyang Foods functions as the lead firm, overseeing the overall brand, recipe, and marketing. The finished products are typically shipped by sea in containers from Busan Port and arrive weeks later at major European ports such as Hamburg. From there, specialized Asian food importers—such as Han Kook Kwan in Germany—handle customs clearance and import the goods. These importers supply the products to various wholesale distributors, and a retailer like REWE then makes the product available to end consumers in various formats.

The global distribution of Buldak Ramen is often described as a major success story in the Korean food industry. However, it is also worth asking: who is receiving how much of the "fair share" within this value chain? Across the distribution chain, Samyang Foods primarily controls design, branding, and marketing, while outsourcing much of the remaining processes. This reveals a typical feature of GVCs—those closest to the production site are often the farthest from the actual distribution of profits.

In the past two to three years, Samyang Foods has significantly increased its production workforce, and the proportion of non-regular workers has risen to nearly 20%, the highest among the three major ramen companies in Korea. At the same time, Samyang, as the lead firm, has maximized profits through strategic use of social media marketing, encouraging voluntary consumer participation while minimizing advertising costs. Yet, the actual laborers

or raw material suppliers remain excluded from this value increase.
Furthermore, when these products are imported into countries like Germany, local distributors add their own margins regardless of the producer's actual profit structure. From this perspective, the global value chain surrounding Buldak Ramen appears to align more closely with the logic of maximizing profit, rather than with the ideals of "fair trade," where producers are compensated fairly for their labor. In conclusion, even a single pack of ramen reflects a long and complex global value chain. I believe it is time for us, as everyday consumers, to become more aware of this.

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The Everyday Archive of Global Capital

Gentrification and the City through the Lens of a Rental Bike

The photograph shows a rental bike operated by Mainzer Mobilität, stationed at the centre of the Neustadt district. On first glance, the bike may appear as a simple object of convenience—emblematic of urban mobility and sustainability. However, when placed within the socio-spatial transformation of Mainz, the bike also becomes an emblem of a shifting urban reality shaped by global capitalist processes. It symbolises not only access but also exclusion: a device meant to facilitate mobility in a city where affordable living spaces and accessible urban sites are becoming increasingly scarce for certain populations.

The concept of gentrification—initially coined by Ruth Glass (1964)—describes the transformation of working-class urban neighbourhoods by middle-class buyers or renters, often accompanied by rising rents, displacement, and socio-spatial segregation. In contemporary discourse, gentrification is tightly linked to neoliberal urbanism, in which the city is increasingly treated as a site of capital investment, and housing as a commodity rather than a right (Smith, 2002: 443). The rental bike in Mainz may be read through this lens: it is part of a broader effort to "upgrade" the city, to brand it as liveable, green, and mobile—a strategy that aligns with the interests of capital accumulation rather than social inclusion.

David Harvey (2008) argues that cities under capitalism are constantly reshaped to facilitate the circulation of capital, often at the expense of those who cannot afford to keep up with rising costs. In Mainz, this dynamic is visible in the transformation of inner-city areas—such as the Neustadt or parts of the Altstadt—where former working-class districts are now home to expensive flats, boutique cafés, and co-working spaces. The result is that many long-time residents are forced to move to the outskirts, increasing their commuting time to jobs, schools, and places of social interaction. In this scenario, the rental bike becomes both a facilitator of and response to displacement—it offers mobility, yet only within a system that it silently sustains.

What does it mean when a bicycle, symbol of eco-consciousness and public good, becomes implicated in processes of exclusion? The visual and material presence of rental bikes across Mainz can be seen as a layer in the "everyday archive" of global capitalism—signs of a city managed for efficiency, aesthetics, and consumption rather than equity. They are tools of access in a city whose spatial logic increasingly privileges those with economic means. As Giesa and Hofmann (2023) note in their study of urban change in German cities, "urban development often cloaks displacement under the language of innovation and sustainability" (p. 21). The rental bike fits neatly into this narrative: its design and function promote a modern, flexible, and green urban life, while ignoring the fact that such mobility is necessary precisely because affordable proximity has become inaccessible.

All of this shows that the Mainzer rental bike reflects both the opportunities and contradictions of life under global capitalism. It is a hyper-visible object that conceals the invisible logics of exclusion. The photo of the bike, then, is not only a record of urban infrastructure, but a symbol of the shifting spatial and social coordinates of life in a gentrifying city.

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Jan-Eric Mahlmeister
Pol. Economy of Everyday Life
SoSe 2025

This is a photo of the gym I go to. It is located in an industrial area on the outskirts of a town, on the first and second floor in an office building. By car, even with heavy traffic, it only takes me about 15 minutes to get there. If I use public transportation, it takes me at least 40 minutes, including a 25 minute walk, assuming the train is on time. Without a car, the commute to and from the gym can be longer than the actual workout. This gym and others like it represent a broader pattern of urban development that prioritizes commercial interests and middle-class consumption while excluding the less fortunate. Having your property next to a gym can be undesirable: you have loud music playing inside, the sound of weights being slammed, and people constantly going in and out. A place like that can be a sore in some people's eyes and bring down the property value, which is why places like this get pushed out of the city into industrial areas, making them harder to reach.

The interests of the middle class, as the politically preferred developmental subjectivity, lead to the "development without the poor." People who can't afford a car need to rely on public transportation, which is usually not sufficient enough to be a viable option, since public transportation is not profitable enough. The needs of the poor become overshadowed by the need for high returns on investments. The financial interest of a few outweighs the interest of the many.

On a bigger scale, this gym can be seen as a sign of class segregation. Not just the price for a membership and the time needed to actually work out are factors that segregate the lower classes from those places, but also the location. If you don't have the money to afford a car, you will pay with the time you lose. Money as an exchange for time can be seen in nearly every part of life. For example, getting your food delivered instead of cooking it yourself, paying for a premium subscription instead of getting ads, or having a person clean your apartment instead of doing it yourself. In our modern capitalistic society, you either pay with your money or with your time.

Sem (BEd/MEd) Introduction to the international Political Economy of Everyday Life

Instructor: Dr. Ruben Kremers

Student: Janik Monath (2788258)

Everyday Archive of the Global Political Economy

The picture I have chosen to use for my Everyday Archive shows a self-checkout register, which allows the customers of the store that it is installed in to scan and pay for their purchases themselves, without the need for a cashier. The device itself provides its users with all the information needed to successfully conduct their purchasing process and there is no need for prior instructions, even if the customers use it for the very first time.

The academic concept that I would like to relate to this picture is that of the so-called "Prosumer" (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010). Alluding to a derivative of producer and consumer, the concept describes how customers are recruited into a productive, collaborative relationship with the brand—or in this case, the store itself. Rather than being passive recipients of goods or services, prosumers actively participate in value creation. In the case of self-checkout machines, consumers are doing the labor once performed by paid employees, such as scanning items, bagging, and processing payments. Self-checkout systems highlight the growing entanglement between global capitalism and everyday life by showing how labor is increasingly outsourced to consumers themselves. While marketed as convenient and empowering, these systems also reflect a broader strategy within capitalism: the shifting of work and responsibility onto individuals without corresponding compensation. This form of “invisible labor” is often normalized through language that stresses speed, autonomy, or technological progress.

Businesses subtly reshape the labor landscape by turning shoppers into unpaid cashiers, reducing staffing costs while maintaining profit margins. This exemplifies what Ritzer and Jurgenson refer to as “prosumer capitalism” in the digital age, where individuals not only consume but also play a role in the production process—be it at the checkout counter, on social media, or within app-based platforms.The boundaries between work and leisure blur as our everyday actions become sites of economic extraction. Furthermore, the spread of self-checkout technology demonstrates how capitalist imperatives penetrate even the most mundane aspects of life. Tasks that once involved human interaction are now mediated by

screens, reinforcing a form of economic rationality that values efficiency and cost-cutting over social connection. Ultimately, the idea of self-checkout can be seen as a factor in the development of an increasingly antisocial society. In its quest for optimization and friction reduction, global capitalism reconfigures daily routines in ways that may seem trivial but cumulatively transform the nature of labor, agency, and social experience.

In this regard, the self-checkout register serves as more than just a convenience; it represents a microcosm of larger structural changes, where daily actions support global economic processes. It underscores how capitalism doesn't just shape markets, but also habits, spaces, and interpersonal relations.

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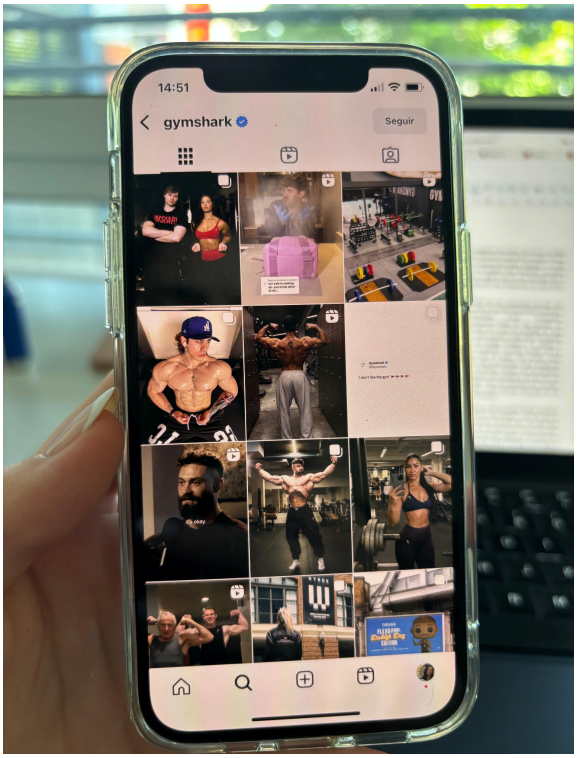
Visual Reflection: Visual Reflection – Instagram, Gymshark, and the Prosumer



I took two pictures from Instagram. The first shows a Gymshark advertisement that appeared between two stories while I was scrolling through my feed. These types of ads appear frequently, inserted seamlessly among stories from friends or other accounts I follow. The algorithm chooses them based on my previous interactions with fitness-related content, such as viewing reels, liking posts, or following workout pages. The second image shows the official Gymshark Instagram profile, which is filled with photos and videos of influencers, both athletes and everyday content creators who are sponsored by the brand. They model the clothing, demonstrate workouts, and promote motivational messages that reinforce the Gymshark identity. Together, these images reflect how advertising, social media, and influencer culture have merged into a continuous, personalized stream of marketing embedded in daily digital life.

This image can be analyzed through the concept of the prosumer. A prosumer is both a producer and a consumer. I am not just a passive viewer of Gymshark ads, the fact that they appear on my feed is the result of my own digital behavior. I have interacted with fitness content and pages; these actions train the algorithm to target me more precisely. In a sense, I produce the conditions for my own consumption.

If I buy a Gymshark product, post a picture wearing it, or share a story, I extend the marketing chain. I contribute to the brand's visibility and credibility without being paid. My digital activity—scrolling, liking, commenting, posting—adds value to the platform and to the brand. This is a form of unpaid digital labour that benefits both

the social media company and the advertiser. Platforms like Instagram are not neutral, they prioritize content that sells and visibility that generates clicks.

This example shows how everyday practices—interacting with ads, following trends, sharing content—are part of a broader system of digital capitalism. I don't just consume what the system offers; my behavior is part of how that system works. The algorithm uses my data to refine its targeting, making marketing more efficient and more personal. As a prosumer, I participate in a feedback loop where I help shape the content I receive, while simultaneously reinforcing the structures of commercial visibility.

With this reflection I want to show how global capitalism embeds itself into the most ordinary parts of life—like watching stories on Instagram. Social media platforms feel casual and personal, but they are powerful systems of data extraction and influence. What seems like simple entertainment is also a system of profiling, recommendation, and commodified attention.

A simple ad is more than it seems—it shows how global capitalism works. My phone becomes both a place to shop and a place where I work without knowing it. The same platforms I use to relax also use me. As a prosumer, I help create value but don't get paid. Even when I'm just scrolling, I'm part of the system.

The Urban Development Programme ‘Soziale Stadt‘ in Mainz Neustadt and its effects on gentrification

These two pictures show the most visible parts of the so called ‘Soziale Stadt’ program in the quarter of Neustadt in Mainz. Since 2001 the Neustadt quarter is part of the urban development program of the federal government of Germany which funds on the one hand the rebuilding of public spaces (see picture 1) to improve the liveability for the inhabitants. On the other hand, a so-called quarter manager has been employed to improve the cohabitation in the quarter and holds open office hours for issues that residents may have. These offices (see picture 2) can be rented free of charge by local initiatives and associations.

This program was originally designed to transform quarters with a rather low liveability to quarters where people really wanted to live. Nowadays, the Neustadt is the most vibrant and popular quarter in Mainz. While the programme and strategy could be considered a success, rents have increased above the ordinary, especially in comparison to other neighbourhoods in Mainz. Consequently, signs of gentrification are becoming apparent.

The core question is therefore whether these urban development programmes are doomed to fail in the sense that the intention of including the inhabitants leads to the exclusion of poor people in the long run? If the premise is set that the effect of the exclusion of poor people in urban neighbourhoods should be avoided, what can be done to prevent it? One solution could be that gentrification should not only be addressed when the signs are already noticeable but right from the beginning of urban development programs as the ‘Soziale Stadt’.

Item of Everday Live

Item of Everday Live

The picture shows a pair of black jeans. I chose jeans as an object of everyday life because they are both economically and culturally symbolic of Western culture and commerce. They are associated with ideas of liberalism, independence, and modern Western identity. However, the jeans depicted in the picture are not produced by a ‘typical’ Western company solely driven by profit. Instead, the company — at least in its advertising — claims to produce jeans under fair conditions and with the environment in mind.

Thus, jeans, as a highly symbolic everyday item of Western culture and commerce, can serve as a starting point for critique of economical practices. Such critique, especially in relation to clothing, can be brought forth by the academic concept of commodity fetishism**.** Commodity fetishism refers to the perception of trade as merely the exchange of goods, ignoring the social relationships between people whose labour gives those goods their value. Fair trade tries to emphasise the companies’ responsibility for workers involved in the production chain, as well as the ecological responsibilities that firms ought to assume. Thus, the everyday object of fair trade jeans can also be connected to the broader concept of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Moreover, due to the costs borne by workers in the supply chain as well as the environment the production of jeans can be related to the issue of market failure**.** Fair trade inherently critiques the externalities that are not internalised into the final price of jeans. Finally, this issue also relates to the concept of New Institutional Economics (NIE). NIE explores how institutions influence economic behaviour, and emphasizes the role of institutions in curbing the opportunistic behaviours of economic practices.

In conclusion, jeans offer an opportunity to reflect on Western commerce, culture, and capitalism, and can serve as a valuable starting point for the critique of current economic practices.

Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz
Aufbau seminar: Introduction to the International
Political Economy of Everyday Life
Dozent: Ruben Kremers
SoSe 2025

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Podcasting

Streaming platform are not only providing a space for artists to put new music out but is also increasingly becoming home to podcasts. What is a podcast but the commodification of social interaction? Gaining popularity during Covid, where social interaction was strongly restricted, podcasts are essentially a streamable audio program that is released regularly as episodes, not dissimilar to radio shows but available anytime. Podcasting covers a wide range of topics, from news and entertainment to education and specific niche interests. The multitudes of themes available keep you interested, as you are able to pick anything you are in the mood for. Podcasting is now a trend: every big social media influencer has or is trying to launch a podcast as seen in the picture. We see Youtube star/ influencer Logan Paul, who started his career filming entertaining content on Youtube, anything from challenges to vlogs. He is surrounded by two other men, also influencers. In this picture, we see the three men in what seem to be a studio, as they are equipped with headsets and microphones, which they need in order to produce their content. A further look onto their channel

gives us a better understanding of what type of content is being produced, with the podcast revolving around celebrity/ influencer drama. What started as a way to give people a voice and the ability to build like-minded communities is becoming an over-saturated market. Nowadays, everyone thinks that what they have to say is important. Social media and the eternal quest for likes has distorted the sense of self of many, who now crave the attention and would do anything to get it. Podcasting is nothing but the capitalist version of everyday social intereaction with friends. The democratisation of podcasting follows a long trend of commodification of hobbies and pass times, in a world where doing something for fun and not for money is seen as a waste of time. Influencers want to say their piece on everything and anything, making podcast the new "Have you heard me?" to Instagram's "have you seen me?" mantra. Podcasting, in the case of influencers, have become yet another way to make money, revealing more and more of themselves and selling more of their time to their audience. On their side, the audience feels like they really know the podcaster, creating a parasocial bond between podcaster and listener. The listener is the silent member of the group but still feels like a part of it, which makes him or her less inclined to engage in such conversation with friends themselves. However, if the goal is to make money, we can ask ourselves to what extend is the podcaster being their true authentic self or how much of what is being said is tailored to the audience. Moreover, in combination to the headphones that are almost permanently glued to our ears, are we starting to lose our basic social skills and are taking the easy way out to fullfill a need for social interaction without the negative feelings that can sometimes arise? Are we becoming passive in our social interactions in fear of being rejected or shamed for what we would say or do? Podcasting is a double edged knives: While earasing the voice of some, it sometimes amplifies a whole lot of nothing.

The picture shows two TV programme guides for German TV, issued for July 2025. Featured on the front pages are advertisements for TV shows, documentaries, and football events. Both magazines also offer guides for streaming platforms, a “streaming planner”, while the one on the right also contains advice against back pain, hinting at an attempt to appeal to an older audience. Dominating the presentation of the magazines, however, are large pictures of young, blue-eyed women with long blond hair. They are wearing dresses, subtle jewellery, and makeup that makes their skin appear flawless, while pronouncing their lips and eyes. The women’s names are written in small font, hidden away in a corner of the page. While both women are actors and hence related to the contents of the magazine, the purpose of their pictures is clearly not to present them as professionals, but to attract looks.

This is a prime example of the commodification of the female body for advertising purposes, or “sex sells”.

The discussion around gender equality in the west has taken a centre position on the stage of everyday political discourse, yet the modelling industry remains highly feminized.

Both magazines were first published in the 90s, and until today almost every single issue since has featured similar pictures of women, because men on the cover make for fewer sales.

With the design being more appealing to both male and female customers, the market gives no incentive to ever change the makeup of the front page.

As the editor in chief of TV Spielfilm puts it in an interview with the Tagesspiegel:

“Women are interested in women. After all, most women’s and fashion magazines feature women on the front page “ (Alvarez, 2013).
These women are entirely reduced to their functionality in appearing aspirational and attractive. Additionally, the ideal produced by the proliferation of these pictures is not only one of flawless skin, very low body fat, bright, glaring eyes, and perfect teeth with a disarming smile, but also one of being white.
These body ideals appear not only on TV guides, which are only an especially mundane example, but anywhere, from billboards over social media to company image films. Because it is market laws that make these kinds of pictures so prominent in our daily lives, women are consumers on the one hand, but become a commodities on the other. This also normalizes a specific standard of femininity, unattainable for many, and yet internalised by most. What we find appealing, attractive, or worth striving for, and on the flipside, ugly, repulsive, and *not normal,* is heavily influenced as a mere byproduct of profit maximization.
The question arises, whether this could be changed through commodification of more feminist female images, or whether that would only give more legitimacy to dehumanizing capitalist practices.

Alvarez, S. (2013, 14. Dezember). *Warum sehen sich Fernsehzeitschriften so ähnlich?: Blau und Frau*. Tagesspiegel. https://www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/medien/blau-und-frau-3535849.html

Sports and Mega-Events

This photo was taken at the Red Bull Arena in Leipzig, home to a football club which profits from massive sponsorship, so much that many football fans argue its success is produced artificially with all the as the club was founded only in 2009. Ironically, it can be interpreted as showing the difference between traditional and authentic football clubs and capitalist concepts finding their way into everyday aspects of our lives, oriented towards consumption, the first part being the the visitor fans who completely occupy their designated area in the arena showing support for their team, while the parts reserved for the hometown fans seems pretty much empty or lifeless. Now this picture was taken early on right before the match started, however the difference in atmosphere was remained throughout the game.

This, however, is not the subject of this text. Though a little far fetched, I think this example reminds of how in our everyday life, in which we watch a Bundesliga game, the importance of money making has taken over a part of culture that was initially thought as a source of lighthearted entertainment, but has developed into an economic phenomenon seeking maximal profit and prestige: World Championships, European Championships, Olympic Games, Club World Championships and many more tournaments. These Mega-Events are not only a source of entertainment and fun for the viewers, but also a source of income, for organisations like the UEFA or FIFA, but more importantly for the countries and cities hosting these huge events and tournaments. It attracts tourists, and therefore business and money opportunities.

Hosting these kinds of events requires a certain amount of infrastructure, like hotels for guests and athletes and arenas for competitions to be held. To accommodate such events, many cities have to update their infrastructure, as in building arenas and other accommodations. In addition, countries strive to either improve or uphold their reputations, and therefore aim for a polished impression on tourists. This, however, has a track record of happening to the detriment of poor and disadvantaged people and communities: for example, Brasil in 2014 and 2016 for the World Championship and Olympic Games forced people out of their homes in the slums of Rio de Janeiro in order to provide space for new in infrastructure. A more recent example is the World Cup in Qatar in 2022, where little to no infrastructure for a football tournament was existent and therefore had to be built from the ground up, by foreign workers who worked under such horrible conditions people died working.

Huge sports events like a World Championship reinforce inequality and greed by pushing gentrification, working conditions which can almost be considered modern slavery and profit maximisation, also simultaneously further destroying our planet by promoting travel and sealing ground, making it harder for water to flow through the earth and into ground reservoirs.

I think this is a great example on how capitalism and the maximisation of profit weave into every part of our lives, from our food and clothing to our entertainment and fun time. It also shows how capitalism can take the joy out of things once one starts to reflect on the processes needed in our modern world to uphold our entertainment, but also how everyone contributes to capitalism by consuming its products, as in watching a tournament on tv despite its ethical controversies because it seems inevitable due to being an integral part of society and everyday life.

Berliner Morgenpost

MIT HORMONEN GEMÄSTET

Horror auf „Menschenfarm“ – Frauen in Georgien ausgebeutet

07.02.2025, 18:49 Uhr • Lesezeit: 3 Minuten

Von **Louisa Thönig**
Online-Redakteurin

In February of this year, international media reported on the existence of a so-called “human egg farm” in Georgia. Thai women had been lured by Facebook advertisements, believing they would work as surrogate mothers and earn between €11,500 and €17,150. This promise, however, turned out to be a deception.

According to the women, they were regularly injected with hormone treatments to stimulate their ovaries. Once a month, they were sedated and their eggs were harvested. The traffickers confiscated their passports and threatened them with continued captivity, those who refused to undergo the procedures were told they would have to pay a ransom of around €2,000 to buy their freedom.

As shocking and cruel as this case is, experts believe it is not an isolated incident. Instead, it highlights a broader and deeply troubling reality within the global fertility industry. While the development of assisted reproductive technologies such as IVF is a remarkable achievement of modern medicine—offering hope to infertile or same-sex couples—surrogacy and egg donation practices often come at a high human cost.

In particular, it is predominantly women from economically disadvantaged regions who are recruited - or coerced - into offering their bodies for profit. Their reproductive capacities are commodified, and their vulnerability is systematically exploited in the name of fulfilling the parenthood dreams of others. This raises urgent ethical questions

about consent, autonomy, and the global inequalities embedded in these reproductive arrangements.

I argue that under neoliberalism, motherhood is increasingly structured around market-based logics and becomes a site of market activity.

To explore this, my paper first outlines the theoretical foundations of neoliberalism, the concept of choice within neoliberal discourse, and the mechanisms of commodification. It then examines how these ideas intersect specifically in the context of motherhood, focusing on the neoliberal framing of maternal choice, the commodification of reproductive labor, and the structural barriers that limit genuine freedom of choice.

I chose this picture of a “Gulf Air” airplane with a special livery advertising the Formula 1 Grand Prix in Bahrain because I work at the airport and therefore see it in my everyday life. Special liveries like this one are very common and often refer to Formula 1 or other sport events and they remind me of the concept of mega-events in regard to the Political Economy of Everyday Life, as they actively advertise these events.

To understand how this image can be seen as an example for this concept, it is necessary to have a look on whether the Grand Prix in Bahrain and similar events in countries/cities nearby can be understood as mega-events.

We define mega-events to be huge, global spectacles, that try to reach an international audience through advertisement and mass media. Taking the Formula 1 Grand Prix as an example with many millions of viewers for every race, we can say that there is an international audience, especially as the race takes place somewhere else each time and is often referred to on social media and advertisements in general. Apart from Formula 1 however, the football World Cup is considered to be the most important and influential sport-event in the world. Therefore, the Qatar world cup in 2022 for example can also be listed as a mega-event.

Mega-events, especially in countries where there is no developed infrastructure for this particular sport, are often accompanied by major criticism of the long-term nature of the arenas/tracks and the working conditions. To save money, working conditions are often reduced to a minimum. For the example of the Qatar Football World Cup in 2022, several thousand workers died during the construction of the stadiums and infrastructure. However, this finding applies not only to the World Cup in Qatar, but also to many other events in this region. In Bahrain, for example, over 50% of the population are migrant workers and the criticism of restrictions on personal freedom and miserable working conditions also exists there.

Advertising without feedback effects, such as aircraft livery, is a good example of how operators and governments try to put the event on the international stage (as thousands of people around the world see it every day) frame it positively and conceal the negative aspects.

With four out of the 24 Formula 1 races every season being in Qatar, Saudi-Arabia, Abu-Dhabi and Bahrain, the Football World Cup 2022 being in Qatar and the one in 2034 being in Saudi-Arabia, the Asia Cup 2025 being in Saudi-Arabia, several UFC-events being in Abu Dhabi and so on, a wide range of sports and their most important tournaments are represented in the countries mentioned in the near past and in the future. It doesn't really matter which sport you follow, the tournaments, and therefore their venues, will be part of everyday life for every fan to a certain extent, along with all the criticism and protests.