



Call for Applications

Deadline: 19 April 2026

Inter- and Transdisciplinary International Summer School 2026 within the framework of TransHumanities

When: 31 August–4 September 2026

Where: Hotel Seaside, Spiez, <https://www.hotel-seaside.ch>

Language: English

ECTS: 6

Costs: CHF 600 (travel, food and accommodation [double room] covered by organizer; single room: CHF 750). Members of the GSAH and the Faculty of Humanities, University of Bern, are exempt from the conference fee, except for single room upgrade (CHF 150).

Capital in Question

Imagining Work, Value, and Futures Beyond Growth

For some time now, scholars in the humanities and social sciences have been rethinking capital and work beyond purely economic terms. Ideas such as Pierre Bourdieu's mapping of social, cultural, and symbolic capital, James Coleman's concept of "social capital," and John Guillory's use of cultural capital in debates about canon formation have shown that "capital" operates across many dimensions of life and multiple disciplines. More recently, concepts such as "genetic capital," "biovalue," and "biocapital" have foregrounded the growing intertwining of biotechnology and capitalism (Donna Haraway, Michel Foucault a.o.).

In parallel, since the 1990s, attention has turned to processes of financialization that extend speculative logics far beyond traditional markets. After the 2008 financial crisis, the volatility of global finance became visible; shadow banking and high-frequency trading have undermined faith in self-regulating markets and the rational *homo oeconomicus*. Contemporary instability now extends to new actors and infrastructures: from speculative cryptocurrencies to social media monetization, from algorithmic management or data mining to the extraction of value from user activity. "Platform capitalism" (Nick Srnicek) reshapes what counts as capital, creating precarious gig work, intensified surveillance, and contested autonomy. Some argue these shifts may signal a new "data feudalism" (Shoshana Zuboff) where power lies with those who control data rather than industrial capital.

At the same time, intersectional, feminist, and queer approaches have drawn attention to forms of labour often overlooked in classical economics: care work, unwaged work, and other gendered and racialized forms of precarity. They have shown how contemporary transformations rely on the invisibilization of reproductive and affective labour, the appropriation of (digital) commons, and the erosion of social reproduction. Global labour history has broadened our understanding of the many entangled forms of labour, from slavery and domestic service to casualized and migrant work. Other strands of scholarship examine the ecological limits of accumulation, the enduring legacies of colonialism and racial capitalism, and the cultural imaginaries through which capitalism and precarity are represented and contested. These debates unfold against the backdrop of growing economic tensions, financial nationalism, and renewed state intervention.

Together, these developments show that capital and work can no longer be grasped solely through familiar frameworks of productivity and growth. They emerge instead as unstable, contested, and deeply cultural categories—haunted by past crises yet reshaped by the urgencies of the present. Addressing capital demands interdisciplinary dialogue, critical imagination, and a readiness to think beyond inherited paradigms.

This Summer School is organized by the Graduate School of the Arts and Humanities (GSAH) of the University of Bern within the framework of TransHumanities. We invite PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers in the humanities and social sciences to critically engage with the transforming dynamics of capital and labour. We aim to create an interdisciplinary platform to interrogate both historical genealogies and contemporary rearticulations, combining theoretical inquiry with methodological reflection and cross-disciplinary exchange. We welcome proposals that explore, but are not limited to, the following themes and questions:

- How do literary, artistic, cultural practices reflect and critique contemporary capitalism(s) while imagining alternatives? What futures beyond growth emerge in past and contemporary social movements and in the life-making practices of collectivities marked for extraction or disposal?
- How do intersectional, feminist, queer, postcolonial, and decolonial perspectives reframe concepts such as capital, labour, value, and social reproduction? How do ecological imperatives, Indigenous interventions, and degrowth discourses contribute to rethinking capital and labour beyond accumulation?
- What is capital without the state? How do legal and institutional frameworks—such as labour law and migration regimes—structure inequalities historically? What capacities and coercions do states and the world system of states provide for capital?

Partner:

 Schweizerischer Nationalfonds
SNSF Starting Grant Project
Trail: Tracing Labour in
Islamic Legal Traditions

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- As accumulation increasingly transits through war and militarism, border and security regimes, and technologies of population control—often themselves financialized—how are dynamics of capital, social reproduction, and labour transformed?
- What insights emerge from global and historical genealogies of work—from coerced and enslaved labour to digital gig economies—when read in light of today’s inequalities?
- How do digital and “immaterial” forms of labour, such as platform work and algorithmic management, unsettle established boundaries between production, reproduction, and consumption, and reshape value creation?
- Is “capital” still an indispensable critical tool for interdisciplinary research, or might alternative concepts such as “value”, “profit” etc. open new avenues for analysis and critique?
- What methodological innovations—archival, ethnographic, digital, comparative—help us study capital and labour across disciplines and geographies?

Invited keynote speakers:

Prof. Dr. Prathama Banerjee (Professor of History and Political Theory, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi)

Prof. Dr. Jodi Melamed (Professor of English and Race, Ethnic, and Indigenous Studies, Marquette University, Milwaukee)

Prof. Dr. Tiziana Terranova (Professor of Culture, Digital Media and Politics, Università di Napoli “L'Orientale”, Naples)

Program:

Each morning session will begin with a lecture given by one of our three keynote speakers, followed by a response and a plenary discussion. The morning sessions will lay the groundwork for the parallel workshops in the afternoon, which focus on key concepts, problems and core texts that are particularly relevant for the research projects of the participants. Throughout the week, posters will visualize the participants’ projects and foster informal exchange.

Week	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Mon	Arrival (or afternoon)	Arrival / Welcome	Introduction / Poster Exhibition
Tue	Lecture, response, discussion	Parallel workshops	Film screening
Wed	Lecture, response, discussion	Excursion	
Thu	Lecture, response, discussion	Parallel workshops	Special Dinner
Fri	Parallel workshops	Reports and lessons learned	Departure (or Saturday)

How to apply?

The Summer School offers doctoral and postdoctoral scholars a unique opportunity to contribute to a broader discussion with their own research and ideas. We encourage applications from researchers from the humanities and the social sciences with a strong interest in theoretical debates within an interdisciplinary setting.

Please submit the following application materials:

- a letter of motivation, indicating how you expect to benefit from participating in this Summer School and how you can contribute, in turn, to the discussions (please mention your specific interest in the topic)
- a curriculum vitae (maximum two pages)
- an abstract (500 words) of your current research project, including few keywords

What do we offer?

The GSAH will cover your travel expenses, accommodation (except single room upgrade 150 CHF) and meals at the Hotel Seaside in Spiez. You will receive an e-reader containing preparatory material and have the opportunity to present your research on the Summer School homepage. Most importantly, the Summer School offers an intellectually stimulating, lively and friendly atmosphere conducive to fruitful exchange.

Contact:

Please apply electronically by submitting a single PDF until 19 April 2026 to Melanie Sampayo Vidal, who is happy to answer questions regarding the application: melanie.sampayo@unibe.ch.

For all further inquiries, please contact Dr Mike Toggweiler at michael.toggweiler@unibe.ch

Summer School project team:

Prof Dr Serena Tolino (Director IPN and GSAH, Lead Summer School)

Dr Mike Toggweiler (Coordinator IPN and GSAH, Coordinator and Contact Summer School)

MA Melanie Sampayo Vidal (Assistant IPN and GSAH, Assistant Summer School)

Partner:

