

**ANTH 138A-DIGITAL CULTURES (Spring 2022)**

Brandeis University, Department of Anthropology

Mondays and Wednesdays 5 – 6:20 PM

[Lown Center for Judaica Studies](#) 201



“No Matter How Digital You Make India, You Can’t Download Bread from Google”

*Sign from Farmer’s Protests, India, 2020*

**Professor:** Dr. Brian A. Horton (he/him/his)

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**Office Hours:** Wednesdays 12PM – 2PM (EST) or by Appointment, Brown 205

**Course Description**

*Digital Cultures* examines the complex and often fraught relationships between digital technologies and human cultures. By thinking through digital technology’s relationships to structures like race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability, this course helps us explore the human components in the creation, circulation, and experience of digital technologies. What this class spotlights is that though digital technologies may seem materially new and technically innovative, they are built on longstanding power relations that structure both their construction and dissemination. In short, the “digital” component of this class is a lens through which we will come to understand larger questions of culture: such as identity, politics, power, love, war, sex, influence, and status. Moving between a range of disciplines such as digital humanities, digital anthropology, new media, critical race studies, and queer/trans feminist theory, this course will also examine modes of researching, understanding, and engaging with digital technologies. Rather than seeing social media and technological innovations as objects that have shifted the course of human history through increased connection or democratization of information, how might we temper our digital enthusiasm to consider what old questions are given new life in a digital frame? From new regimes of digital surveillance to influencers on social media to discriminatory design, we will travel through digital worlds together in order to examine the rich cultural, political, economic, and ethical questions opened up by a renewed interest in digital technologies. Beyond reading about, theorizing, and discussing digital media, students will also get firsthand experience in

conducting digital anthropological research via a final group project. This class is designed for students to get an introduction into digital anthropology. Thus, no real requirements are necessary.

This course fulfills the digital literacy component of the Brandeis [Core](#) and counts as an elective for students majoring in Computer Science.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and explain key concepts from digital anthropology
2. Apply concepts and frameworks from digital anthropology in academic and popular contexts
3. Critically articulate their relationships to digital technologies and practices
4. Use the methods of digital anthropology to develop and execute original research projects
5. Develop the necessary skills to successfully work as part of a group/team
6. Feel comfortable speaking in front of others and facilitating/participating in discussion

### **Required Materials**

*All course readings will be available on the course LATTE page.* Students will also need:

- Wifi-enabled Computer/Tablet/Phone with camera and microphone capabilities
- Zoom Account

\*Please email me if there are any issues regarding access to these materials.

**I ask that you maintain an active and consistent relationship with LATTE because course assignments, readings, and announcements will be made there.**

## **COURSE POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS**

### **Structure**

This course will meet Mondays and Wednesdays 5-6:20 PM in [Lown Center for Judaica Studies](#), 201. Mondays will be lecture and Wednesdays will be discussion/activity-based. Each week, students will be assigned a set of required readings, which you will be expected to have finished reading by Wednesday's discussion-based class meeting. Wednesday classes will be focused on discussion in small groups organized either randomly or by readings. These initial groups for discussion will be provisional and subject to updating, pending student feedback.

***Wednesday discussions will primarily be student led***, with students working through a list of discussion questions circulated each week, in advance of Wednesday discussions. Professor Horton and the TA will be using these weekly discussion groups to track your participation. Slow discussions, lackluster participation, and silence will be both noted and accounted for (and reflected in participation grades).

### **Communication and Office Hours**

Both of us will be available for weekly office hours. See Page 1 for our specific times and sign-up links. We will hold our office hours in person, with some options for zoom as the situation regarding COVID changes. Unless otherwise indicated, the expectation is that we meet in person for office hours.

Each week, I will hold office hours Wednesdays **12 – 2 PM (EST)**. The TA, will also hold office hours each week on **Mondays 3:30 – 4:30 PM**. These hours are an opportunity to check in with us,

to discuss issues you are having, to clarify assignments or readings, talk about grades/grading, etc. These hours are designed for you, please take advantage of them as needed. To sign up for our office hours, please use the link to the appointment pages on our calendars. Signing up there will automatically create a calendar invitation that we can accept and you should accept as well, so that it is on your calendar and you do not miss the meeting

I cannot reiterate enough how important it is to remain in constant communication. I recognize that we are in unpredictable times between the state of race/race relations, a global pandemic, and an economic crisis, alongside everything happening in the world. I also understand that at times one may want to withdraw or may not be able to be fully present. While I want to hold space for the kinds of stress, grief, and crisis, that we are facing, I also urge you to remain in constant contact with me, especially about your feelings of stress, anxiety, grief, or otherwise, should these feelings impinge upon your ability to fully participate in the course. I commit to maintaining regular communication and checking in as much as possible, but I also expect you to take ownership of your work and participation in the course by maintaining clear and open lines of communication.

### **Email and Communication Etiquette/Tips**

1. **Use a clear greeting with my name and title:** Tempted to use sup? Or Hey? Or What's good? Don't. Please address me appropriately with "Hi," "Hello," "Dear," or some other greeting followed by Dr. Horton or Professor Horton.
2. **Include a subject line:** As tempting as "SOS", "HELP", or "HAALLP, GURL DOWN," might be. Again, Don't. Please use a clear subject line that offers me some indication about what exactly the email is about (ex "Question about Midterm", "Rescheduling Office Hours," or something else specific and to the point).
3. **Use standard grammar, punctuation, and capitalization:** Approach email like formal, professional communication. If you would not write it in a paper you are handing in for a grade, to your boss, or to put in print for a wider audience beyond your social media following, do not include it in an email.
4. **Use your lifelines (the syllabus, Latte, and your peers):** If you are sending an email that is a question (for instance about deadlines, assignment formatting, readings for the week, etc), check to see if your question can be answered by the syllabus, Latte, or even a peer. This is not me telling you NOT to email me. Rather it is me telling you that sometimes the thing you are curious about might be more quickly answered by one of your lifelines.
5. **Think before you send:** Please remember that what you write in an email is in text and semi-permanent (and in some contexts can be subpoenaed). Write in a way that is direct, respectful, and reads generously.

For more email tips, please see here <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2015/04/16/advice-students-so-they-dont-sound-silly-emails-essay>

### **Seminar Room Culture**

This is a class that deals with issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, caste, nationality, ability, power, identity, and a range of other topics. We bring to our seminar room different relationships and perspectives that will shape both what we think and how we may relate to course materials and class discussion. I recognize that some issues may be triggering, uncomfortable, or frustrating for many students and that discussions can heighten anxieties or feelings of discomfort. Given these concerns, please consider some of the following suggested rules which we will also amend at the beginning of the semester and continue to shape as the semester progresses:

1. **Respect Names, Pronouns, and Experiences:** Please take time to learn and internalize the pronouns of your peers and use the appropriate names and pronouns when addressing one another. It is entirely likely that we (myself included) will misrecognize and misuse pronouns. Please hold one another accountable and correct when possible. And when you have been corrected, say “Thank You” instead of “Sorry.”
2. **Reflect Before Speaking:** While academic freedom is a cornerstone of a liberal arts education, that freedom is not synonymous with discriminatory remarks or hateful speech. In this course, we will not use language that discriminates on the basis of race, sex, gender identity/expression, religion, nationality, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, caste, ability, medical status, age or other social positions and identities. That being said, while we may not intend to injure, things happen. As the instructor, I will consider these moments as teachable and commit to work to unpack them as well as offer students ample opportunities to raise concerns in class or privately.
3. **The Devil Does Not Need an Advocate:** When discussing social experiences, particularly those that center injury (racism, sexism, assault, violence, and so on) phrases like “just to play the devil’s advocate” are often counterproductive. Rather than actually doing the rigorous, intellectual labor of counterargument, deconstruction, or crafting alternate causality, “playing Devil’s advocate” often names an impulse towards false equivalence (all arguments have two sides). Moreover, one can consider alternate causality or counterarguments without the denial of others’ experiences, which devil’s advocate statements often do. I encourage you to resist the urge to advocate for the devil. Rather, think and ask yourself why you might be eager to speak on behalf of the devil. Even the devil himself cannot shield you from criticism. Instead, if it is something you honestly think, speak with an I statement and own your ideas.
4. **Use I Statements:** I strongly discourage generalizing and totalizing statements about groups of people. Though these statements might feel true they might be further complicated when inflected with the experiences of those other than yourself. Instead, use “I” statements to make claims that are not totalizing but rather are grounded in your own subjective experiences of the world. I statements will help us unpack and examine experiences critically rather than through sweeping generalizations.
5. **Do Not Just “Hear,” But Actively Listen:** As participants in this seminar, it is important to remember that our work is dialogic—conversational—and collaborative. We will be each other’s interlocutors, discussion partners, and teachers. To this end we must create an intellectual space that is predicated on listening, rather than just hearing. To listen is not just to hear other people’s voices, but to internalize, to reflect, to witness, and to acknowledge what your peers have said. Help create a respectful listening and speaking space by waiting for others to finish speaking, acknowledging what others have said, and giving all students access to the discussion space.
6. **It’s about you even if it is not “about you.”** We will encounter a range of texts, images, films, and other pedagogical objects this semester that come from a range of racial, gender, sexual, class, caste, national, ability, and/or other positions. Just because a text does not center your particular experiences and/or identities does not excuse you from being present in discussion. While this is not an invitation to dominate or monopolize conversations at the

expense of voices from marginalized perspectives, it is a provocation. My expectation is that you productively contribute to discussion via response, engagement, questioning, clarification, or other modes of healthy discussion regardless of your standpoint, but with that standpoint in mind as a way of navigating whether to center yourself or not and how to approach the conversation.

7. **Confidentiality:** Please respect that the seminar room is a semi-private space. While class discussions take place in the context of a large university (and perhaps through an online app like zoom), the experiences, feelings, and ideas shared by peers in class may not be things folks want to share outside of class. Please respect the confidentiality of others by *doing your best to leave what others share in class, but to take away from class what you learn.*

### Zoom and Online Logistics

*Due to the ongoing pandemic, this course could shift to zoom at any time. Some classes we will require meeting on zoom because I might be travelling.* All of the links and password information for Zoom will be made available on our LATTE page. *Office Hours will also take place via zoom on weeks when I am unavailable in person.* To make our time on zoom productive and to help class run as smoothly as possible please adhere to the following guidelines:

1. **Rename:** Zoom enables you to rename yourself for each class. To do so, click on the participants tab, highlight your name, choose the more option and select rename. Given that we are quite a large class and meeting virtually, it will be a challenge to learn every name and pronoun by heart. Please use the naming feature to include both your name and the pronouns people should use to refer to you.
2. **Time zones:** Please let me know if you might happen to be in a time zone where regularly making classes might be a challenge. You will not be penalized for being in a different time zone, but please be in touch with me **in advance** about any time issues, so that we can come up with a solution to address them.
3. **Video/Microphone Use:** You are encouraged but not required to use your videos during class. It will help make it easier to see who is speaking and to make the class feel a bit more like normal. However, it is understandable if that is not possible. Please mute your microphone when not in use.
4. **Zoom Chat:** The zoom chat is your space. Please use it to ask questions, post links, comment and converse with one another. The chat is a relaxed space for you to express yourselves in relation to course material. Keep in mind our ground rules, but feel free to use the chat. Please note that at times, especially during lecture, I may miss things in the chat so please be patient, or if it is urgent feel free to unmute and remind me.
5. **Privacy:** In the event we are virtual, I will do my best to record any lectures to upload and keep on Latte. **These recordings will be for the use of ANTH 138A Students ONLY.** These are not for public circulation. Please respect both my privacy and the larger privacy of fellow students in the class.
6. **Hand Raise:** Since we are a large class, please use the hand raise function to ask questions, comment, and participate when we are in large group. It will help me and the TA keep track of speaking order, and it will also help avoid the awkward pauses and interruptions as people attempt to figure out if someone is done speaking. For smaller groups/discussions we can test out more conversational approaches.

**Snow Day Policy:** In the event that Brandeis cancels classes due to inclement weather, we will also cancel classes. If the class is a Monday class with lecture, then I will post slides and likely record a

lecture. If it is a Wednesday class, there will be no discussion makeup. Should I decide to cancel class independently, then we will convene on zoom at our regularly scheduled time.

### **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

You and you alone are responsible for your work in this course. Cheating, lying, stealing, and sabotaging the learning of others are unacceptable behaviors. Facilitating the abilities of others to engage in this behavior is also equally unacceptable. Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this (or any other) course. In the instance of any violations, the University's Codes of Student and Academic Conduct will be followed. For more information please consult [Brandeis University's Rights and Responsibilities \(Section 4 on Maintenance of Academic Integrity\)](#).

### **Accommodations**

We all enter the seminar room with different learning needs and I will do my best to make sure that those needs are met and that our classroom is a safe, supportive space for all students. Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, please talk with us and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. I want to support you. In order to provide test accommodations, I need the letter more than 48 hours in advance. I want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support at 781-736-3470 or [access@brandeis.edu](mailto:access@brandeis.edu).

I also understand that the current situation regarding Covid-19 is unprecedented and will cause unforeseen challenges that may arise during the course of the semester. If you are having issues at any point throughout the course that you feel will affect your ability to participate please be in communication with us so that we can come up with solutions to help you succeed and continue to participate. Brandeis also has some resources available in an emergency for assisting in purchasing technology to assist students in attending classes remotely. The form is here: <https://www.brandeis.edu/student-financial-services/financial-aid/emergency-funding.html> and the email is [emergencyfund@brandeis.edu](mailto:emergencyfund@brandeis.edu).

### **Assignment Expectations**

Written assignments must be turned in by the deadlines established in the syllabus or in class. In the event of any extensions or postponements, I will announce via email or in class any adjustments to the schedule. **In the event of extenuating circumstances, such as illness, requiring an extension, I must be contacted at least 24 hours prior to the deadline in order to make necessary adjustments to the deadline.**

### **Assignment Formatting**

All written assignments must include the following:

- 11 or 12-point font (Choose something easily legible and sensible. Curlz is not your friend!).
- One-inch Margins on all sides
- Double spacing
- Last name and page number in the top right header
- Files should be uploaded as Word Docs (PDFs unacceptable unless indicated)
- Files should be named First Name Last Name\_Assignment Name [ex: Brian Horton\_Midterm]

All quotes, paraphrasing, citations and bibliographies should rely on APA style, which must include the author name, year, and page number in parenthesis, Ex. (Horton, 2014, p. 234). All assignments will be submitted on LATTE unless otherwise specified. Bibliographies will only be needed for the final project submission and the project prospectus.

### **Grading and Evaluation**

*Success in this 4-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time in preparation for this course (readings, papers, assignments, studying for exams, etc.).*

Your grade will be based on the following components, described in further detail below:

1. Reading Reacts (10%)
2. Engagement and Contribution (20%)
3. Midterm (20%)
4. Final Group Project (50%)
  - Peer Evaluations (10%)
  - Project Prospectus (10%)
  - Group Presentation (10%)
  - Final Submission (20%)

A+97-100.00  
A 94-96.99  
A- 90-93.99  
B+ 87-89.99

B 84-80  
C+ 77-79.99  
C 74-70  
D+ 67-69.99

D 64-60  
F 0-59.99

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

**Reading Reacts (10%):** Throughout the course of the semester, you are required to participate in online discussions on LATTE regarding the course readings & lectures. You are expected to make a **minimum of seven posts**. Your posts should be approximately 4-5 sentences. They should be direct responses to either the readings or to posts made by classmates. All responses should use evidence from course readings and content. Responses should be up by the end of each Friday of a given week. **There will not be opportunities for makeup or for late posts.**

### **Engagement and Contribution (20%)**

Part of your grade in this course will be evaluated based on how engaged you are and how you contribute to the course throughout the semester. Ways to earn points here include **A)** Regular attendance **B)** Active participation on LATTE Reading Reacts such as commenting on and engaging with posts from your classmates **C)** Active participation in class seminars (such as comments, questions, and visible signs of attention) **D)** Consistent participation in Thursday discussions **E)** Positive peer reviews from your group projects. I should add here that exceptionally positive peer reviews can suffice to count for a significant portion of this grade. Negative reviews will cause you to lose points and potentially fail this portion of your final grade.

**Midterm (20%):** You will have a take home midterm exam. The midterm will consist of 2 essay questions, based on course readings. The questions will be straight forward, not surprises, and if you have been putting in the work throughout the course and participating, then there will be nothing to

throw you off. You will be allowed to use all notes and course materials to help you answer the exam questions. The only thing you may not use is one another (i.e. this is an individual assignment). The midterm, when released will include a grading rubric. You may use the Brandeis writing center if you would like to have your midterm proof-read in advance.

Writing Center Appointments Available here: <https://www.brandeis.edu/writing-program/center/>

**Final Group Project (50%):** Instead of a final exam or final paper your final assignment for this class will be a group project. This will be the largest component of your final grade and you will begin working on the project **by January 31st**, when groups are assigned. The project will be an opportunity for you and your classmates to work collaboratively on something of your choosing that reflects your collective interests. This final project will also enable you to develop a collaborative project that you can use as part of your larger academic portfolio when applying for graduate education or for employment. **Every member of the group will receive the same grade on the prospectus, presentation, and final submission.** You and your group members will have the opportunity to decide what topics, issues, debates, or ideas to explore in further depth. The project will be broken up into smaller components that will form the basis of your grade.

**Peer Evaluations (10%):** **At three different** points in the semester, you will hand in a peer evaluation form (Posted on Latte). This form will be used by your fellow group members to evaluate your contributions to the group. This will also be a way for the TA and myself to check in about your group's progress and to ensure that everyone is equally contributing. Please use this form honestly (and confidentially) as a place for you to register any issues that you might be having. Remember that we cannot help if we do not know.

**Project Prospectus (10%):** The project prospectus (see form on latte) is basically a research proposal where you and your group will outline the topic idea, the work plan, and the responsibilities that each member will take on to complete the project. Think of the research plan as basically the guide that you all will use to complete the tasks needed to finish the group project.

**Group Presentation (10%):** During the last week of classes, we will have group presentations where each group will present their project to the class. This will be a chance to present any findings, talk about your ideas, etc. Part of this grade will also come from asking questions of other groups as well.

**Final Group Project Submission (20%):** This will be the final deliverable that you and your group make. This will look slightly different for different groups based on whatever the project prospectus outlines as the research objectives/plan. But this will be a writeup that includes the different components of your project prospectus.

**A Note About Group Work:** Yes, I hear the groans and eyerolls already about a group project. That being said, group work is part and parcel of the world outside of the academy. Also, given the massive challenges (and loneliness) of the pandemic, this might be a good opportunity both to share in work collectively and interact with other students more consistently. **Group projects are not a chance for you to shirk responsibility but rather to share the labor and work collectively.** Please approach your assignment like you are part of a team and not relying on others to do the work for you. I cannot stress this enough: should you not pull your own weight in the final project, it will not go unnoticed. I will find out. And it will be reflected in your participation grade. Don't be that person. Please do your part.



<b>SEMESTER DEADLINES AT A GLANCE</b>			
<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Assigned</b>	<b>DUE</b>	<b>Feedback By</b>
Reading Reacts	Weekly	<b>Fridays by 11pm</b>	Random Latte Checks
Midterm	March 2 <sup>nd</sup>	<b>March 8<sup>th</sup></b>	March 30 <sup>th</sup>
Groups Assigned	<b>January 31<sup>st</sup></b>	-	-
Project Prospectus	<b>January 31<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>February 28<sup>th</sup></b>	March 8 <sup>th</sup>
Peer Review 1	<b>January 31<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>February 28<sup>th</sup></b>	March 4 <sup>th</sup>
Peer Review 2	<b>January 31<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>March 30<sup>th</sup></b>	April 8 <sup>th</sup>
Final Presentation	<b>January 31<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>April 25<sup>th</sup> &amp; 27<sup>th</sup></b>	May 2 <sup>nd</sup>
Final Project/Paper	<b>January 31<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>April 25<sup>th</sup></b>	May 2 <sup>nd</sup>
Peer Review 3	<b>January 31<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>April 27<sup>th</sup></b>	May 2 <sup>nd</sup>
NO CLASS	Feb 21 <sup>st</sup> , Feb 22 <sup>nd</sup> , April 18 <sup>th</sup> , & April 20 <sup>th</sup>		

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

### **WEEK 1 SYLLABUS (Wed Jan 19<sup>th</sup>)**

#### **WEEK 2 INTRODUCTIONS (January 24<sup>th</sup> Lecture and January 26<sup>th</sup> Discussion)**

**Overview:** This week’s readings will begin the arduous task of defining two of the key terms that organize this course: “digital” and “anthropology.” While in no way exhaustive, this week’s readings stage for us what it might mean to understand digital technologies from the vantage point of what they might tell us about human cultures. In thinking about the larger intersections between anthropology and digital technologies, consider the following questions:

- What does the term digital mean? How is it situated against its opposite term, “the actual?”
- What is ‘difference’ and what might its role be in constructing our relationships to technology?
- How ought we understand the digital not simply as a thing to be studied but also as a method for studying?
- What is indexicality and how does it relate to our understandings of the virtual-actual distinction?
- What does disruption mean and what might its potential (and pitfalls) be?

**Required Readings (59 Pages, Boellstorff may be unfamiliar for non-ANTH majors)**

- Cathy N. Davidson (2018). "Difference is Our Operating System," in Dorothy Kim and Jesse Stommel (eds), *Disrupting the Digital Humanities*, Open Access: Punctum Books, ix – xiii.
- Dorothy Kim and Jesse Stommel (2018), "Disrupting the Digital Humanities" in Dorothy Kim and Jesse Stommel (eds), *Disrupting the Digital Humanities*, Open Access: Punctum Books, 19 – 37.
- Tom Boellstorff et. al. (2013) *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*, "Three Brief Histories" (pp. 13-28).
- Tom Boellstorff. 2013. "Rethinking Digital Anthropology."

### **WEEK 3 VIRTUAL (January 31<sup>st</sup> Lecture and February 2<sup>nd</sup> Discussion)**

**Overview:** This week's readings point to the larger flaw in imagining some of the conceits of the digital as "radically" new phenomena. Boellstorff points us to the larger history of the virtual as well as the different ways we might study it. Similarly, boyd and Gershon's turns to ideology demonstrate that what we may think about the world (as it relates to our identities, politics, ethics, and so on) shape how we use and would like various technologies to be used. Consider the following questions:

- What is media ideology and what does it reveal about the continuities between virtual and actual worlds?
- What does it mean to suggest that "humans have always been virtual"?
- How does virtuality demand us to think differently about doing anthropology?
- What is "techne" and how might it be connected to our own sense of self?
- What are some ways of studying the virtual worlds?

### **Required Readings (75 Pages, challenging/technical concepts in Boellstorff & Gershon)**

- Tom Boellstorff (2015), "History," and "Method" *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores The Virtually Human*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 32 – 86.
- danah boyd "The Not-So-Hidden Politics of Class Online"
- Ilana Gershon (2010) "Breaking Up Is Hard To Do: Media Switching and Media Ideologies" *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 389-405.

### **WEEK 4 SURVEILLANCE (February 7<sup>th</sup> Lecture and February 9<sup>th</sup> Discussion)**

**Overview:** Who is watching us? Is it the government? Is it our employers and educational institutions? Is it society? Or are we merely watching ourselves? This week touches on the topic of "surveillance." Many scholars have argued that digital technologies have dramatically expanded the capacities for surveillance. From Artificial Intelligence to the commodification of our personal data to literal spyware, we live in a heightened era of being watched. But what might the longer history of surveillance be? How might we think of surveillance as part of a longer history of the expansions of state power? And how might surveillance signal not simply a larger sense of "being watched" but also of us "watching ourselves?" This week, some questions to consider are:

- What does panopticism mean and how does the structure of the prison come to shape the larger norms of modernity according to Foucault?
- What are the relationships between design and power?
- What is discipline and how does it alter our internal sense of ourselves?
- What are the longer histories of surveillance studies and how might those histories revise a genealogy routed primarily through Foucault?
- How do American histories of racism and anti-blackness undergird regimes of surveillance?

**Required Readings (57 pages, Foucault will be challenging, so make time to read carefully)**

- Michel Foucault (2008 [1975]) “‘Panopticism,’ from *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*,” *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*, Vol 2, No 1, pp. 1-12
- Simone Browne (2015), “Notes on Surveillance Studies: Through the Door of No Return,” *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*: Durham, Duke University Press, 31 – 62.
- Illana Gershon (2014). “Selling Yourself in the United States.” *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, Vol 37, No 2., pp 281 – 295.

**WEEK 5 TECH(IE) (February 14<sup>th</sup> Lecture and February 16<sup>th</sup> Discussion)**

**Overview:** Silicon Valley, California, is not merely a place. It is also a lifestyle. As Alice Marwick argues, this lifestyle is characterized by a peculiar mix of entrepreneurial capitalism, technological determinism, and digital exceptionalism. In other words, Silicon Valley is marked by a range of contradictory positions from neoliberalism to humanitarianism. These contradictions not only come to constitute the industry of Web 2.0 (social media). But these contradictions also compose the archetype of tech and its ambassador archetype, the “Techie.” In thinking with this week’s readings, we might consider the Techie archetype not simply as a free software-loving innovator and entrepreneur. We might also understand the ways in which toxic masculinity, racism, classism, and heterosexism come to constitute the archetype. Some questions to consider:

- Who or what is the “Techie” as a figure and how has that figure come into being?
- What are neoliberalism and governmentality and how do they relate to Web 2.0?
- What are technological affordances and how do they shape status?
- How has the techie archetype been globalized and how does it rub up against difference?

**Required Readings (102 pages, some context challenges; Marwick builds on Foucault)**

- Audrey Watters (2018), “The Myth and Millennialism of Disruptive Innovation,” in Dorothy Kim and Jesse Stommel (eds), *Disrupting the Digital Humanities*, Open Access: Punctum Books, 49 – 60.
- Alice Marwick (2013), “Introduction” and “Leaders and Followers: Status in the Tech Scene,” *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, Branding in the Social Media Age*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1 – 19, 73 – 111.
- Sareeta Amruthe (2020), “Bored Techies Being Casually Racist,” *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, Vol. 45(5) 903-933
- Yashica Dutt (2020), “The Specter of Caste in Silicon Valley,” *The New York Times Online*, July 14<sup>th</sup>

**WEEK 6 FLEX (February 21<sup>st</sup> and February 23<sup>rd</sup> NO CLASS)**

**Overview:** Relax. Rest. Recharge. And get your project proposal in **by February 28<sup>th</sup>**

**WEEK 7 INFLUENCE (February 28<sup>th</sup> Lecture and March 2<sup>nd</sup> Discussion)**

**Overview:** Last week we discussed “status” or the ways in which power and influence might accrue online. This week we are turning our eyes towards “influence.” In thinking with technologies from Facebook to Instagram we consider the power of influence this week. What is the power of the virtual world to influence us; to compel us to act, think, and believe a variety of things that may or may not be true? How has social media produced the figure of the influencer? We will consider this week the influencer not simply as silly or frivolous but as a powerful figure that has reshaped business and politics. Finally, we will also consider influence’s potential to muddy truth. In thinking with and about

“Fake” news we will examine the potential and the pitfalls of social media influence. Some questions to consider:

- What is microcelebrity and how does it enable particular forms of influence?
- What is the attention economy and how is it connected to both status and influence?
- How is Facebook structured to make disinformation easier?
- Is fake news necessarily bad? How might fake-news enable particular forms of resistance?

**Required Readings (79 pages, mostly expository readings)**

Alice Marwick (2015), “Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy,” *Public Culture* Vol 27, No 1, 137 — 161

Crystal Abidin (2016), “Aren’t These Just Young, Rich Women Doing Vain Things Online?”: Influencer Selfies as Subversive Frivolity,” *Social Media + Society*, 1–17

Tamar Shirinian (2019). “Fakeness: Digital Inauthenticity and Emergent Political Tactics in Armenia,” *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* Vol 42, No. 2, pp. 347 – 361.

Siva Vaidhyanathan (2018). “The Disinformation Machine,” *How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 175 – 195.

*Fyre: The Greatest Party that Never Happened* on Netflix (Watch)

March 2<sup>nd</sup> -Midterm Handed Out

**WEEK 8 SEX (March 7<sup>th</sup> Lecture and March 9<sup>th</sup> Discussion)**

**Overview:** This week’s readings consider the libidinal (sexual) economies enmeshed in digital spaces. From Do it Yourself Porn to platforms for sex workers to selfies as objects of sexual desire, we will explore the sexual life of the internet. Much like what early film did for pornography, the internet has exploded the various ways that human sexuality can become manifest. Up for discussion this week are the cultures of porn that have proliferated in virtual worlds. We will trace the ways that sex, the body, and desire itself might be given new life online. However, we will also consider, thinking with various technologies of surveillance and misuse, the ways that sexual cultures of the internet also reinvigorate surveillance and perhaps risk and violence for vulnerable populations, like gay and trans refugees on dating apps like Grindr. Some questions to consider this week:

- What is the role of the body in virtual articulations of desire and politics?
- How is the internet a sex public?
- What counts as “porn”?
- What is playfulness and how might it capture the larger spirit of sex online?
- What can the internet do for marginalized sexual cultures and desires? And how might it also reproduce other formations of violence and discrimination?

**Required Readings ( Pages, Some challenging concepts in McGLotten)**

Sneha Krishnan (2018).” ‘Bitch, don’t be a lesbian’”: Selfies and Same-Sex Desire, in Rohit K. Dasgupta and Debanuj DasGupta (eds.) *Queering Digital India: Activisms, Identities, Subjectivities*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 151 – 164.

Belinda Middleweek (2020). “Pussy power not pity porn: Embodied protest in the #FacesOfProstitution Twitter network,” *Sexualities*, Vol 23, No. 3, pp 342 -360.

Shaka McGlotten. 2013. "The Élan Vital of DIY Porn," *Virtual Intimacies: Media, Affect, and Queer Socialities*, Albany: SUNY Press, pp. 101 – 122.

Andrew Shield (2020). "Tend to Prefer Sane, Masculine, Caucasian (no offense to other flavors though)": Racial-Sexual Preferences, Entitlement, and Everyday Racism," *Immigrants on Grindr: Race, Sexuality, and Belonging Online*, London: Palgrave, pp. 144 – 184.

### **WEEK 9 INFRASTRUCTURE (March 14<sup>th</sup> Lecture and March 16<sup>th</sup> Discussion)**

**Overview:** As Boellstorff argued in an earlier reading, anthropologists must take seriously digital worlds as still interconnected with the materiality of offline worlds. This materiality, loosely defined, can be thought of as hardware or as the resources that one has to access online technologies. But what might the material afterlives of online experience be? This week we will think about the connections between digital technologies and the environment. From the proliferation of environmental metaphors for digital objects, such as "the cloud," to the very real ecological concerns brought on by rampant internet use, this week returns us to an earlier rule of digital cultures: that it cannot be separated from the material conditions of life. Some questions to consider this week:

- What is meant by the term infrastructure and can we think of the internet as an infrastructure?
- How do spatial and environmental idioms shape the ways that digital worlds are talked about?
- What are the potential challenges of connectivity as a lens for talking about the internet?
- What kinds of environmental ethical dilemmas does the internet expose?

### **Required Readings (57 Pages; all are a little technical)**

Alix Johnson (2019). "Data centers as infrastructural in-betweens: Expanding connections and enduring marginalities in Iceland," *American Ethnologist* Vol. 46, No. 1, pp. 75–88

Allison Carruth (2014). "The Digital Cloud and the Micropolitics of Energy," *Public Culture* 26(2): 339-364.

Jennifer Gabrys (2011). "Media in the Dump: Salvage Stories and Spaces of Remainder," *Digital Rubbish*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 127 – 146.

### **WEEK 10 CYBERCULTURES (March 21<sup>st</sup> Lecture and March 23<sup>rd</sup> Discussion)**

**Overview:** It is nearly impossible to imagine internet cultures without Blackness. Race and ethnicity are at the very center of internet cultures, inflected in many of the larger trends, debates, and platforms that users experience every day. On social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, Blackness structures not just trends (like the Flip the Switch or BussIt Challenge) but also plays into the structures of status, credit, and profit for digital creative labor. This week explores the asymmetrical experiences of the internet faced by black people. In thinking about the kinds of work that Blackness does to make certain internet aesthetics "cool", we will trace how the binary frame of ratchet and respectable organizes how Black lives and the content produced by black creatives are understood online and in broader social milieus. This week squarely examines the unequal terrains of culture imbricated in "digital culture." Some questions to consider this week:

- How do the affordances of social media platforms exacerbate inequality?
- What are the roles of blackness, blackface, and appropriation in internet cultures?
- How are racial inequalities exacerbated in the process of something becoming "viral?"
- How can digital creative labor be credited? Who owns a trend?

### **Required Readings (121 Pages; Brock reads like an Op-Ed with some technical terms)**

- André Brock Jr. (2020). *Distributed Blackness: African American Cybercultures*. New York: New York University Press, 125 – 209.
- Moya Bailey and Trudy (2018). “On Misogynoir: Citation, Erasure, and Plagiarism.” *Feminist Media Studies* Vol 18, No 4, 762 -768.
- Jason Parham (2020). [“TikTok and the Evolution of Digital Blackface”](#) *Wired*, 1-32.
- Peaches Monroe (2014) [“Eyebrows On Fleek DaFuq”](#) (View)
- BET (2018) [“What “Eyebrows On Fleek” Creator Peaches Monroe Learned The Hard Way.”](#) (View)

### **WEEK 11 ALGORITHM (March 28<sup>th</sup> Lecture and March 30<sup>th</sup> Discussion)**

**Overview:** This week takes on the category of the algorithm. After “data,” algorithms are arguably the most controversial objects online. Algorithms are simply a set of rules or process that instructs the implementation of a finite sequence. Put differently, an algorithm is merely the language of command, that which tells a computer what to do and how. Given that it is merely a combination of texts, algorithms are understood as neutral, objective, and scientific. However, recent insights from Artificial Intelligence and Design suggest that algorithms are anything but neutral. As this week will examine, algorithms are part of a new form of segregation that some scholars refer to as “the New Jim Code.” This week we will explore this regime of racial inequality by centering on what Noble (2018) refers to as algorithmic oppression, or the ways that computers can reinforce racial inequalities that are prevalent offline. Some questions to consider:

- What is algorithmic oppression and how is it possible that an algorithm reinforces racism?
- What is discriminatory design and what role does design take in reproducing inequality?
- What is intersectionality and how might it shape AI?

### **Required Readings (139 Pages, will challenge your understandings of algorithmic neutrality)**

- Ruha Benjamin (2019), “Engineered Inequity: Are Robots Racist?, *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 49 – 76.
- Safiya Umoja Noble (2018). *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York: NYU Press, 15 – 109pp.
- Joy Buolamwini and Timnit Gebru (2018), “Gender Shades: Intersectional Accuracy Disparities in Commercial Gender Classification.” *Proceedings of Machine Learning Research* 81:1–15.

### **WEEK 12 CONSPIRACY (April 4<sup>th</sup> Lecture and April 6<sup>th</sup>\* Discussion)**

\*Last Day to Drop WITH a W transcript notation (Instructor permission required)

**Overview:** On January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021, white supremacists entered the capitol of the United States. Breaking down doors, vandalizing property, assaulting police officers, and shouting death threats to leaders of government, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021 happened. Alongside the furor of supporters of Donald Trump shouting slogans like “Stop the Steal,” were vague references to outlandish conspiracy theories like massive voter fraud, corrupt government officials rigging the election, and a little-known digital conspiracy theory known as QAnon. The conspiracy alleges a cabal of Satan-worshipping, pedophilic, cannibalistic, global, child sex-traffickers are running the world and the American government (particularly the Democrats) and working against Donald Trump. Though QAnon is both outlandish and discredited, it is still powerful and clearly potent. Theories like QAnon and the larger digital trail of proof in white supremacist Twitter threads and Parler conversations points to one of the larger problems of social media: that it is not only made for misinformation but is a bastion for white supremacy. Some questions to consider:

- How does twitter enable (and perhaps embolden white supremacy)
- What does the internet do to make conspiracy theories feel more believable?
- What are the ethical obligations of Tech companies to fight white supremacy and misinformation?
- What does “truth” mean in a post-truth, digital world?

**Required Readings (123 Pages, most of it reads like a newspaper or New Yorker piece)**

Jessie Daniels, “Twitter and White Supremacy: A Love Story” 1 – 11.

Jessie Daniels, “The algorithmic rise of the far right.” *Contexts*, Vol. 17, Issue 1, pp. 60-65

Yokai Benkler, et al. 2017. “Study: Brietbart-Led Right-Wing Media System Altered Broader Media Agenda,” *Columbia Journalism Review* (March 3), 1 - 17

Adrienne LaFrance, “The Prophecies of Q: American Conspiracy Theories Enter a New Phase,” *The Atlantic*, 1 - 40

Alice Marwick and Rebecca Lewis- “Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online” (1 – 50)

[Dave Davies \(2020\), “Journalist Enters The World Of QAnon: 'It's Almost Like A Bad Spy Novel,’” NPR. \(43 Minutes OR 22 Pages of Transcript\)](#)

**WEEK 13 APPOLITION (April 11<sup>th</sup> and April 13<sup>th</sup>)**

**Overview:** In this final week, we consider what abolitionist technologies might look like. Rather than relying on a techno pessimistic framework we might consider what kinds of work can be done to fight the regimes of surveillance, violence, and oppression that we have discussed in previous weeks. We also read briefly about an anthropologist working in research at IBM to consider some of the ways that anthropologists are bringing their labor, training, and ideas into tech. Some questions to consider:

- How might the process of design be reimaged to be more just?
- What might digital forms of equity and equality look like?
- How can an abolitionist framework reshape design?

**Required Reading (45 pages, mostly informal and expository)**

Natasha Singer (2014). “Intel’s Sharp Social Scientist,” *The New York Times*, February 15.

Ruha Benjamin, (2019). “Retooling Solidarity, Reimagining Justice,” in *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. Medford, MA: Polity Press” 160 – 195

**WEEK 14 NO CLASS (April 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> PASSOVER)**

**WEEK 15 FINAL PRESENTATIONS (April 25<sup>th</sup> and April 27<sup>th</sup>)**

**WEEK 16 CLOSE OUT (May 2<sup>nd</sup> Individual Group Meetings for Project Feedback)**