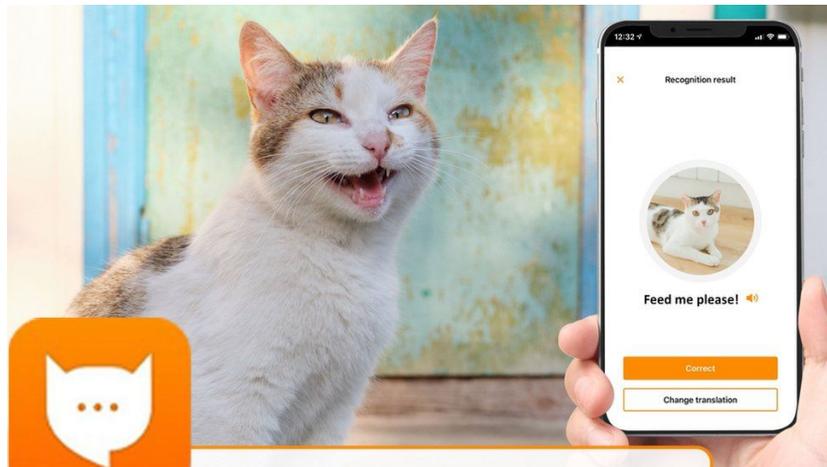


COMS 611: Sound and AI

Professor Jonathan Sterne

Winter 2022 | Mondays 11:30-14:30

on Zoom to start, then maybe hybrid in W220 Arts and online if we're lucky¹



Find Me:

jonathan.sterne@mcgill.ca (he/they) <https://sternetworks.org>

You can call me Jonathan. Please tell me what you would like to be called.

Office Location: Online for as long as it's unsafe for high-risk people on campus. Because I like people, for longer discussions, I will also do outdoor "walking office hours" a couple times a week where you can come up to Villeray and walk around my neighbourhood with me.

Office Hours: after class, and by advance appointment via Zoom, phone, or outdoors. Sign up here:

Seminar Description

Machine learning—often branded as artificial intelligence or "AI"— is an ever-expanding set of political and technological operations in our world today. Sometimes AI refers to a set of real

¹ McGill University is named for James McGill who enslaved Black and Indigenous people. Learn more here at https://www.blackcanadianstudies.com/Recommendations_and_Report.pdf (pp. 55-67). McGill is situated on unceded Indigenous lands in Tiohtiá:ke (Montreal). The Kanien'kehà:ka (Mohawk) of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy are recognized as the traditional custodians of these lands and waters. Zoom's headquarters are located on Muwekma Ohlone territory. Desire2Learn's headquarters are located on the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, which includes the Ojibwa, the Odawa, and the Potawatomie. The actual servers we will be using may or may not be located in Quebec, but are very likely to benefit from water rights expropriated from Indigenous peoples.

technologies, sometimes a set of claims about technologies or industries, and sometimes a set of exploitative social relationships masquerading as automated technologies. The last few years have seen an explosion in critical scholarship on AI, as well as a flowering of critiques within industry, in popular media, and among artists. While the first round of that work focused primarily on the processing of images and text, there is growing interest in the relationship between AI and sound, especially as it relates to speech and music. Our seminar will consider this intersection in depth. We will read and discuss some of the new scholarship on AI in media studies and related fields, and then turn our attention to the politics of AI in the sonic domain. Our goal will be to break with the “common sense” of AI, especially as a “given” problem. Another goal is to demystify the technology and the cultural analysis of technology in general; to show students that they do not need advanced engineering degrees to produce sharp, precise, and politicized analyses of technological practices. How is AI like other kinds of computational or algorithmic cultural practices, and how is it different? How does AI relate to automation more generally? Does it raise genuinely new political or ethical questions, or is it just an extension of already existing antagonisms shaped by capitalism, racism, sexism, ableism, colonialism and other axes of power? Along the way, we will critically consider the work of corporations and researchers alongside that of artists, activists, and others who seek to build technology for people rather than technology for profit.

The reading load will be approximately three essays or a book per week (or the equivalent), and the seminar will be a mix of lectures and discussions. Students will have the opportunity to write or produce multimodal work applying course material to their areas of interest, and will be encouraged to meet with the professor during the course of the term. We will also have special guest stars.

Goals: at the end of the term I would like you be able to:

1. describe part of an AI system;
2. ask interesting questions about artificial intelligence and culture;
3. design a robust research project to answer those questions;
4. recognize and be able to summarize some of the key arguments in critical AI studies;
5. describe how a focus on sound does, or does not, transform how we study AI;
6. leave the course a little more precise, confident, and skilled in your thinking and scholarly practice than when you went in.

Delivery Plan

Class sessions: If the class will be online, we will meet for two 1-hour sessions with a break in the middle. If class is hybrid in W220, we may go the full 3 hours.

During class, we will use a number of strategies for helping discussion in a large seminar: small group work on collective google docs (class catuments²), short lectures and informal student presentations/responses. No formal presentations will be required.

The Course Website: We will be using McGill's MyCourses system (a branded version of D2L).

Class Credos:

More than one thing can be true: cultural analysis only works if it is possible to hold onto apparently contradictory ideas at once, and explain how they can both be true in specific circumstances.

No bullshit: we will avoid easy, prepackaged explanations of complex phenomena, and we will greet the claims of interested parties as open to interpretation and analysis. We will also not bullshit one another. That said, you will have many opportunities to brainstorm and make things up. That kind of activity is strongly encouraged, and is not bullshit.

You have the right to be wrong: part of learning is changing one's own perspective. This is only possible where ideas can be expressed and challenged, and people are allowed to change their minds. But: no "devil's advocates" will be allowed (see: "no bullshit").

It is everyone's job to imagine a better world: any critique of how something is raises the question of how it ought to be. You will be asked to think carefully and imaginatively about alternatives to the way things are.

Follow the golden rule: treat others as you would want to be treated.

And three special graduate-level credos:

Precision, precision, precision: humanists value precision in the use of language. We should be precise and intentional even when we are being ambiguous.

Make your own problems: don't accept prepackaged, mechanistic, or psychologicistic explanations for complex cultural phenomena. Break with common sense. Our job as scholars is to frame new questions and objects of study, and then go about researching them.

Be patient with yourself and with others: at our best, we are all in some ways, beginners.

Requirements:

I. Contribution to the course (25%)

The purpose of this mark is that we all have a responsibility to make sure the course goes well for ourselves, and for everyone else. There are many ways to contribute to the course.

Weekly Discussion Prompt

Due Dates (5pm):	21 Jan
14 Jan	28 Jan

² Term coined by Emily Dolan for our co-taught Instruments and Instrumentalities Seminars.

11 Feb
18 Feb
18 March

25 March
1 April

Most weeks, you'll make a short post on the appropriate discussion board in the following format:

1. Pull a direct quote from one of the readings. Write it out in your post and give us the page number so we can find it.
2. Write a short paragraph explaining how the quote fits into the author's overall argument.
3. Write a short paragraph explaining why you chose it, and why you would like to discuss it further. What's interesting about it (to you)?

These are designed so that I can read them and set up a discussion agenda for class. A nice side-effect is that everyone will be ready with at least one comment that they've had time to mull over beforehand.

If you find this format constraining, you are welcome to write more afterwards, for instance, if you have a reaction or you want to develop an idea in the more standard "weekly response paper format." (I often write to think.)

You are allowed one (1) "seek and destroy hermeneutic" per semester in writing OR discussion. Use yours wisely and we will cheer you on.

Automatic Extensions: I don't believe in making things due on weekends, but class is on Monday. Should the Friday deadline be a problem, you have until 7am Sunday to post without it being a problem for me. Most weeks I will collate the questions and form an agenda for class on Monday mornings. However, some weeks we are having job candidate interviews Monday mornings (I will send details, please come, it's pretty exciting!), which means I will have to do this work on Sunday morning those weeks.

What if I miss a week? You can miss 2 weeks no problem, no excuse necessary. But this assignment is designed to help me prepare for class (yes, your writing helps me), so there is no point in submitting work if it's so late that it's after class. If you find you cannot keep up with this assignment, please contact me right away so we can work out another way for you to contribute to the course.

What if I'm not comfortable discussing what I wrote in class? That's a bummer – I want you to be comfortable discussing your ideas, even when they are not fully formed. But if you are really uncomfortable, let me know and I won't call on you.

A productivity hack: You can do this assignment after having done one of the readings for the week, should find yourself doing the others last-minute.

Special Weeks

For our book clubs—**7 March and 21 March**—you'll be part of a small group that will present a short summary of a chapter to the group. I'll provide more details later in the term.

For Jessica Thompson's visit on **14 March** you'll have a listening and documentation assignment to complete before class. See her week for details.

Participation in class

Showing up, paying attention in class, and contributing to discussion is the default mode of class participation. An online contribution might be another. Helping out your classmates with their projects is still another. If you are not sure how you can or should contribute to the course, please come meet with me during add-drop, or send me an email.

(Post-Discussion) Classography

While I strongly encourage you to focus on the assigned readings, students will sometimes make unavoidable references to other authors, technologies, artworks, people, and other things that are not on the syllabus or in the readings. If you mention something like this in class (for instance, dropping the name of an artist you like, or adding a Foucault reference to comment in class, you should post something to the classography with (as appropriate) a citation or web link as appropriate after class. I will also ask you to concisely explain your reference to the class when you make it.

II. Mess Around With A Machine Learning System (0%--you can thank me now)

During the term, there will be several opportunities to interact with, experiment with, and try out machine learning systems. Perhaps you want to adopt one as your own. I recommend spending a little time playing around just to see what it does, and what it's like to work with.

III. The 3D Project: Didactically Describing Descriptions (20%)

Due 4 Feb, 5pm.

Your first project is "just" an exercise in close reading and explication. You will take two texts we have read in the course and compare and contrast them to answer the following questions:

How does each author describe an AI system? What does their description provide for us, and what does it leave out? Why do you think the author made the choices that they did?

Some things you might consider in answering these questions: at what scale do they describe an AI system? Do they focus on the operations of the technology? The resources it uses? People's experiences of it? (If so, which people?) Its institutional form? What kinds of rhetoric do they use to get their points across?

Product: The standard expectation for this assignment is a 5-page double-spaced academic paper. However, you may also make an equivalent work in another format. Examples could include an infographic, podcast, lecture section, or other kind of didactic text. “Equivalent” here means roughly the same amount of work and same length (which might mean fewer words, in the case of a podcast, for instance).

Side effect: My secret yet not secret goal for this project is that the students who are not technically minded will get more comfortable talking about technologies critically.

Feedback: I will provide written or recorded comments on your work, and assign it a grade. You are welcome to meet with me to discuss it, and you are also welcome to revise it for a higher mark if you are not satisfied with the score I gave it. If you submit a revision, please include a cover letter explaining what you changed.

IV. The Three Ps Project (Prospective Prospectus or Prolegomenon) (50%)

For this not-really-final project, your job is to ask a question and turn it into an actionable research program.

Part I: The Question

Due 7 or 14 March, 5pm, you’ll sign up for one or the other date.

Ask a scholarly question about sound and artificial intelligence. Sounds easy, right? It’s not! It should be something that you are curious about, and to which you do not already know the answer in full. A *hunch* might be a decent substitute for a question, but it’s only a hunch if you don’t already know the answers in advance. We will discuss how to do this in class, but the form of your assignment will be as follows:

In a short no-more-than-2-page-double-spaced text, begin by clearly stating your question. Then: explain where your question comes from. How did you get interested in it? What makes it “inherently” interesting? How does it fit into a conversation that scholars have been having? Can you break it down into subsidiary questions?

Escape Hatch: If coming up with your own question feels like too much or you’re just not ready, take one reading (that you did not discuss in your first project) put yourself in the author’s shoes, and answer the questions above as if you are them. Your job is to reverse-engineer their question-forming process.

I will respond to your post via comments in an email.

Part 2: The Draft

Due 8 April, noon. Please get this in on time so your group-mates have time to read and comment on it. If you are running late, please contact your group-mates to make arrangements (it's their flexibility you'll need, not mine).

This +/- 5-10 page double-spaced text (length will vary according to genre) can take the form of a formal research proposal, a conference paper in the style of a “prolegomenon to” (in which case we’re talking closer to 10 pages); a grant proposal, part of a thesis prospectus, an event score, or some other set of instructions to yourself that are also presentable to help an audience understand what you are going to do, and to convince them that it is worth doing. One of the suppositions behind this structure is that length is not equivalent to labour: it sometimes takes more work to write a 2-page grant statement or cover letter than to write a 8-10-page conference talk.

Your proposal should explain your question, and then explain what do you need to do, or to know, in order to answer your question. How will you do it/find it out? Draw on one or more authors this term to choose appropriate methods for your project, and design a research program. Ideally your statement of the question will build on my feedback from March, as well as further thought on your part.

Escape Hatch: if you did not ask a research question for the March deadline, and still do not want to come up with your own question, you can instead write a +/- 10 page paper (or produce an equivalent didactic text) that takes one author’s question, and builds a research program to answer it using the methods of a different author from the course. This time, you will be posing as a chimera of two people we read this term, rather than acting as just one.

Part 2b: The Discussion

For class on **11 April**, we will meet and discuss people’s draft 3Ps projects in small groups. Group members are responsible for providing their colleagues with feedback according to the feedback rubric on the website. You may also schedule a meeting with me or send me an email if you have questions. I will not provide feedback on drafts you ask me to do so, but I am certainly happy to discuss your project with you!

Part 3: The Revision

Due 19 April, 5pm.

Once you have received peer feedback, you have 1 week to revise your 3Ps Project and send it to me. I will provide written or recorded comments on your work, and assign it a grade. You are welcome to meet with me to discuss it your writing, and you are also welcome to revise it for a higher mark if you are not satisfied with the score I gave it. If you submit a revision, please include a cover letter explaining what you changed.

VI. The Reflection Letter (5%)

Due 21 April, 5pm.

48 hours after submitting your revised 3Ps Project to me, you will write me an informal email (literally, start it with “Dear Jonathan” and write it as an email) answering the following questions:

1. What did you learn about being a scholar doing the various writing exercises for the course?
2. What do you think you did particularly well? Is there an area you feel you improved on over the course of the term? What did you struggle with and how will you deal with that going forward?
3. What skill do you want to work on *next* as you go forward in your education?
4. Do you have any questions or additional thoughts to share with me?

This is also your deadline for submitting a revised version of any of the previous projects. All revisions must come with a cover letter explaining what you changed.

Preliminary Schedule

We will feel no guilt if we only discuss 2 of the assigned readings for any week in depth.

We will also feel no guilt if we change the schedule. But I will announce it in class.

If you have thoughts about a reading that we did not get to in seminar, please feel free to post to our discussion forum.

Here is a link to help you do the readings: Paul Edwards, “How to Read a Book,”
<http://pne.people.si.umich.edu/PDF/howtoread.pdf>

Readings are listed in reverse-chronological order for each week. No hierarchy of importance is meant by their order.

10 January: AI in the cascade of human crises; getting-to-know-you and first day business

Recommended:

New to Critical AI Studies? Here are a couple quick hits to give you a flavour:

Benjamin, Ruha. Assessing Risk, Automating Racism. *Science* 366:6464 (2019): 421-422
Costanza-Chock, Sasha. “Design Justice, AI, and Escape from the Matrix of Domination.” *Journal of Design Studies* (2018). <https://jods.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/costanza-chock/release/4>

Handout: Things Critical Scholars Tend to Say About AI

Handout: Some Places and People to Follow (a very incomplete list)

17 January: Beyond Techsplaining

Eidsheim, Nina. "Re-writing Algorithms for Just Recognition: From Digital Aural Redlining to Accent Activism." In Pooja Rangan, Akshya Saxena, Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, and Pavitra Sundar, eds., *Thinking With An Accent*. Berkeley: University of California Press, accepted for publication.

Audry, Sofian. "Introduction," *Art in the Age of Machine Learning*, 1-19. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2021.

Machine Listening. "(Against) the Coming World of Listening Machines," *Machine Listening: A Curriculum* (2020). <https://machinelisting.exposed/topic/against-the-coming-world-of-listening-machines/>. NOTE: I'm asking you to read the text and maybe listen to the clips embedded in the text. There's also a 2 hour 43 minute video, which is not required.

Crawford, Kate, and Vladen Joler. *Anatomy of an AI System: The Amazon Echo as an Anatomical Map of Labor, Data and Planetary Resources*. Artificial Intelligence Now, 2018, <https://anatomyof.ai>. There is an essay and a map at this site. Read the essay, check out the map.

Handout: Some AI Cocktail Party Knowledge

24 January: OK, a Little Techsplaining, But Humanities-Style

Napolitano, Domenico, and Renato Grieco. "The Folded Space of Machine Listening." *Sound Effects: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Sound and Sound Experience*, 10:1 (2021): 174–89.

Li, Xiaochang, and Mara Mills. "Vocal Features: From Voice Identification to Speech Recognition by Machine." *Technology and Culture*, 60:2 (2019): S129–60.

Lewis, George. "Why Do We Want Our Computers to Improvise?" In Roger T. Dean and Alex McLean, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Algorithmic Music*, 123-130. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

_____. "Rainbow Family." *Technosphere Magazine* (2018). <https://www.technosphere-magazine.hkw.de/p/5-Rainbow-Family-5Aj9nAxzG6zFRAAd9icEvH>

Handout: "Schools" of Technology and Causality—Science and Technology Studies, Actor-Network Theory, Cultural Studies of Technology, German Media Theory

31 January: Split Class

Part I: Fernando Diaz, Special Guest Star

Suresh, Harini, and John Guttag. "A Framework for Understanding Sources of Harm Throughout the Machine Learning Life Cycle." In Proceedings of *Equity and Access in Algorithms, Mechanisms, and Optimization*, 1-9. New York: ACM, 2021.

Part II: Reasoning About Quantitative Reasoning, Or Numbers According to Humanists

Mulvin, Dylan. "Samples of the World *Out There*: The Surrogate World of Proxies," 1-33. *Proxies: The Cultural Work of Standing In*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2021.

Castelle, Michael. "Deep Learning as Epistemic Ensemble" and "Social Theory for Generative Networks." (2018) <https://castelle.org/pages/deep-learning-as-an-epistemic-ensemble.html> <https://castelle.org/pages/social-theory-for-generative-networks-and-vice-versa.html>.

Radin, Joanna. "Digital Natives: How Medical and Indigenous Histories Matter for Big Data." *Osiris*, 32:1(2017): 46–64.

Handout: The Never-Ending Digital Humanities Debate + The Historiography of Statistics

Recommended for those really new to talking about numbers:

D'Ignazio, Catherine and Lauren Klein, "The Numbers Don't Speak for Themselves," *Data Feminism*, 149-172. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020.

4 Feb, 5pm: Due Date for Didactically Describing Descriptions Project.

7 Feb: Discuss Didactically Describing Descriptions Project.

No additional readings are due but it's a good chance to review what we have covered so far and fill in any gaps in our AI Cocktail Party Knowledge.

14 Feb: As Power Listens

Bijsterveld, Karin. "Slicing Sound: Sonic Skills and Speaker Identification at the Stasi 1966-1989." *Isis* 112:2(2021): 215-241.

Stoever, Jennifer. "Introduction: The Sonic Color Line and the Listening Ear." *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*, 1-28. New York University Press, 2016.

Knouf, N. Adriana. "Noisy Efficiency" and "Algorithmic Noise Producing Noisy Profits" in *How Noise Matters to Finance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016. Available online at: <https://manifold.umn.edu/read/how-noise-matters-to-finance/section/84002eb9-a10b-4755-81b1-d8f2cbbeae2c>

Handout: "Don't Believe the Audiovisual Litany" and Jonathan's Other Axioms for Sound Studies

21 February: Listening Positionalities

Brooks, Daphne. "Introduction." *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound*, 2-64. Harvard University Press, 2021.

Robinson, Dylan. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*, 27-76. University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

Mills, Mara. "Do Signals Have Politics?: Inscribing Abilities in Cochlear Implants." In *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, edited by Karin Bijsterveld and Trevor Pinch. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Handout: Contested Terms and Terrains in Sound Studies, or "What Are People Arguing About These Days?"

28 February: Reading Week!

7 March: How to Ask Questions about AI (Book Club I)

Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (illustrations by Alex Barnett), *Discriminating Data: Correlation, Neighborhoods, and the New Politics of Recognition*

Handout: Re-read "How to Read a Book" <http://pne.people.si.umich.edu/PDF/howtoread.pdf>

7 or 14 March, 5pm: Ask a Question Due

14 March: Spatial AI and the Sound of Gentrification – Jessica Thompson, Special Guest Star

An assignment for class! No reading response due on 11 March.
Also, please plan to attend Professor Thompson's lecture on 10 March.

How to listen in an emergency:

A soundwalk for difficult times.

Instructions

This prompt tasks you with taking a solo soundwalk through a city of your choosing. If you are not able to go outside, or do not feel safe doing so, that's totally okay—feel free to invent another way.

1. Move through space and notice sounds in your environment.
2. Using an annotation method of your choice, make note of the types of sounds that occur, and where and when they took place.
3. Bring your data to class.

Prior to your departure, select a framework for walking/listening and a method for documentation. For example, you might choose to drop a thread onto a map, tape it down and follow it. Or, you might choose to follow a path suggested by something in the environment, like a colour, a bird or an architectural feature.

Your methods could include handwritten notes, dot stickers, recordings, voice memos, or you could use a copy of *Borderline* <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/borderline/id1348417625> and export your data to a spreadsheet.

Additional Resources

1. For more examples of frameworks and documentation methods, see MIT CoLab's [Listening to the City Handbook](#).
2. If you get stuck or bored, try an [Oblique Strategy](#)

Readings:

Mattern, Shannon. "Urban Auscultation; or, Perceiving the Action of the Heart." *Places Journal* (April 2020): <https://placesjournal.org/article/urban-auscultation-or-perceiving-the-action-of-the-heart/?cn-reloaded=1>.

Martin, Allie. "Hearing Change in the Chocolate City: Soundwalking as Black Feminist Method." *Sounding Out* (2019, August 5): <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2019/08/05/hearing-change-in-the-chocolate-city-soundwalking-as-black-feminist-method/>.

Safransky, Sara. Geographies of Algorithmic Violence: Redlining the Smart City. *Int. J. Urban Reg. Res.*, 44(2019): 200-218. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12833>.

Recommended:

Graziani, Terra, Joel Montano, Ananya Roy, & Pamela Stephens. "Property, Personhood, and Police: The Making of Race and Space Through Nuisance Law." *Antipode* (2021, online first): 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12792>.

[Hammer, R.](#) and [Park, T.M.](#) (2021), "The Ghost in the Algorithm: Racial Colonial Capitalism and the Digital Age", [White, A.I.R.](#) and [Quisumbing King, K.](#) (Ed.) *Global Historical Sociology of Race and Racism (Political Power and Social Theory, Vol. 38)*, Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley, pp. 221-249. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0198-871920210000038011>.

Silva, Tarcízio. *Algorithmic racism timeline*. (Jan 5 2020) <https://tarciziosilva.com.br/blog/destaques/posts/algorithmic-racism-timeline/>.

21 March: Methods Potpourri (Book Club)[: Revenge of Book Club)

Eriksson, Maria, et al. *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*. MIT Press, 2019.

Handout: Adversarial vs. Sympathetic (or community-based) scholarship.

28 March: Sound, Affect, and ML

Part I: Stefanie Blain-Moraes, Special Guest Star.

Stark, Luke. "Algorithmic Psychometrics and the Scalable Subject." *Social Studies of Science*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2018, pp. 204–31.

Part II: More on Sound and Affect

Semel, Beth. "Listening Like a Computer: Attentional Tensions and Mechanized Care in Psychiatric Digital Phenotyping." *Science, Technology and Human Values Online* first (2021): 1-21.

Turow, Joseph. "What Marketers See in Voice," *The Voice Catchers: How Marketers Listen to Exploit Your Feelings, Your Privacy, and Your Wallet*, 70-109. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021.

Handout: Sound and Affect Redux.

4 April: More Modalities, More Methods, More Epistemologies, Please!

Born, Georgina, Jeremy Morris, Fernando Diaz, Ashton Anderson. *Artificial Intelligence, Music Recommendation, and the Curation of Culture*. Toronto: The Schwartz Reisman Institute for Technology and Society, 2021.

Lewis, Jason Edward, Noe Arista, Archer Pechawis and Suzanne Kite. '[Making Kin with the Machines.](#)' *Journal of Design and Science*, vol. Summer 2018, no. 3.5, July 2018.

Seaver, Nick. "Algorithms as Culture: Some Tactics for the Ethnography of Algorithmic Systems." *Big Data & Society* (July-Dec 2017): 1-12.

Handout: Taxonomies of Intellectual Labour

8 April, noon, 3Ps Draft Due

I will assign you to small groups for closer reading and peer feedback.

11 April: Feeding Back

You will meet in groups and give one another feedback on their research programs. We will also spend some time discussing them collectively.

19 April, 5pm: Revised 3Ps Due

21 April: Reflections Letter Due; also the last possible date to submit revised work with a cover letter.

Other Policies

Accommodations and Access Needs: I study disability, have disabilities, and believe firmly in the right to access. Just come talk with me at the beginning of term, or send me an email, and we will figure out what works for you and for the class. I only ask that you be forthright and clear with me from the beginning to avoid surprises later in the term. You do not need any kind of medical documentation (what we call “biocertification” in disability studies) in order to seek accommodation. You also do not need to contact the Office for Students with Disabilities in order to ask for an accommodation, though you are certainly welcome to work with them if you are so inclined. I work with them all the time for my undergrad classes. The OSD can be reached at 514-398-6009 (voice), 514-398-8198 (TDD), [<http://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>].

The above commitment to accommodate applies equally to survivors of sexual assault and/or harassment on or off campus. Survivors are encouraged to consult the resources provided by the Students’ Society of McGill University (<https://ssmu.ca/resources/sexual-violence/>), the Sexual Assault Centre of the McGill Students’ Society (<http://www.sacomss.org/wp/>) and the McGill Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education (<https://www.mcgill.ca/osvrse/>).

Universal/Resonant Design: My courses are intentionally designed to be modular and flexible and to address different learning styles and needs. Nevertheless, aspects of this syllabus— requirements, expectations, etc.— may conflict with your access needs. I can be flexible if you come to me within the first two weeks of class to discuss your access needs. Note that some accommodation requests could potentially conflict with *others’* access needs (or the prof’s), and/or the pedagogical goals of the course, in which case they might need to be negotiated.

Etiquette (same as it ever was):

1. I expect you to really try.
2. Good faith and good humor toward your colleagues in the classroom. For both: disagreements are expected and encouraged, but please keep nitpicking to a minimum; personal attacks and intimidation are not acceptable under any circumstances. There will be a strict limit on seek-and-destroy hermeneutics. Follow the Golden Rule. Encourage basic questions as well as advanced ones.
3. Your job as a participant is to listen actively to what others have to say and advance the discussion. **If you are a confident contributor** use your confidence for good and not evil. Help bring others into discussion, refer to your classmates by name, and be encouraging about the contributions of those who do not say as much.
4. While personal anecdotes are allowed, keep in mind this is a graduate seminar. Others may disagree with your interpretation of your experience. This is encouraged and allowed. If you are not comfortable with this, do not share your story. If you share your story and *then* decide you are uncomfortable with others discussing it, just ask us to stop and I will move the discussion along.

5. **Awkward Silences** and hesitation are okay. Don't feel you need to rush to speak and don't worry if you need a little time to articulate something. Contributing to class discussion is more than the frequency of the times your hand goes up and the number of words you say. If you are struggling to articulate something, that's probably a sign that you are saying something that is new and not obvious.

6. **Difficult subject matter:** As your prof, I will never do anything intentionally to shock or traumatize students. At the same time, it's our job to discuss difficult subjects in class, and nobody can predict the effect some materials may have on someone. I will try and give previews of the kinds of subject matter you will encounter before you encounter it but I cannot guarantee I will preview the important thing. If I forget, feel free to ask. If you are having difficulty dealing with a class discussion or a reading or recording, you may raise the issue as part of the discussion (keeping in mind #4 above), or you may simply discretely leave class. A note to me (the prof) would be helpful after the fact so that we know what happened and don't think you just got up and left.

Technology Policy: We will discuss a technology policy on the first day of class.

Pre-Covid, my technology policy stated that I would like to avoid an atmosphere of "ambient computing" and "availability to apps and social media." Even though people are now forced to use their computers a lot more, I still want to establish the same baseline: the classroom should be a space of focused discussion, a place to come together. Please try to resist multitasking. If you need to look something up (for the class discussion, not a dinner recipe), please do so quickly and then close that window.

French: You have the right to submit your written work in French and in many years some students in my seminars choose to do so. If you plan to write in French, please get in touch with me during add-drop so we can talk about how to handle it. Normally it's not a problem but since there is a writing-intensive component to the class, we should at least discuss how it will work.

Class discussions are in English, but native French speakers are strongly encouraged to resort to French if you can't find the right word in English and we'll figure it out together. You are also welcome to read course materials in French (where they are available in French).

Nondiscrimination: If there is something I can do to make the class more hospitable, please let me know. I value equality of opportunity, and human dignity and diversity. In accordance with McGill's policies, I will not tolerate discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, ethnic or national origin, civil status, religion, creed, political convictions, language, sex, sexual orientation, social condition, age, personal difference or the use of assistive technology in negotiating that difference. Among other things, this means that you do not have to agree with your teacher, the assigned readings, or the majority of your classmates in order to do well in

this course. You are, however, obligated to demonstrate an understanding of the course material *whether or not you agree with it.*

How to Interpret McGill’s Inflated Graduate-Level Grades:

- A: Good work
- A-: Satisfactory
- B+: There is a problem with what you submitted
- B: There is a substantial problem with what you submitted
- B-: Lowest possible passing grade in a graduate course; indicates a major problem but not a failure
- C+ or lower: Officially considered a “fail” by the Graduate Studies Office.

In rare cases, if your performance on any assignment is not satisfactory, you may be asked to do it again.

You must complete all the major assignments to pass the course.

It is your responsibility to make sure I receive any assignment you turn in.

It is also your responsibility to properly back up your work: keep more than one digital copy and always have a paper copy of anything you submit (files get corrupted, equipment gets stolen, etc). I recommend syncing your important documents to a cloud storage service and having an external hard drive.

Policy regarding incompletes:

The K contract: At McGill, grades of incomplete are called “K” grades and they are only supposed to be assigned after the student and professor have agreed upon a contract, which means you need to approach me ahead of time and propose a timeline for getting your work done. I do not give incompletes (“K” grades) except in truly extraordinary circumstances. K grades revert to “F” grades at the end of the next term unless a contract extension is signed by both professor and student. I almost never give extensions.

The Passive-Aggressive K: Should a student fail to turn in a final project and fail to contact me well before my deadline for submission of grades, I will issue a K grade without a contract. McGill Graduate Studies, however, still expects a contract to be filed and it will be the student’s responsibility to contact Jonathan and get one in place. In these circumstances, should the project be completed at a later date, it will receive a mark. However, students who receive a “K” in this fashion will not be eligible to receive an “A” or “A-” for the course. I will not sign an extension for a K grade that was granted without a contract, and no late paper will be graded without a K contract being in place beforehand. I also cannot promise comments on a paper submitted after a passive-aggressive K.

McGill Required Academic Integrity Statement: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism

and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

McGill Required McGill Special Required Emergency Syllabus-Eraser Clause: In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control [HAHAHAHAHAHAHA YOU MEAN LIKE 2020, 2021, AND 2022], the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

I am keenly aware that I am still teaching in the middle of a global pandemic and that many of us could find ourselves in difficult situations beyond our control during the semester. Please do not hesitate to contact me if anything happens that makes learning and engaging difficult for you. The sooner, the better.

I also strongly recommend that you make 1-2 buddies early in the term whom you can text with if you get cut off, if you miss an entire class meeting, or need help from a peer on something. To facilitate this buddy-making process, I will create some arbitrary "pods" for you to join and use them a couple times for class discussion.

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<https://www.mdpi.com/2076-3417/8/10/1949/htm>