Subject: "Critical Media Studies"
Demo Task & Guidelines

The Olympiad on the Subject of "Critical Media Research" consists of two rounds.

Round One. On first round participants are invited to write an essay in English. Participants perform the task remotely. The duration of the assignment is 24 hours. The Olympics starts at 10:00 Moscow time on February 16, 2020 and ends at 10:00 Moscow time on February 17, 2020. Participants can use any Internet resources and methodological literature. The completed paper should be sent to the email cms@hse.ru.

An essay is considered submitted if you receive a notification that your paper has been received. An essay submitted after 10:05 on February 17, 2020 shall not be accepted.

Your essay should be presented in Word format, Times New Roman font, size 12, with line spacing of 1.5. The left margin should come to 3cm; right margin – 1.5cm. The top and bottom margins must come to 1,5 cm. The essay should include the selected topic as the title and a bibliography.

The Olympiad exam will consist of one given question or theme, which candidates will need to discuss in the form of an essay. The text size is not less than 7,500 characters and not more than 13,000 characters with spaces (bibliography is not included).

We expect candidates to manifest their academic writing skills and show familiarity with international scholarly debates and general issues around the areas of media, culture and communication studies.

The maximum grade for the essay is 60 points. The marking criteria for this exam are the following:

1. Argument and Theoretical Background (up to 30 points)

The essay must support an argument and show familiarity with theoretical perspectives around scholarly debates. We expect that the candidate develops a critical- in the broader sense- thesis to the issue at hand and supports this thesis with literature.

2. Structure (up to 15 points)

The essay must have a clear structure, an introductory paragraph, where aspects of the theme and argument are discussed, a main body, where the argument develops and a short concluding section. The candidates should form sentences that connect to each other in a coherent way.

3. Language and Style (up to 15 points)

The language should display clarity of thought. The candidates should avoid jargon and convoluted phrases. Whenever academic terms are introduced they need to be explained or backed by literature. The candidates should use the Harvard referencing style (in-text citations with publication date and page number if needed) and include a short bibliography in the end.

Sample Exam Question (the text size is less than required).

Have social media become a divisive force in liberal democracies?

Sample Reply (excerpt)

The question of regulating social media so as to protect communities from intolerance and hate speech reflects larger questions around cultural and media policy in liberal democracies. According to the most fundamental liberal credo, everyone is allowed to express their opinions, and disagreements can be solved through civic deliberation. This is the belief in the idea that the virtues and openness of civil society can overcome misanthropic hate. Yet this opinion can be naïve and even dangerous for the democratic prospect of societies.

According to theories of social antagonism, social media is an arena of social antagonism just like any other forum in which political opinions and ideologies struggle for publicity, visibility and legitimacy (Mouffe, 2013). In the shift to more authoritarian ways of governing we are experiencing today, social media has proved particularly useful for extreme right-wing ideologues, trolls and often Neo-nazis to promote their discourse of hate and make themselves felt, perceived and heard in the context of what Jacques Rancière calls the given 'distribution of the sensible' (2004). While established media oligopolies would be reluctant to (at least) openly promote the extreme right in the fear of being called out, social media has helped neo-Nazis to overcome this, offering potential for social recognition.

In European countries we saw how the rise of explicitly violent political formations gained power precisely through the manipulation of social media. In the USA, the alt-

right uninhibitedly promoted its imagery and built bonds online through speech dressed up in anti-institutional rhetoric, against straw man concepts like 'cultural Marxism' or 'political correctness'. Thus, the Trump era puts pressure on the myth of libertarianism as a progressive force as represented by the 'Californian Ideology' (many around this new right present themselves as libertarian), a myth that endured during the long (and happy) 1990s and now seems to crumble (Barbrook; Cameron, 1996).

This rise of political hate formations attests to the fact that certain information and cultural forms need to be subject to control (Fuchs, 2017). The question is not only how control can be implemented so that it does not threaten larger public rights or victimise the 'censored', but also from which political position one would proceed in implementing this control. To proceed in censoring from within the very ideology of libertarianism may eventually prove inadequate, since libertarianism poses itself as explicitly against censorship. To imagine a real public control of social media would mean to imagine how these corporations could be run from an emancipatory perspective by the most vulnerable parts of our societies, involving the working class, women of colour and minorities.

Bibliography

Barbrook, R. and Cameron, A., 1996. The Californian Ideology. Science as Culture, 6(1), pp.44-72.

Fuchs, C., 2017. Social Media: A Critical Introduction. California: Sage.

Mouffe, C., 2013. Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically. London: Verso Books.

Rancière, J., 2004. The Politics of Aesthetics: the Distribution of the Sensible, trans. Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum

Round Two. Participants gathering above 30 points (out of 60) are invited to Round Two, which is a personal interview in English. Non-Moscow based participants will have the opportunity to interview remotely. The duration of the interview will be no more than 20 minutes. The maximum grade for the interview is 40 points.

In the interview the candidates are expected to demonstrate their knowledge in research and explain their motivation to study the master's program.

The candidates will have to explain their future research plans and justify how the program will help them in their future careers. We will be paying particular attention to the methods, theoretical frameworks and originality of the themes that candidates

discuss. We will ask questions related to the past research experience of the applicant, their motivation to enter the master's program and their future plans.

The marking criteria for this exam are the following:

1. Originality of research plan (up to 15 points)
2. Knowledge of theory and methods (up to 15 points)
3. Language, discussion and presentation skills (up to 10 points)