



Education at Division Fine Arts and Design, HKB. (Photo: Priska Ryffel)

Research Area Intermediality

## Digital capital in action: transforming digital practices at universities of the arts

**Abstract:** What digital practices do graduate students employ in the closing phase of their training at art universities? Where did they learn these practices, and how are they evaluated? And above all: how do these digital practices impact on their student selves? Inspired by these questions, the study investigates differences in the ordering and hierarchisation of social space with regard to the circulation of digital capital (following on from Bourdieu's theory of capital). The project aims to provide insights into connections between the digital transformation of society and the social opportunities of art students.

**Introduction:** In study programmes at universities of the arts, increasing discussions can be observed about the relationships between digital and analogue practices, between technological standards and the artistic idea, and between university offerings and individual action orientations. All three strands of this discussion are linked to the digital transformation in tertiary education, which, given the practice-based nature of the arts disciplines, is closely related to digitisation processes in society itself. This is why we are investigating what digital practices are employed in the education at art university levels (focussing on Master programmes for contemporary art practice, design and art education), and how these have an impact on the students' selves. Let it be noted, that we use a very broad concept of the "digital", which we understand to encompass technological skills, media, devices, works and products.

**Methodology:** As our starting point, we assume that Bourdieu's theory of capital (1982, 1985) must be able to be expanded to incorporate the dimension of a digital capital; accordingly, we have formulated the following research idea. We shall observe students' final projects in the three study programmes 'contemporary art practice', 'design' and 'art education' in order to investigate what digital practices these students employ. What competences and knowledge do they draw on here? How do their lecturers, mentors and juries assess their work? This study is based on the fundamental understanding that subjective experience and perception create meaning (in the logic of practice), and that this meaning is itself generated, as it were, by expertise and actions. We use a combination of methods, including qualitative interviews and observations, to focus on the subjective experiences of students during their work on their final projects; we hope, thereby, to gain evidence about the presumed modes of action of digital capital in education programmes at universities of the arts.

**Results:** The primary objective of this explorative study is to contribute to investigations as to whether differences in the ordering and hierarchisation of social space can be perceived with regard to the existence, utilisation and circulation of a digital capital. We thereby aim to reach findings about the connections between the digital transformation of society and the social opportunities and possibilities of action on the part of students and universities of the arts.

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