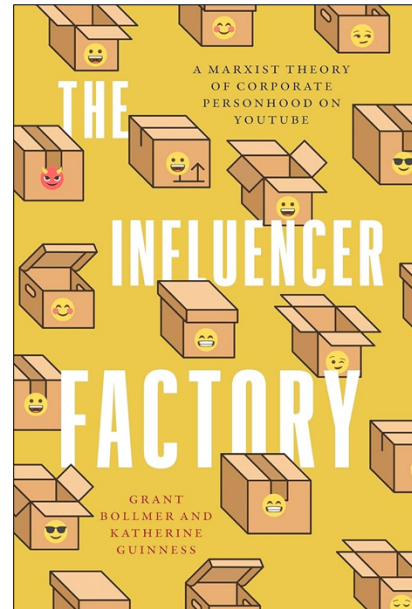


Grant Bollmer and Katherine Guinness, **The Influencer Factory: A Marxist Theory of Corporate Personhood on YouTube**, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024, 256 pp., \$110.00 (hardcover), \$28.00 (paperback), \$28.00 (eBook).

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In the era of digital capitalism, the image of the self has been transformed into a strategic commodity, and subjectivity into an asset shaped by market dynamics. **The Influencer Factory: A Marxist Theory of Corporate Personhood on YouTube**, written by Grant Bollmer and Katherine Guinness, offers an ambitious and incisive reading of influencer culture as both symptom and driver of a profound mutation in contemporary forms of life. Far from merely documenting the rise of certain media figures, the book presents a cultural and political diagnosis of the present, proposing a disturbing central hypothesis: In a system that demands the monetization of every aspect of existence, it is no longer enough for the individual to become a commodity; they must now operate as a corporation.



From this premise, the authors develop the concept of the Corpocene, a new historical stage in which the distinction between person and enterprise becomes dangerously blurred. Within this regime, the subject adopts corporate structures and strategies—diversification, tax opacity, vertical integration—as the only means of survival amid the structural precarity imposed by platform capitalism. The figure of the influencer thus becomes the paradigm of a corporatized subjectivity, caught between the imperative of authenticity and the logic of profitability.

Rooted in the Marxist critical tradition and cultural analysis, the book weaves together social theory, political economy, and digital media studies, combining sophisticated conceptual frameworks with examples drawn from popular culture (MrBeast, Jeffree Star, Emma Chamberlain, etc.). This hybrid approach translates complex ideas into recognizable phenomena without sacrificing analytical depth. The result is a lucid exploration of the entanglement of capital, technology, and subjectivity—shedding light on the mechanisms by which we display, narrate, and sell ourselves within today's media semiosphere.

The book is geared toward a specialized audience—academics, researchers, and advanced students—in fields such as cultural studies, critical theory, sociology, political economy, contemporary philosophy, and digital and Internet media studies. It may also be of particular value to professionals in cultural and communication analysis, as well as readers interested in exploring the transformations digital capitalism imposes on contemporary understandings of subjectivity and its impact on everyday life. While its style may prove challenging for general audiences due to its heavy theoretical references and conceptual sophistication, readers familiar with contemporary debates on the Anthropocene—and other “-

enes”—neoliberalism, or influencer culture will find in this book a robust analytical apparatus capable of offering original interpretations of selfhood in an age of what might be called algorithmic self-exploitation.

The analysis is thoroughly documented and supported by case studies that articulate a typology of influencers—ranging from precarious, low-visibility workers to major media figures operating as consolidated corporations with legal, logistics, and production departments at their service. This spectrum of conditions reveals that, even at the system’s margins, subsistence depends on adopting entrepreneurial behaviors and producing constant visibility. In this regard, the text also rightly emphasizes that the influencer phenomenon should not be read merely as a form of spontaneous success. From the opening pages, it is framed as a contemporary form of self-exploitation, where constant visibility obscures labor demands, the lack of rights, and the extractive logic of platform capitalism. Through sharp critique, the authors demonstrate that the promises of authenticity and community circulating on social media serve as ideological devices enabling capital to subsume even the affective and intimate dimensions of the self.

The work effectively reveals the structural tensions within the influencer figure: between visibility and vulnerability, authenticity and spectacle, person and enterprise. The central paradox running throughout the book is clear: The more autonomous the digital subject appears, the more deeply embedded they are within the very logics that exploit them. The only form of protection against precarity, the book suggests, seems to be the self-corporatization of the individual. Thus, the influencer becomes both symptom and symbol of a neoliberal subjectivity that must be performed, managed, and monetized in real time.

One of the most original and compelling aspects of *The Influencer Factory* is its methodological decision to approach influencer culture not only through its visible protagonists but also through its background spaces—the visual, material, and symbolic architectures that structure this mode of subjectivity production. This attention to everyday spaces is far from decorative; it allows for a deeper understanding of how the architecture of contemporary capitalism infiltrates the intimate, affective, and material lives of individuals. Rather than seeking the truth of the self in the foreground of the image, the authors invite us to look behind it—toward what seems secondary but is, in fact, fundamental: the spaces where neoliberal subjectivity is produced.

Following an extensive introduction where the authors lay out a solid conceptual arsenal and establish a consistent analytical framework, the book is structured around four central chapters, each dedicated to one of these spaces: the house, the car, the market, and the warehouse.

The chapter “House” begins with the home as a paradigmatic space of privacy, intimacy, and domesticity, showing how, within influencer culture, this realm becomes a carefully curated and monetizable stage. The house is no longer merely a place of living but a site for the production of symbolic, affective, and economic value. In this sense, the home is transformed into a permanent set where every object—from dishware to lighting—communicates status, authenticity, and personal branding. The self becomes indistinguishable from its property, embodying the logic of self-exploitation through a fusion of being and having.

In “Car,” the focus shifts to a similarly quotidian but mobile space—hybrid between the intimate and the public. The car appears as a capsule of emotional authenticity: a place for spontaneous confessions, crying on camera, or commenting on the latest viral drama. Yet it also functions as a symbol of precarity and dislocation. For some influencers, the car is no longer just a mode of transport but an improvised home or mobile recording studio. This chapter highlights the paradoxical nature of the automobile: Simultaneously a sign of aspirational mobility and structural vulnerability, it condenses a solitary subjectivity moving between digital platforms and real-world geographies without clear anchorage.

The chapter “Market” explores spaces of excessive consumption, such as haul videos, unboxings, or explorations of thrift stores and abandoned warehouses. Here, the authors show how the influencer functions not just as a curator of objects but as the most sophisticated commodity within the digital ecosystem. Amid the endless flow of products, the self must strategically distinguish itself from what it displays to avoid dissolving into banal abundance. It is precisely this capacity to stand out—to present itself as a singular subject amid material excess—that makes it a desirable product. This chapter demonstrates how, in the attention economy, what is being sold is not so much an object, but a subjectivity constructed for the consumption of others.

Finally, “Warehouse” takes the analysis to the most impersonal extreme of this journey: the industrial space. While the house still maintained an appearance of intimacy and the car offered mobile emotion, the warehouse represents logistical capital in its purest form. Here, the subject becomes fully corporatized, merging with business language, automation, and stock management routines. Some influencers turn these spaces into distribution centers for their own brands, while others use them as backdrops for performances of efficiency, entrepreneurship, and success. The warehouse reveals the culmination of a transformation: no longer about representing an authentic life but about becoming a production unit in itself—where person and enterprise are indistinguishable.

Despite its many strengths, the text does present some limitations. Its theoretical density and length may pose difficulties in some sections, and certain parts of the final chapter feel repetitive. Furthermore, while the book offers a lucid and forceful diagnosis of contemporary forms of alienation, inequality, and self-exploitation, it stops short of proposing concrete avenues for resistance or transformation—or even identifying emergent forms of dissent within the system itself. This absence is particularly noticeable given that the Internet, the very stage of the phenomenon under analysis, has also served as a fertile ground for collective organization, political experimentation, and cultural critique. A deeper reflection on these possibilities might have enriched the book’s conclusion.

Overall, *The Influencer Factory* stands out as a valuable and provocative contribution to understanding the present. By revealing the mechanisms through which the self becomes corporatized and converted into value within the visibility economy, the text not only illuminates a media phenomenon but also offers a powerful interpretive lens for grasping new forms of life under platform capitalism. Far from closing the debate, it leaves open crucial questions for future research: How might we reclaim the body, time, and affect in an economy that relentlessly commodifies them?