THE POLITICS OF CODE
MCC-GE 3150 (Special Topics in Technology Studies)
SPRING 2025

Prof. Alexander R. Galloway (galloway@nyu.edu)   Time: Thursdays, 2-4:50pm
Office hours: Tu 2pm-4; Wed 10am-12pm   Classroom: 239 Greene St. #712

This doctoral seminar focuses on political analyses of computational media. We begin by investigating the digital, cybernetics, information theory, and the symbolic order. Next, we consider the ramifications of data capture and the formation of coded objects and bodies, including the rise of immaterial labor within service economies and the extension of codified labor practices into the realm of daily life. Finally, we explore the corrosion and collapse of code into entropic phenomena of various kinds, including randomness and noise. The course will favor both close readings of specific technologies as well as social and cultural claims about the computer age. Students are required to demonstrate familiarity with a coding language before semester's end.

I. CODE

Jan 23 -- Course Introduction

Jan 30
- Anthony Wilden, "Analog and Digital Communication" (PDF).
- Bernhard Siegert, "Coding as Cultural Technique: On the Emergence of the Digital from Writing AC" (PDF).
- Sarah Pourciau, "On the Digital Ocean" (PDF).

Feb 6
- Friedrich Kittler, "The World of the Symbolic--A World of the Machine" (PDF).
- Friedrich Kittler, "There Is No Software" (PDF).
- Friedrich Kittler, "Computer Graphics: A Semi Technical Introduction" (PDF).

Feb 13 & Feb 20
- Bernard Geoghegan, *Code.*
- Peter Galison, "The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision" (PDF).
- Jacques Lacan, "Psychoanalysis and cybernetics, or on the nature of language" (PDF).

II. DATA

Feb 27 & Mar 6
- Wendy Chun, *Discriminating Data*.

Mar 13 & Mar 20
- Catherine Malabou, *Morphing Intelligence*.
- Catherine Malabou, "One Life Only: Biological Resistance, Political Resistance" (PDF).
- Catherine Malabou, "The Phoenix, the Spider, and the Salamander" (PDF).

Mar 27 -- Spring break

III. Entropy

Apr 3 & Apr 10
- Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science*.
- Katherine McKittrick and Alexander Weheliye, "808s & Heartbreak" (PDF).
- Calvin Warren, "The Catastrophe: Black Feminist Poethics, (Anti)form, and Mathematical Nihilism" (PDF).

Apr 17 & Apr 24
- Cecile Malaspina, *An Epistemology of Noise*.

May 1 -- TBD

Thursday, May 8, 5pm -- final paper due

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Required Books
- Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Discriminating Data: Correlation, Neighborhoods, and the New Politics of Recognition* (Cambridge: MIT, 2021).
- Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, *Code: From Information Theory to French Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023).
- Catherine Malabou, *Morphing Intelligence: From IQ Measurement to Artificial Brains*, trans. Carolyn Shread (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).
- Cecile Malaspina, *An Epistemology of Noise* (London: Continuum, 2018).
- Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

Course Assignments

Seminar--All students are expected to read the assigned texts in advance of class and participate in seminar. Each student will act as a discussion leader twice during the semester.

Writing -- Each student will write two papers during the semester. Semester total length expectations for both papers are 20 pages for doctoral students and 16 pages total for MA students. Papers should adhere to standard format (12 point font, double spaced, one inch margins, no spaces between paragraphs, etc.) and follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Use parenthetical citations "like this" (49); a bibliography is not necessary. All writing should demonstrate a close reading of the required materials and exhibit a method of critical analysis.

Code -- Students are required to demonstrate familiarity with a coding language before semester's end. Examples include HTML (beginner), Processing (intermediate), Python or Javascript (intermediate+).