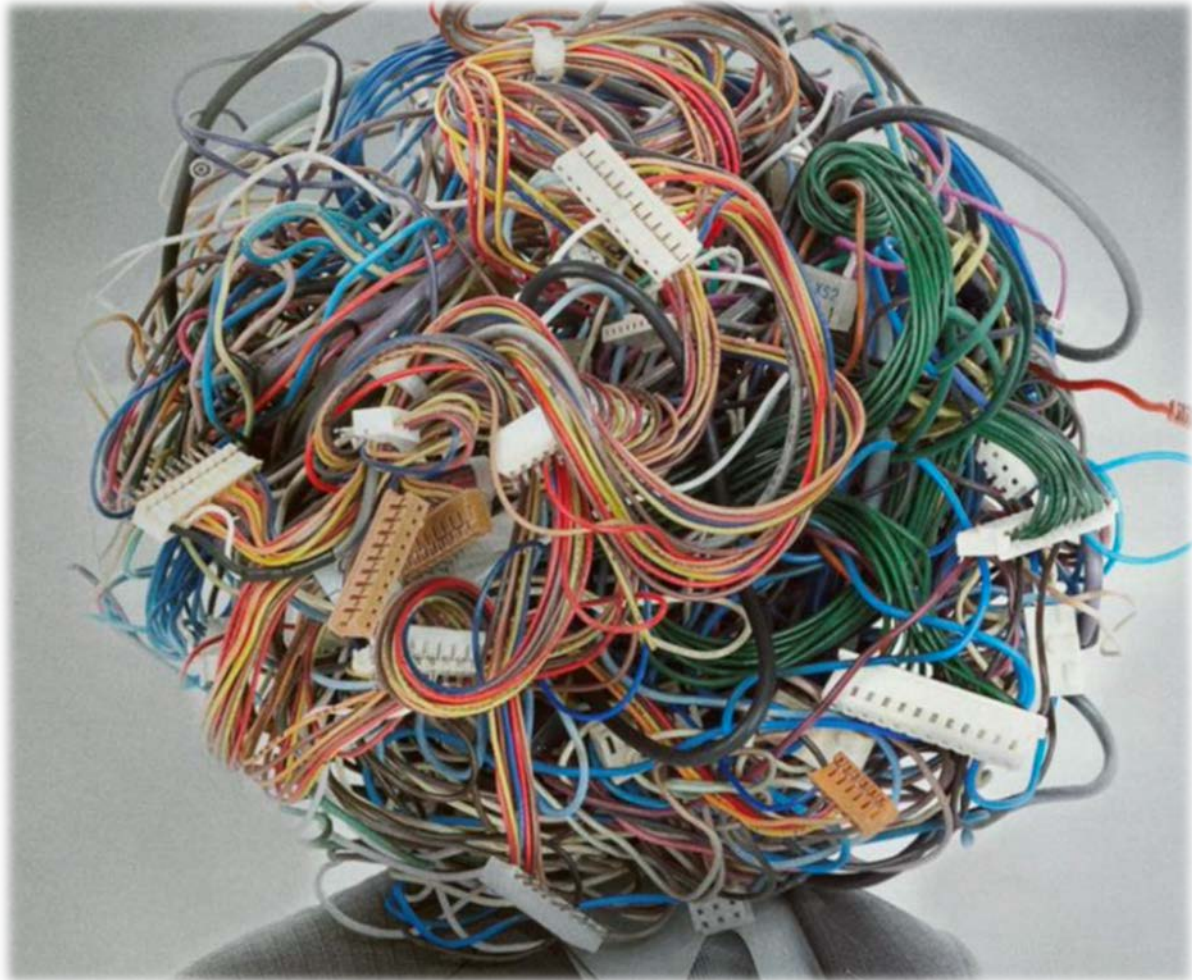


**CULS5217: AI Culture and Society (Tentative)**

6 Sep – 13 Dec, 2024 | Fri: 2:30 pm – 5:15 pm | Classroom: LSB (Lady Shaw Building): LT2  
Prof. Xuenan Cao, appointment by email



**Course Description:**

AI have radically changed our idea of who we are, how we behave, and our notion of identity, agency, and society. This course explores the fascinating intersection of computation, digital technologies, and ethical concerns, exploring pivotal questions regarding the relationship between AI functionality (and dysfunctionality), human labor, and humanities. What is the labor, environmental, and social issues behind the use of AI? Where does human agency lie in the world undergirded by various systems of machines, networks of computers, and the cloud? This course introduces key intellectual commitments of digital studies and its recent engagement with AI ethics, including untangling the stories we tell ourselves about human uniqueness in face of machine intelligence, the material infrastructure of information, and the ethics issues that arise in the evolving landscape of AI infusion. In this class, we will use various media, including movies, anime, and documentaries as illustrations to facilitate the critical assessment of conceptual frameworks.

## Course Objectives:

- **Comprehension:**  
Recognize key concepts relevant to the history and the contemporary use of AI  
Describe the connections between conceptual ideas such as machine, labor, society of control, and society of network.
- **Analysis:**  
Recognize the different forms and components of AI represented and embedded in popular media such as fiction, comics, animations, and films  
Form written and oral arguments about the implications of technologies
- **Critique:**  
State a social and political issue in terms of critical digital studies  
Recognize contradictions in literature and scholarly writings on AI and society  
Explain the perceived contradictions

You will learn some technological facts, but more importantly, you will acquire skills of speaking and writing intelligently about social, economic, and cultural issues. Students may vary in their levels of competence in the above-mentioned abilities. You can expect to acquire these abilities if you honor all course policies, attend classes regularly and participate actively, and complete all reading and writing assignments in good faith.

## Grading:

Attendance and In-Class Participation	30%
Written Reflections	30%
<u>Group Digital Campaign</u>	40%
Total	100%

## Course Assignments:

Individual efforts will constitute 60% of the grade and collaborative work the remaining 40%.

### Attendance and Participation—30%

Attendance and contribution to the in-class activities are critical components of the course and of your grade. It is essential that students complete all of the required readings before each class and be ready to participate in activities. Efforts to engage with peers in class and online forum will also be taken into consideration when calculating the participation grade.

### Two Forum Posts (Short Reflections)— 30% 350-500 words each

You are encouraged to write more than the required length or the required the numbers of posts. The best parts of your writing will count towards your final grade. The two forum postings must be completed by **Nov 20 (Wed.)**.

A post is a concise, question-driven reflection about the required readings of a chosen week. You are free to choose any two weeks on which you will write the posts. You need to summarize the readings discussed in the lecture, the central questions raised by the author, supporting or counter examples to the author's argument. Alternative to two class-assigned reading, you can also choose to write one poset on a digital platform, or a digital device. [Examples include Facebook, WeChat, Tik-Tok, Bilibili, iPhone, etc.] A lack of critical discussion (such as simply presenting information as unexamined "facts," and not showing its "situatedness") will result in significant point-reduction.

## Digital Campaign —40%

**Digital Campaign:** Design a digital campaign to expose a potential issue related to any topic of your choice. The topic must reflect on some materials discussed in this course. You must supply a personal angle to your digital campaign, and the coherence of the personal angle and the project accounts for 10% out of 40% of the grade.

The campaign can take shape as descriptions/scripts of your own video, photo posts (posted on Instagram, or whatever else you can think of), textual descriptions and hashtags, or a combination of them. You will use materials you have collected (written notes, screenshots, or photos) explore a few related topics of their choosing.

The campaign project should contain **a short presentation in class (week 13-15)** and **a written proposal due on Dec 18 (Wed.)**. The written portion including at least one paragraph for each of the following items: (1) the background of the project, (2) its suitability for digital campaigns (versus traditional campaigns such as posters or radio), (3) campaign goals and targeted audience, (4) interactive components – this part should contain as many paragraphs as you need for the project and include descriptions of how you will realize the campaign effects using digital tools, (5) the measurement of campaign effectiveness. The project will be judged by the clarity of the written proposal and innovations in presentation.

## Topics Covered in the Course:

1. **Digital:** "Digital" refers to the broad transformation of information and processes into digital form. The course may explore how AI relies on digital data and processes, as well as the implications of the digital transformation on society.
2. **Cybernetics:** Cybernetics is the study of systems, control, and communication in animals, machines, and organizations. This course examines the history of cybernetic and how the military roots have morphed into both popular culture (cyberpunk) and everyday life.
3. **AI, Algorithm, Machine Learning:** Algorithms are step-by-step procedures for solving problems or performing tasks that can be used for training machine learning models, a subarea of AI. The course discusses the fetishization of this term in various commercial practices.
4. **Human Labor in AI - Ghost Work:** Ghost work refers to the often invisible and under-appreciated human labor that supports AI systems, such as data labeling and content moderation.
5. **Infrastructural Turn:** This concept focuses on the environmental implications of AI infrastructure, including data centers and energy consumption. Students might explore the environmental concerns associated with the growth of AI technologies.
6. **Artificial Communication:** AI's capacity to communicate is a central theme. The course may emphasize that AI is not about intelligence but also about the ways in which AI systems communicate with humans and other systems.

7. **Cultural politics of AI:** How does race, gender, and national identities get configured through AI in ways that we do not see? A section of this course is dedicated to the built-in bias of AI systems.
8. **Geopolitics of AI:** The course would likely examine the global political and economic dimensions of AI, including questions of power, influence, and competition among nations and corporations in the AI domain.
9. **AI Ethics:** Students might explore the need for auditing AI systems to ensure fairness, accountability, and transparency in their decision-making processes. This relates to addressing biases and ethical concerns. AI fairness deals with ensuring that AI systems do not discriminate or reinforce societal biases. The course may delve into methods and principles for achieving fairness in AI algorithms and applications.

**Overall, this course would provide a comprehensive understanding of AI's multifaceted impact on society, covering technological, ethical, labour-related, environmental, and geopolitical dimensions, among others.**

### Weekly Agenda:

Week 1 (Sep 6) Introduction	<p>What was AI?</p> <p>Opening Activity: The Turning Test (A team generate a series of answers, and the class judges it).</p>	<p><b>Advertisement:</b> All iPhone commercials</p> <p><b>Documentary Excerpts:</b> <i>Reverie of The Connected World</i></p>
	<p><b>Reading:</b> Benjamin Peters, "Digital" in <i>Digital Keywords</i>.</p> <p><b>Supplementary:</b> Cal Newport, "Introduction" to <i>Digital Minimalism, Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World</i>.</p>	
<b>Theme 1: AI Futures</b>		
Week 2-3 (Sep 13, 20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Man-Machine</li> <li>• Machine-Woman</li> </ul>	<p><b>Movie excerpts:</b> <i>Space Odyssey</i></p>
Human-machines	<p><b>Reading:</b> Norbert Wiener, "Man, Machine, and the World Around" [What is automation? It means no human control: rocket pilot is really no pilot]</p> <p>"AI machine-directing Israel-Bombing" <a href="https://portside.org/2024-04-05/lavender-ai-machine-directing-israels-bombing-sprece-gaza?utm_source=portside-general&amp;utm_medium=email">https://portside.org/2024-04-05/lavender-ai-machine-directing-israels-bombing-sprece-gaza?utm_source=portside-general&amp;utm_medium=email</a></p>	

	Supplementary: Donna Haraway, Excerpts from “A Cyborg Manifesto” Safia Umoja Noble, “Your Robot Isn’t Neutral,” from <i>Your Computer Is on Fire</i> Harrell, D. F. (2010). Designing empowering and critical identities in social computing and gaming. <i>CoDesign</i> , 6(4), 187–206.	
Week 4 (Sep 27)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Algorithms</li> <li>• Machine Learning</li> </ul>	Documentary Excerpts: <i>Reverie of The Connected World</i>
Algorithms	Reading: Chapter 1 of Meredith Broussard, <i>More Than Glitch</i> , page 1-6. Tania Bucher, Chapter 5 “Affective Landscape,” <i>If...Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics</i>  Suzanne Thomas, Dawn Nafus and Jamie Sherman, “Algorithms as Fetish: Faith and Possibility in Algorithmic Work,” <i>Big Data &amp; Society</i> 2018.	
<b>Theme 2: Humans in AI</b>		
Week 5 (Oct 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invisible Labor</li> <li>• Ghost Work (on how automation replies on the concealed labor of human employees)</li> </ul>	Excerpts of ethnography: <i>Dying for an iPhone</i>
Human Labor	Reading: Mary Gray and Siddharth Suri, “Introduction: Ghost in the Machines” from <i>Ghost Work</i>  Supplementary: Susan Leigh Star, “Layers of Silence, Arenas of Work”	
Week 6 (Oct 11)	No Class_Public Holiday	
Human Labor	If you are interested in reading something on your day-off...here is a good choice:  George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson, “Production, consumption, pro-Sumption”	
Week 7 (Oct 18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cloud Factory</li> <li>• Datacenters</li> <li>• Waste and Mines</li> </ul>	Excerpts of ethnography: <i>Dying for an iPhone</i>
Infrastructure	Reading: Nathan Ensmenger, “The Cloud Is a Factory” from <i>Your Computer Is on Fire</i>	
Week 8 (Oct 25)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artificial Communication</li> <li>• Human-Centered AI</li> </ul>	
Artificial Communication	Readings: Ben Schneiderman, excerpts from <i>Human-Centered AI</i> . Nishant Shah, “The Unbearable Oldness of Generative Artificial Intelligence,” <i>European Journal of Cultural Studies</i> (2024).	

Theme 3: Politics of AI	
Week 9 (Nov 1) Cultural Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Race, Gender, and Politics</li> </ul> <p>Reading: Meredith Broussard, “Introduction” to <i>More Than a Glitch</i>.</p> <p>Bender, et al., “On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots,” FAccT(2021)</p>
Week 10 (Nov 8) Geopolitics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>China American Rivalry</li> </ul> <p><b>Briefing on Final Project</b></p> <p>Reading: Nigel Inkster, “Introduction” to <i>The Great Decoupling: China and the Struggle for Technological Supremacy</i></p>
Week 11 (Nov 15) Geopolitics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Geopolitics of ‘Platforms’</li> </ul> <p>Reading: Joanne Gray, “The Geopolitics of ‘Platforms’: The TikTok Challenge.”</p> <p>Supplementary: Nick Srnicek, “Introduction” to <i>Platform Capitalism</i>.</p>
Week 12 (Nov 22) AI Ethics	<p><b>Forum posts due before class, on Nov 20 (Wed.) 12:00pm.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ethics, functionality, and fairness</li> </ul> <p>Reading (Pick one area of interests):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fred H. Cate, “Big Data, Consent, and the Future of Data Protection,” in <i>Big Data Is not a Monolith</i></li> <li>Kara Swisher, “How Apple, Not Government, Become Tech’s Biggest Regulator,” <i>The New York Times</i>.</li> <li>Inioluwa Deborah Raji, Elizabeth Kumar, Aaron Horowitz, Andrew Selbst, “The Fallacy of AI Functionality.” FaccT 2022</li> </ol>
Week 13 (Nov 29) AI Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bias, disciplines, and...are we done with ethics?</li> </ul> <p>Reading (Pick one area of interests):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Halcyon Lawrence, “Siri Disciplines” in <i>Your Computer Is on Fire</i></li> <li>Blackman, “Introduction” to <i>Ethical Machines</i>.</li> <li>Eletra Bietti, “From Ethics Washing to Ethics Bashing” FAT 2020</li> </ol>
Week 14 (Dec 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Optional Topic) Postscript on the Society of Control</li> </ul> <p><b>Final Project Presentation in class</b></p> <p>Optional Reading: Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the society of Control”</p>
Week 15 (Dec 13)	<p><b>Final Project Presentation in class</b></p> <p><b>Project Due Dec 18, 12:00pm.</b></p>

## **Class Policies:**

**Late Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory and is part of the requirement for passing the course. Late attendance will result in loss of attendance and participation points.

**Absence:** Please communicate with the professor about absences. Absences must be accompanied with a formal explanation in accordance with university guidelines. Each absence will incur the loss of one attendance point. More than 25% absence (i.e., missing more than 3 weeks out of a 13-week module) will result in the lowering of one grade level (e.g. A- to B-).

**Late Work:** No work will be accepted after the deadline.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Work for which plagiarism is proved will be awarded a grade of zero and relevant disciplinary procedures will be followed with the institution.

**Email Notice:** All students must check their emails for last minute changes, useful information and class announcements.