

COMS 639: Research for Social Transformation
Fall 2023
Fridays 11:35am-2:25pm
Arts W-220

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[Image description – Bald and bespectacled French theorist Michel Foucault cuddles a black cat in a room with full bookshelves]

Course Description: This is a course in how to think about and practice interpretive methods and critical inquiry in media, technology, and cultural studies for the purposes of social change. The seminar focuses on processes of inquiry: how we transform scholarly intuition and gut feeling into inventive research questions that, with the help of theory, enables us to build concrete objects of study and purposefully interpret and analyze them for reasons that matter. We will examine how researchers think relationally and collectively as part of their inquiry, organized around concepts such “articulation” and “the conjunctural” in Cultural Studies, oppositional research from Black Studies and social movement studies, and affect and the “felt” as key sources of queer and feminist inquiry, among others. Asking the question of “how” will take on particular importance in this course alongside questions of “why” and “what.” We will read key theories, conceptual frameworks, and texts on scale and connection, interpretative maneuvers, and scholarly experiments to foster students’ development of meaningful inquiry in the field.

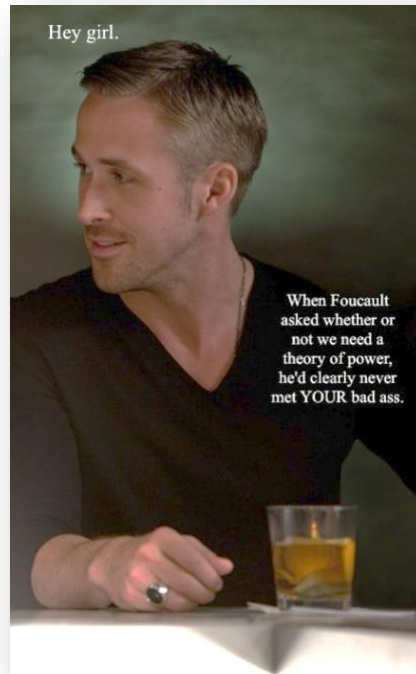
The seminar is *not* a survey of methods, though we will read some key texts on methods – and anti-methods. The goal of the course is to help students build their imaginations as scholars, and not simply repeat what others have done (and their reasons for doing so). It will also help students get oriented as graduate researchers. *Why* we do research will orient all our discussions around knowledge building for social change. Come to this seminar with an open mind, a willingness to try things out (even if they don't work in the end), a desire to explore new ways of thinking and doing things, and a curiosity about the intellectual practice that goes into scholarly inquiry and research.

Key questions that will orient this seminar: What is social research for? What are different models for doing socially engaged research? How do researchers cultivate and nurture good relations with the materials, people, and other beings with whom they conduct research? How do folks balance the relationship between working for social change and doing academic labor? How do people determine which kinds of methods and analysis will best answer the questions that orient their research? How can we best nurture our research imaginations? What is the deal with “interdisciplinarity” and what are we talking about when we use this term? How do folks translate their research ideas into good practices of inquiry and analysis? What makes a particular research project *interesting* and/or *meaningful*? What is theory *for*? How do folks avoid the theory effect – of only finding the things that neatly fit into a particular theoretical framework? How do people not confuse the politics or prestige of objects of study with their significance (just because something is prestigious doesn't mean it's good or important)? What are some of the challenges (and limits) of studying things you love or hate? How can research transform you and other people? How does engaging with materials, ideas, and people outside of yourself enable such transformations?

*For students who took my Affect Theory (COMS 655) seminar in Winter 2023, COMS 639 builds from some discussions in that course about affective methodologies. Students can take this course without having had the prior seminar. It is not required.

Texts: The seminar draws texts and readings from a variety of fields that do interdisciplinary inquiry in media, technology, and cultural studies (broadly conceived), across the Humanities and Social Sciences. Our readings include works of capital-T Theory, queer and feminist studies, affect studies, new media studies, science and technology studies, infrastructure studies, sociology and social theory, anthropology, and cultural studies.

Texts for the course are available in MyCourses or in electronic version through the library or open access sources from which we are reading. Full books for some of the key texts are available at Paragraphe Books, at the corner of Sherbrooke Street and McGill College (just out the front gates of McGill), including Foucault's *History of Sexuality Vol 1*, Cait McKinney's *Information Activism*, and Graff and Birkenstein's *They Say, I Say*.



[Image description: Feminist Ryan Gosling “Hey girl” meme with a reference to Foucault]

Learning Objectives/Common Learning Goals: Students in the seminar will learn to:

Develop analytic concepts and practical approaches to inquiry in media studies, cultural studies, STS, and digital culture.

Comprehend and explain key approaches to research in cultural studies, media studies, and STS.

Build a critical vocabulary to discuss inquiry in media, culture, technologies, their environments, and practices.

Think with key concepts and strategies to **interpret and analyse** media, technology, and culture.

Develop critical deep reading skills to assess and annotate major texts in the field.

Formulate questions and comments that foster discussion and directly engage with seminar materials and other seminar participants.

Build skills in discussion facilitation that include active listening, re-direction, and on-the-spot synthesis.

Develop effective writing strategies for constructing strong critical reviews and analytic essays.

Work both independently and collaboratively to build community together as scholars.

Assignments: In addition to attendance at every seminar session, you are expected to come to seminar ready to discuss our readings in-depth. Bring copies of the readings with you to seminar. You can submit written work in either English or French. Discussion facilitation should be done in English.

Weekly Reading Annotation [15% of final grade]: Each week you will annotate a reading using the program Perusall in MyCourses. Annotation means commenting upon and asking questions

about a reading, directly on the PDF text itself. Perusall enables you to see each other's annotations and respond to them, fostering collective reading practices and discussion before seminar has even begun. Everyone will annotate the same reading each week. Annotations are **due by 5pm Thursday Montreal time (you can do them earlier!)**. They will be evaluated either as 1 or 0. A "1" means the annotation is completed and offers constructive comments, feedback and questions that help foster discussion. A "0" indicates the annotation was not completed OR that the comments and questions were obstructive, disruptive, uncondusive to constructive discussion, or too general or unrelated to the reading. **A minimum of three posted comments per annotation is required.**

Discussion Post and Facilitation [15% of final grade]: Each week a seminar participant will help prompt and facilitate discussion of the course readings and subject matter. This will involve making a discussion post before seminar and actively facilitating the discussion during seminar. **This is not a formal presentation. You are not delivering a lecture!**

In preparation, your Discussion Forum post should do three things, efficiently:

- 1) Identify a focus that can appeal to the whole seminar group. The goal is to invite us into a conversation through the texts we have read.
- 2) Make direct use of the texts we've read. Make clear reference to a few key textual passages (**3 maximum**) and prepare to guide us into direct discussion about them.
- 3) Offer prompts to help with the facilitation: pose questions or think of other things (an activity?) you can use to help us figure out and explain a concept, an argument, etc., from the texts under discussion. Do not pose questions that can be answered by "Yes" or "No."
Propose no more than 3 prompts.

In the seminar session (where the real facilitation work happens):

- 4) Your job is to help make discussion happen and keep it going in productive ways. Draw people into the conversation. Attend to who is speaking and who isn't, and work to bring more people into the discussion. Listen closely to other seminar participants, what they say, and what they are trying to say (with an eye toward generosity and intentionality), and, in turn, help pose questions, restate ideas that others have articulated toward a question or connection to the text or what someone else has said, and ask for clarification, where needed.

The goal is to cultivate directed discussion that meaningfully engages with the texts and issues at hand. Facilitators seed, orient and re-orient the discussion; everyone shares responsible for fostering dialogue and ensuring that those discussions are engaging, meaningful, and respectful. Facilitation requires you to think and prepare like a moderator by taking on extra responsibility for a small body of material and to the course participants. It requires you to listen closely: both to the texts, what they say, and what they are doing, and to other seminar participants. Avoid over-preparing presentation materials. But take it seriously as a skill you are developing.

You will be evaluated on your ability to help facilitate the discussion using strategies of listening, re-direction, re-orientation, and posing queries aimed at getting everyone involved, the clarity of your engagement with the text(s) upon which you focus, and the quality and clarity of your discussion prompts and questions. **You will submit a brief self-assessment of your facilitation to me after seminar, by 5pm the next Monday.**

You will indicate your top three preferences for facilitation days during our first seminar meeting. Please note that if you run into a scheduling problem around a facilitation date, you will need to find another seminar participant with whom to switch.

Seminar Essay Proposal [20% of final grade]: On **Thursday October 12, 2023, at 5pm**, seminar participants will submit a 5-6 paged double-spaced seminar paper proposal via MyCourses. The proposal should indicate which of the seminar paper options you have chosen (see below). Describe the subject of your paper, what you plan to study, the research questions you seek to answer, and why they are significant or interesting. Assert the reason why you are writing this essay. Present what you know of the key literatures in the area and include a bibliography of work that you have consulted; it should accurately reflect preliminary research and additional reading you have done. Some guides for how to prepare a proposal will be posted in MyCourses.

Seminar Paper [50% of final grade]: The course will culminate with a 20-25 paged, double-spaced seminar paper. Seminar papers should not exceed this page limit. The seminar paper will be due on **Friday December 8, 2023, at 5pm Montreal time** in MyCourses. I will provide comments on the papers through the assignment portal in MyCourses.

There are three options for the seminar paper.

Option #1: Review of a particular methodological approach and/or method of inquiry. In this option, your task is to familiarize yourself more deeply, and critically, with some of the key writings on method/process/research design in a particular area of critical research inquiry. Reviews require significant library research and reading, so choose this option if you are committed to doing the extra reading that is required. Part of the task of doing a review of literature is defining an area of scholarly practice and method and determining which texts/works are significant to it. The review should include a description of the area of research practice or methods, a discussion of several exemplary texts and how they construct and articulate their forms of inquiry (with citations for additional texts in the area which you have chosen not to discuss in much detail), blind spots or limitations of the existing literature, and ways scholars expand on and/or open practice in this area. Be critical but also recognize what researchers have accomplished. The review should build from course material that is relevant to the approach and/or method.

Option #2: Proposal for a research project. In this option, your task is to write a fully developed proposal for a research project (something like a dissertation proposal, for instance, though at half the length of what we require in COMS). Such a proposal will include: 1) a full statement of the project and how its problematic is defined that includes

the key research questions; 2) a critical review of research already done in the area and/or in proximate areas; 3) a section on theoretical approach; 4) a section on research methods, the objects of study that will make up the materials of the research and how you will identify and collect them, and methods that will be used to analyze them; 5) a timeline/research plan for carrying out the research from start to publication/dissemination. The proposal should draw from relevant course readings. Folks who choose this option should review some examples of effective research proposals. Your prof will help you get access to them. An excellent starting place is this post by Prof. Darin Barney: <https://www.griersonresearchgroup.ca/studio/research-proposals>

Option #3: Major Revision of a recent project or paper. This option enables you to develop and substantially revise a current or former project **around and in direct relation to this course and its focus on research inquiry for social change**. The revision must truly be significant, meaning that the final paper offers a substantially different analysis than the original. Revisit your research materials. Conduct additional review of the literatures and engage directly with relevant course readings. This is a particularly good option for those of you looking to revise a paper you have written for conference presentation and/or publication but is not limited to this purpose. For folks who choose this option, be sure to read the chapter on revision in Graff and Birkenstein's book *They Say, I Say*.

Grading: Your final grade for the semester will be based on the quality and clarity of your performance in presentations and your written work. While not graded, your participation in seminar discussion is a crucial aspect of your work over the semester, and you will be expected to share your thoughts and participate in conversation. If you turn in work late, you may not receive written comments and your grade could be reduced. If I deem your work unsatisfactory, I may ask you to do it again. Taking an incomplete or "K" grade for this course is greatly discouraged, unless you have a truly exceptional reason that can be supported by documentation.

How to Interpret 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 ""failure"" by the Graduate Studies Office.

Expectations and Policies: There are several expectations that I have of participants in a graduate seminar. I expect that you will: attend every seminar meeting and come prepared to discuss each of our readings, do all of the readings and have something to say about them, bring your readings with you to every seminar, turn in your seminar work on time and in completed fashion, and openly communicate with me about anything of concern to you in the course (e.g. if you know you will have trouble meeting a deadline or if there is anything that will prevent you from fully participating in the seminar).

Devices: As much as possible, we will limit our time looking into screens in this course. Where possible, please bring print outs of readings to seminar with you, or if you use an e-reader, bring that. Avoid email, social media checks/posts or surfing the internet during our seminar session. If you need a device to take notes during discussion, for the purposes of discussion facilitation, or for accommodation purposes, that is okay. Otherwise, in the spirit of engaged face-to-face dialogue and active listening, we will avoid using internet connected devices during seminar time.

Statement on Academic Integrity: McGill University and I take academic integrity very seriously. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offenses under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <https://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/students/student-rights-responsibilities/code> for more information). Writing for the course should not use ChatGPT or other large language models. ChatGPT and other large language models will not be accepted as sources for assignments or any coursework in this seminar.

Nondiscrimination Statement: As a professor at McGill University, I value equality of opportunity, human dignity, and racial, ethnic, sexual, physical, and cultural diversity. I will work to promote a safe and conducive environment for learning. In accordance with university policy, we will not tolerate discrimination or harassment based on race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, sex, age, civil status, familial status, gender identity, sexual orientation, size, and/or disability. In addition to the University's policy, and within the bounds of the course, we do not discriminate based on political creed. This means that you do not have to agree with your peers in seminar or me to do well in this course. So long as you demonstrate an understanding of the course material, and a willingness to engage with it, you are under no obligation to agree with it. I will also make every effort to avoid discrimination based on class or income. If there is something I can do to make the class more hospitable and accessible, please let me know.

Accommodations: If you require any accommodations for your assignments or other classroom modifications due to special circumstances, challenges, or disabilities, please notify your professor and the [Office for Students with Disabilities](#), ideally by the end of the first week of class. The OSD provides a broad range of support and services to assist students, faculty, and staff with disabilities. Their offices are in Suite 410 (4th floor) at 1010 Sherbrooke Street West. To get in touch with the Office for Students with Disabilities, you can call (514) 398-6009 (voice), (514) 398-8198 (TDD) or email disabilities.students@mcgill.ca to speak with an adviser there. Please note the above commitment to accommodate applies equally to survivors of sexual assault and/or harassment on or off campus.

Sexual Assault Survivor Support and Allyship: Should you or someone you know need support as a survivor of sexual assault, harassment and/or discrimination on campus, please contact McGill's Sexual Violence Response Advisor, Émilie Marcotte, for assistance at 514-398-4486 or by email at: osvrse@mcgill.ca, situated in the Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education (located at 550 Sherbrooke, suite 585). They also offer drop-in hours during the school year (the schedule is online). For more information on their office, sexual violence support and reporting options visit: www.mcgill.ca/saap. The [Sexual Assault Centre of the McGill Student's Society \(SACOMSS\)](#) offers peer counseling and support to students who have suffered sexual violence and their allies, as well as outreach and education. Their hotline number is: (514) 398-8500 and they offer drop-in hours as well (the schedule for which is online). The [SSMU website](#) also contains additional information on resources available to survivors.

Other Key Resources: The [Writing Centre](#) offers individual consultation on all aspects of writing. Appointments are required. We highly recommend this university resource if you want to work on your writing (514-398-7109). [Queer McGill](#) provides social, political, and informational support for queer students by queer students (514-398-6913). [First People's House](#) provides a home away from home for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students, promoting academic success as well as community connection (514-398-3217). The [Black Students' Network](#) provides support for Black students, and also works to raise awareness at McGill of issues that Black individuals face; they also work to make the campus safer and more accessible for Black students. Additionally, the [McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life](#) is available as a nondenominational religious and spiritual hub on campus.

Discussion Etiquette: Our seminar time is dedicated to in-depth discussion. Following a few basic discussion guidelines will help ensure that this time is productive, enlightening, and fun.

1. Ideally, our seminar is a space in which we can grow as scholars, critics, writers, analysts, and for some, activists. In this space, we try out ideas, even if we might abandon them later.
2. We should expect disagreements, but they should avoid shutting down dialogue. Learning is a process: we make mistakes, change our minds, and may even come to regret some things we've said. I know I have. In this seminar, our aim is to work together to learn and *un-learn* some of the things we take for granted, while sharpening our analytic skills in the process. Learning and unlearning are processes that require space to work through. In this setting, we give ourselves and other people the space to transform their thinking, change their minds, and make mistakes. We will not seek a purity of ideas, nor should we expect others' ideas to be so; quite the opposite. Contingency, contradiction, mutability, uncertainty, partial knowledge: each makes up how we think and what we believe. Amid all of this, *clarity of expression* becomes especially valuable: this is what we are here to help each other develop.
3. Arguments are not contests. Grant your fellow seminar participants courtesy and respect, whether you agree with what they say or not. In arguments, you must make your case persuasively. Consider other viewpoints. Avoid attacking someone's

- character or personhood in the process. What someone thinks or says is not *reducible* to who they are and/or where they are.
4. Our goal in discussion is to understand the texts we read and how they might be useful to us – in addition to cultivating our skills in thinking with them and critiquing them. Work to avoid purely negative critique in your comments. Understand first; criticize second. Extend the same consideration to your peers. The point is to build knowledge together, not to look good or act smarter than everyone else or, relatedly, endlessly talk about yourself.
 5. Listen to what other people are saying and think about how you can respond to them and build on the conversation. Talk to each other, and not just to your professor. A big part of my job as your professor is to facilitate our discussions. I will pose questions, I will follow up with someone's line of argument, I will re-direct conversation when and where necessary, and I will bring in material from our text(s) to help us think through the issues with which we grapple. Our classroom is a space in which we put the ideas posed to us to work. My job is to manage and direct how that work happens, but this also requires your active participation and preparation.
 6. Try to avoid interrupting others (this is something your professor is also working on!).
 7. Pay attention to when others want to speak; invite them into the conversation. Avoid monopolizing the conversation.
 8. Experience and anecdote do not constitute evidence in a scholarly argument. While you each bring interesting experiences to the seminar, consider whether and if you want to bring them up. Is it relevant to class discussion? Think carefully about this before you speak. If you bring up your own experience in seminar, recognize that it becomes a topic for discussion. Ask yourself what point you want to make by talking about yourself. Do you want others to know this about you?
 9. You do not have to express your own opinion on a subject. You are also free to change your mind on any topic at any time.

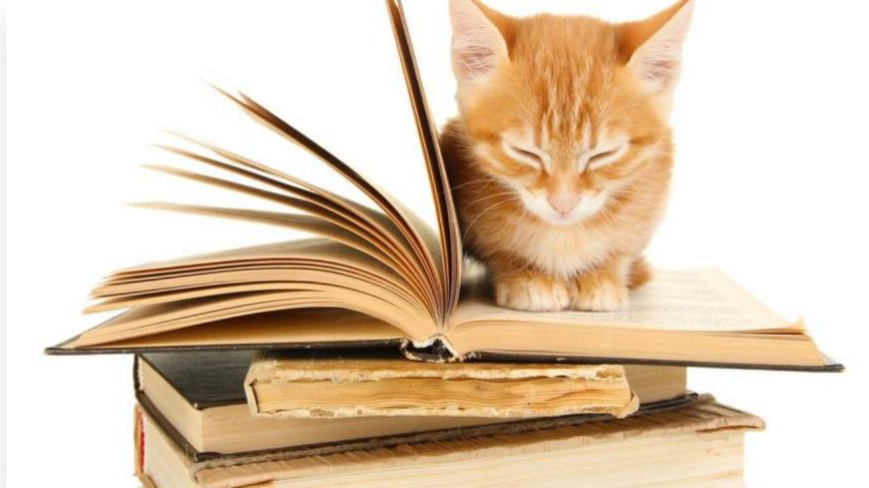
For those of you for whom speaking in seminar is challenging, identify some goals around your participation in this course. For instance, you could aim to make at least one comment during each seminar meeting. Some people find it helpful to sketch out a few notes to help organize their thoughts before they make a comment.

For those who tend to speak too much in seminars, pay close attention to point #7 above. Identify some other ways in which you can engage with the materials and each other without feeling the need to talk all the time. We can discuss other strategies for managing and maximizing one's time in seminar.

Special Required Emergency Clause: In extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Schedule of Readings

This schedule of readings is subject to change over the course of the term.



[Image description: a young orange tabby cat sits on an open book, looking very content, as I hope you will be as you read our course texts!]

Theory in/and Research for Social Change

Friday September 1, 2023: Reading for Social Transformation in COMS 639

Content Note: Today's session will focus on how to read texts in COMS 639, and more generally in the field. This kind of reading requires paying attention to: 1) the argument the author is making, 2) the author's explanation for why they are making that argument, 3) the ways they situate themselves in a debate or conversation (Are they responding to something? What are they building upon? How have they been trained?), 4) how and why they have chosen their materials to analyze and methods of analysis, and 5) the case they make for their position, findings, and/or conclusions.

To facilitate discussion, we're reading four short pieces today, with an additional two recommended. Two offer advice for how to read and plan for reading in graduate school; one is a blog post written by historian Julia Haager with good tips (the comments are also very useful); the other is a piece by Paul Edwards (Prof. of Science and Technology Studies at Stanford University) which lays out how to effectively read a book as an academic endeavor. A short chapter by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, "Reading for the Conversation," articulates how to read an academic text for the conversation it is in, sometimes explicitly stated and other times not. Max Liboiron's article critiques the academic claim to being "first" as a colonial logic, offering advice to both readers and writers around this assertion.

The recommended article by sociologists Hannah Wohl and Gary Fine reports on research they conducted on grad student reading practices in History, Sociology and Economics to understand what is missing in graduate education about reading, including training in how to read deeply and how to read quickly. “Reading is not a single act”; it is made up of multiple practices associated with different kinds of texts and reading purposes. How you read for this seminar will likely differ from how you read for background on a topic or an exam. Additionally, the reading by Timothy Birke provides a clear set of strategies for how to skim texts, which kinds of texts, and when not to; see his caveats.

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein (2021). What’s motivating this writer? Reading for the conversation. In *They say, I say: The moves that matter in academic writing*. W.W. Norton, 187-202.

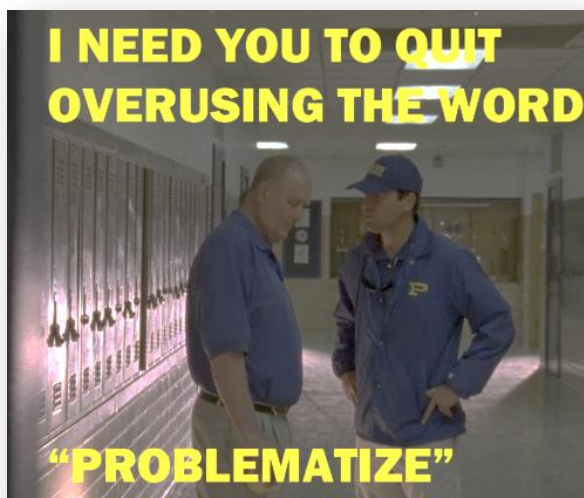
Edwards, Paul (2008). How to read a book, v 4.0. University of Michigan: School of Information Studies.

Haager, Julia B. (2019). Surviving graduate school – How to read and take notes efficiently. *Clio and the contemporary*. Blog. <https://clioandthecontemporary.com/2019/09/23/how-to-read-and-take-notes-efficiently/>

Liboiron, Max (2021). Firsting in research. *Discard Studies*, January 18. <https://discardstudies.com/2021/01/18/firsting-in-research/>

Recommended: Burke, Timothy (2005). How to read in college. (*note the caveats at the end). <https://blogs.swarthmore.edu/burke/permanent-features-advice-on-academia/how-to-read-in-college/>.

Wohl, Hannah and Gary Alan Fine. (2017). Reading rites: Teaching textwork in graduate education. *American Sociologist*, 48, 215-232. DOI 10.1007/s12108-016-9322-0.



[Image description: Academic Coach Taylor meme from TV show “Friday Night Lights” circa 2012 on the academic overuse of the verb “problematize”.]

Friday September 8, 2023: Theory for Getting Oriented and Situated

Content Note: The next two week's readings focus on what theory does and is for. Theorizing is what helps us create objects of study and formulate questions we want to research; it also helps us answer the question "so what?" It also helps us see the relationship between things we might not otherwise have noticed, giving us tools for conceptualizing how to make something researchable, and situating us in the process. This week's readings focus on research (and all epistemology, including that which professes to be the most objective) as situated knowledge (Haraway), the habits (and imposed norms) of orientation toward certain objects and subjects (Ahmed), the scientific offerings of indigenous knowledge (Kimmerer) and the very idea of what "theory" is (Cary Wolfe). The piece by Graff and Birkenstein sets out good practices for seminar discussion – read it and practice what they advise. Two of these pieces are *really* short.

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. (2021). 'I take your point': Entering class discussions. In *They say, I say: The moves that matter in academic writing*. W.W. Norton, 172-176.

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. (2013). "Asters and goldenrod" and "Mishkos Kenomaagwen: The teachings of grass." In *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the teachings of plants*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 39-47, 156-166.

Haraway, Donna. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575-599. **[we will annotate this piece]**.

Ahmed, Sara. (2006). Orientations: Toward a queer phenomenology. *GLQ*, 12(4), 543-574.

Wolfe, Cary. (2016). 'Theory', the humanities, and the sciences: Disciplinary and Institutional settings. *Journal of Literature and Science*, 10(1), 75-80.

Recommended: Annette Markham. (2020). Qualitative research is.... [blog. Post], March 25. <https://annettemarkham.com/2020/03/qual-research/>

Wednesday September 13, 2023: Public Talk with Danielle Boyer on Indigenous Robotics

co-hosted with the Indigenous Futures Research Centre, 6 PM ET (virtual)

For more information and to register:

<<https://can01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.eventbrite.com%2F%2Fdanielle-boyer-on-indigenous-robotics-tickets-643054602627&data=05%7C01%7Ccarrie.rentschler%40mcgill.ca%7C16e44ac4cf0443840eaf08db98221100%7Ccd31967152e74a68afa9fcf8f89f09ea%7C0%7C0%7C638271044301730177%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljoIMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6Ikl1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=ay09XwibDAqnKvr23jvwtvWPXFWQciked76qHRnVnlc%3D&reserved=0>>,

Friday September 15, 2023: What Does Theory Do?

Content Note: This week's readings examine theorizing as a diverse set of practices rather than, say, a style of writing or a kind of text. As Julia Wood argues, theory is the "self-consciousness of practice" (1995, 160), articulating a necessary relationship between theory and practice. Or as Stuart Hall suggests quite provocatively, "The only theory worth having is that which you have to fight off, not that which you speak with profound fluency." Our readings are drawn from Black feminist literary theory (Christian), feminist applied communication research (Wood), queer theory (Sedgwick), and cultural studies (Hall). Attend to what each says about theory, what it is, and what it does.

Wood, Julia T. (1995). Theorizing practice, practicing theory. In Kenneth Cissna, ed. *Applied communication in the 21st century*. Routledge, 157-167.

Christian, Barbara (2007). The race for theory (1987). In Barbara Christian and Christina Bowles, eds. *New black feminist criticism, 1985-2000*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 40-50.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. (2003). Paranoid reading and reparative reading, or, you're so paranoid you probably think this essay is about you. In *Touching feeling*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 123-151. **[we will annotate this piece]**

Hall, Stuart. (2013). Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies. In *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen. London: Routledge, 261-274.

Friday September 22, 2023: Activism and Scholarship – Crafting Research Toward Social Change

Content Note: This week's readings draw from Latin American anthropology of media, Black studies, and social movement studies to articulate relationships between critical scholarship and social change. We start with Joey Sprague's introductory chapter to the book *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers* presents a nice clear articulation of how feminist research engages social change. Clemencia Rodríguez's chapter examines how community media creates resources for daily life in the war zones of Colombia, a deeply reparative analysis that tunes into the essential work that community media can do in contexts of terrorizing guerilla violence. Note that this reading speaks directly to the experiences of living in a war zone. We will also read an article from 3 social movement scholars on social movement agents as transformative knowledge makers, and why their knowledge making is so significant in/for academic inquiry. Robin Kelley's article examines the activism of Black students at the University of Missouri in the U.S. in dialogue with Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's thesis in their book *The Undercommons*, which is a (highly) recommended reading.

Sprague, Joey. (2015). The field of vision. In *Feminist methodologies for critical researchers: Bridging differences*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1-29.

Rodríguez, Clemencia (2011). The doing is everything! Toward a theory of citizens' media in contexts of war. In *Citizens' media against armed conflict: Disrupting violence in Colombia*. University of Minnesota Press, 231-266. **[we will annotate this piece]**

Casas-Cortés, María Isabel, Michal Osterweil, Dana E. Powell (2008). Blurring boundaries – Recognizing knowledge-practices in the study of social movements. *Anthropological quarterly*, 81(1), 17-58.

Kelley, Robin D.G. (2018). Black study, black struggle. *Ufahamu: A journal of African studies*, 40(2), 154-168.

Recommended: Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten (2013) *The undercommons: Fugitivity and planning*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia (available in MyCourses as PDF).

Laura Pulido (2008). FAQs: Frequently (un)asked questions about being a scholar activist. In *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*, ed. Charles R. Hale. University of California Press, 341-366.

Bratich, Jack (2018). U.S. feminism, 1968, and mediated collective intelligence. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 43(2): 290-299.

Piven, Frances Fox (2010). Reflections on scholarship and activism. *Antipode*, 42(4), 806-810.

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson (1993). Public enemies and private intellectuals: Apartheid USA. *Race & Class*, 35(1), 69-78.

Cox, Laurence (2015). Scholarship and activism: A social movements perspective. *Studies in social justice*, 9(1), 34-53.

Couture, Stéphane (2017). Activist scholarship: The complicated entanglements of activism and research work. *Canadian journal of communication*, 42(1), 143-147.

Ramasubramanian, Srividya and Alexandra N. Sousa (2021). Communication scholar-activism: conceptualizing key dimensions and practices based on interviews with scholar-activists, *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 49(5), 477-496, DOI: 10.1080/00909882.2021.1964573

Tuesday September 26, 2023: Christine H. Tran on *Homewrecker Platforms: Games, Gender & the Media Housework of Live Streaming
6 PM ET (Hybrid: in-person and virtual options)

For more information and to register:

<https://can01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.eventbrite.com%2F%2Fchristine-h-tran-on-homewrecker-platforms-hybrid-event-full-title-below-tickets-639585105267%3Ffbclid%3DIwAR2XrGhxLqk_q_hnysqQl6epkT7tBwoOj5gALRcLBeEWzdNrRwGhpY4RNE&data=05%7C01%7Ccarrie.rentschler%40mcgill.ca%7C16e44ac4cf0443840eaf08db98221100%7Ccd31967152e74a68afa9cf8f89f09ea%7C0%7C0%7C638271044301730177%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljoIMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6Ikl1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=bAC%2FfUpcyDYB%2BajWKTpbn%2BBerWVIMWaNIHEpx3v1bsl%3D&reserved=0>,

Friday September 29, 2023: A Queer Social Movement Media Study about Lesbian Technology

Content Note: This week we are reading the book *Information Activism* by Cait McKinney, a significant work of queer media studies scholarship that historicizes media networking in the context of 1970s-1990s lesbian information activism. Drawing on affect studies, media studies, queer studies, and feminist scholarship McKinney's research reveals a close and deep

engagement with the variety of materials one finds in volunteer-run queer archives, lesbian newsletters, lesbian telephone hotlines, and the bibliographic activism of lesbian librarians.

McKinney, Cait. (2020). *Information activism: A queer history of lesbian information technologies*. Duke University Press. [we will annotate one chapter]

Historicizing the Present as Spaces of Struggle

Friday October 6, 2023: Conjunctural Analysis in Cultural Studies—Studying the Conditions of Cultural Struggle

Content Note: Conjunctural analysis is central to Cultural Studies inquiry, and this week's readings focus in on what this analysis is, what defines a "conjuncture," and how this framework *historicizes the present* (with more on this by Foucault in two weeks). Conjunctural analysis is conducted at a "certain level of abstraction," as Grossberg describes, and keeps relations of power and fields of struggle at the heart of inquiry. Jennifer Daryl Slack's reading on articulation focuses in on the strategies for analyzing the connections between things in the context of conjunctures. Stuart Hall's 1983 lecture "Culture, Resistance, and Struggle" articulates his thesis on the significance of Black cultural struggle as not predetermined nor is it politics guaranteed. As you read these texts, note citations to Antonio Gramsci, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Georg Lukacs, and others from Marxist theory.

Hall, Stuart (2016/1983). Culture, resistance, and struggle. *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History*, ed. Jennifer Daryl Slack and Lawrence Grossberg. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 180-206. [we will annotate this piece]

Grossberg, Lawrence (2019). Cultural studies in search of a method, or looking for conjunctural analysis. *New formations*, 96-97, 38-68.

Slack, Jennifer Daryl. (1996). The theory and method of articulation in cultural studies. In *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies*, ed. Kuan-Hsing Chen and David Morley. Routledge, 113-129.

Hall, Stuart, and Doreen Massey (2010). Interpreting the crisis: Doreen Massey and Stuart Hall discuss ways of understanding the current crisis. *Soundings: A journal of politics and culture*, 42, 5760 words.

Recommended: Grayson, Deborah and Ben Little (2017). Conjunctural analysis and the crisis of ideas. *Soundings: A journal of politics and culture*, 65, 59-75.

Gilbert, Jeremy (2019). This conjuncture: For Stuart Hall. *New Formations*, 96-97, 5-37.

Thursday October 12, 2023: Seminar Paper Proposal due at 5pm

Wednesday October 11-Tuesday October 17, 2023: Prof. Kath Albury visit

Stay tuned for information on a speaker series talk, a workshop, and possibly more (!) with Prof. Albury, a sexuality studies and digital culture scholar.

Friday October 13, 2023: De-Naturalizing What One Studies and Why
(possible special guest Dr. Kath Albury, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia)

Content Note: This week we are reading a short chapter from C. Wright Mills' classic text, *The Sociological Imagination*, which calls for more fluid, contextual, and flexible ways of conducting social analysis and inquiry. We will read Pierre Bourdieu's Paris workshop text on how to conduct research not already pre-determined by work that has been done before. Kadji Amin's piece examines how (primarily) U.S.-based 1990s queer theory overdetermines and constrains the field of queer studies, calling for more transnational, emergent forms of queer research not already defined by 1990s literature. Ada Jaarsma's chapter critiques how pre-constituted problems and categories do not work for disability studies methods. Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein's chapter offers an important (brief) thesis on research as a conversation. **There will be no annotation this week because seminar paper proposals are due.**

Bourdieu, Pierre (1992). The practice of reflexive sociology (the Paris workshop). In *An invitation to reflexive sociology*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant. University of Chicago Press, 218-260.

Mills, C. Wright (1959). On intellectual craftsmanship. In *The sociological imagination*. London: Oxford University Press, 195-226.

Amin, Kadji (2019). Haunted by the 1990s: Queer theory's affective histories. In *Imagining queer methods*, ed. Amin Ghaziani and Matt Brim. New York University Press, 277-293. (a pdf of the whole book is in MyCourses)

Jaarsma, Ada (2020). Critical disability studies and the problem of method. In *Transdisciplinary feminist research: Innovations in theory, method and practice*, ed. Carol Taylor, Jasmine Ulmer, and Christina Hughes. London, Routledge: 16-28. (a pdf of the whole book is in MyCourses)

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. 2021. 'But as several sources suggest': Research as conversation. In *They say, I say: The moves that matter in academic writing*. W.W. Norton, 203-231.

Friday October 20, 2023: Michel Foucault – Historical Genealogy and the Production of Discourse

Content Note: Build some space into your schedule to properly work through Foucault's materials. We will be reading the slim volume *History of Sexuality Vol. 1* and his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." Tune into how he talks about what discourse does and what historical analysis is and can be. A strong critique of dominant morality runs through both.

Foucault, Michel (1978/1990). *History of sexuality Vol. 1: An introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage.

Foucault, Michel & Bouchard, Daniel. (1980). Nietzsche, genealogy, history. In *Language, counter-memory, practice: Selected essays and interviews*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 139-164. **[we will annotate this piece]**

Recommended: Deleuze, Gilles (1992) What is a dispositif*? In *Michel Foucault, philosopher: Essays translated from the French and German*, Ed. Timothy Anderson. Routledge, 159-168.

Crafting Objects of Study

Friday October 27, 2023: It Starts with a Feeling

Content Note: This week's readings focus on the transition from gut instinct, intuition and having a feeling about an issue of concern/interest to building research inquiry and analysis from those sources of embodied knowledge and information. We will read some classic essays on the topic, including Audre Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic" and "Poetry is not a Luxury," Joan C. Scott's "The Evidence of Experience" and some more recent work on embodied, first-person research: not only as an end, but as part of larger processes of doing research about things that are not (always, or even centrally) about you. Thanem and Torkild draw from their own personal motivations for conducting research and how they use it to formulate practices of inquiry. Minna Ruckenstein's chapter from their book *The Feel of Algorithms* tunes into how people feel and perceive the ways in which algorithmic culture works in their lives. I've recommended a piece by Marina Levina, a feminist scholar of media studies, draws on her own experiences growing up as a Jewish young woman in the former Soviet Union (in Ukraine) to articulate the connective politics of antisemitic whiteness there and in Trumpist America. It's a good model of autobiographically informed analysis.

Lorde, Audre. (1984). "Poetry is a not a luxury" and "Uses of the erotic." In *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Berkeley, CA: Crossings Press, 36-39, 53-59.

Scott, Joan C. (1991). The evidence of experience. *Critical Inquiry*, 17(4), 773-797. **[we will annotate this piece]**

Thanem, Torkild, and David Knights. (2019). Initiating an embodied research process. In *Embodied research methods*. Sage, 40-53.

Ruckenstein, Minna. (2023). "Introduction" in *The Feel of Algorithms*. University of California Press, 1-27. (the whole book is available in MyCourses).

Recommended: Ferguson, Roderick. (2012). Of sensual matters: On Audre Lorde's "Poetry is Not a Luxury" and "Uses of the Erotic." *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 40(3&4), 295-300.

Levina, Marina (2018). Whiteness and the joys of cruelty. *Communication and critical/cultural studies*, 15(1), 73-78, DOI: 10.1080/14791420.2018.1435079

November 2, 2023: Dr. Avery Dame-Griff on The Two Revolutions: A History of the Transgender Internet

co-hosted with the DIGS Lab, 6:30 PM ET (Hybrid: in person and virtual)

For more information and to register:

<<https://can01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.eventbrite.ca%2Fevent%2Fthe-two-revolutions-a-history-of-the-transgender-internet-book-talk-hybrid-tickets-684869863197&data=05%7C01%7Ccarrie.rentschler%40mcgill.ca%7C1e44ac4cf0443840eaf08db98221100%7Ccd31967152e74a68afa9cf8f89f09ea%7C0%7C0%7C638271044301730177%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWlloiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6IjEhaWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=zhkZnOhd0XSt7v8p7FkT80tylrP3w5Lmd2NINQgrcFQ%3D&reserved=0>>

Friday November 3, 2023: The “Case” – On Representativeness, Attunement, and Scale

Content Note: This week’s readings examine the specific role that “representativeness” plays in our choices of objects of study and our analysis thereof: that is, what they come to (and can) represent. Issues of scaling objects of study and attunement to materials that will make up one’s corpus (your “stuff”) are fundamental to this work. To prompt this conversation, we will read Lauren Berlant’s short article on what makes something a “case” to be studied, as well as a short chapter by a Swedish case studies researcher in Education (Stake) on the significance of “unique cases.” We will also read three short chapters from Tsing’s *The Mushroom at the End of the World* on the arts of noticing, collaboration as contamination, and the problem of scale in her ethnographic study of matsutake mushroom pickers. We will also read a piece by media studies scholar Anna McCarthy on the politics of scaling objects of study in Cultural Studies. Give yourself plenty of time to do the readings for this week!

Berlant, Lauren. (2007). On the case. *Critical Inquiry*, 33(4), 663-672.

McCarthy, Anna (2006). From the ordinary to the concrete: Cultural studies and the politics of scale. In *Questions of method in cultural studies*, ed. Mimi White and. James Schwoch. Blackwell, 21-53. **[we will annotate this piece]**

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. (2015). Part I: What’s left. In *The mushroom at the end of the world: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Princeton University Press, 11-52.

Stake, Robert E. (1995). The unique case. In *The art of case study research*. Sage Publications, 1-14.

Recommended: Alcoff, Linda Martin (1991/92). The problem of speaking for others. *Cultural critique*, 20, 5-32.

Mulvin, Dylan (2020). *Proxies*. MIT Press.

Monday-Tuesday November 6-7, 2023: Professor Bo Ruberg visit

Stay tuned for announcements about a speaker series talk and a workshop on getting published by Ruberg, a queer studies scholar of affect, games, and digital culture and co-editor of the *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*.

Friday November 10, 2023: Boundary Objects and the Relations Between Communities of Practice

Content Note: This week's readings dive into the STS concept of the "boundary object," which has been especially useful for feminist STS work. In addition to Star and Griesemer's early article on boundary objects, we will read two chapters from medical anthropologist Annemarie Mol's book *The Body Multiple* about the multiple realities of the medical condition called atherosclerosis as constructed by different participants, communities of practice, contexts, and technologies. Give yourself time to read the Mol chapters – they are "double texts" (there are two pieces of writing in each chapter, where Mol reflects on and conceptualizes the very process of hers and others' research).

Star, Susan Leigh, and James R. Griesemer. (1989). Institutional ecology, 'translations' and boundary objects: Amateurs and professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39. *Social Studies of Science*, 19, 387-420.

Mol, Annemarie (2002). "Different atherosclerosis" and "Doing theory." In *The body multiple*, Duke University Press, 29-51, 151-184. **[we will annotate the chapter "Doing Theory"]**

Leigh Star, Susan. (1994/2018). Misplaced concretism and concrete situations: Feminism, method, and information technology. In G. Bowker, S. Timmermans, A. Clarke and E. Balka, eds. *Boundary objects and beyond: Working with Leigh Star*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 143-170.

Wednesday November 15, 2023: Public Talk with Dr. Tamara Kneese on Death Glitch: How Technosolutionism Fails Us in This Life and Beyond

6 PM ET (Hybrid: in person and virtual options)

For more information:

<<https://can01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.eventbrite.com%2F%2Fdr-tamara-kneese-on-death-glitch-hybrid-event-tickets-694787657587%3Faff%3Doddtdtcreator&data=05%7C01%7Ccarrie.rentschler%40mcgill.ca%7C16e44ac4cf0443840eaf08db98221100%7Ccd31967152e74a68afa9fcf8f89f09ea%7C0%7C0%7C638271044301730177%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljojMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6Ikl1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=NSDRkhME1fynkMEs5uM7mMD4gg9D2E5KI1e419pE5gQ%3D&reserved=0>>,</p>
</div>
<div data-bbox="134 783 863 820" data-label="Section-Header">
<p align="center"><u>November 17, 2023: Ethnographic Relations -- The Constructive, Constitutive, Contextual Work of Interviewing</u></p>
</div>
<div data-bbox="112 839 884 913" data-label="Text">
<p><u>Content Note:</u> There are two kinds of seminar readings for this week: 1) texts on doing ethnographies, and 2) texts on how-to conduct interviews. We will be talking about both in conversation. The first set of readings centre on power in ethnographic research, with a focus on studying elites. Two readings are about "studying up": one by Jan Radway and Carol Cohn's</p>
</div>

classic feminist essay on studying defense intellectuals. Enloe's three-page essay in dialogue with Cohn articulates the need for feminist approaches to ethnographies of militarized systems (she is speaking primarily to International Relations scholars and those who study systems of violence). Audra Simpson's essay examines indigenous ethnographic refusal and its significance in disrupting systems of power in anthropology and ethnography. The other set of readings articulate the practice of interviewing. They include James Spradley's classic text on ethnographic interviews (and the centrality of asking descriptive, structural and contrast questions—these are particularly good models), and Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale's book on the research interview as itself a substantive research context.

Radway, Janice (1991). Ethnography among elites: Comparing discourses of power. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 13(2), 3-11.

Cohn, Carol. (1987). Sex and death in the rational world of defense intellectuals. *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, 12(4), 687-718.

Enloe, Cynthia. (2004). 'Gender' is not enough: the need for a feminist consciousness. *International Affairs*, 80(1), 95-97.

Simpson, Audra. (2007). On ethnographic refusal: Indigeneity, 'voice' and colonial citizenship. *Junctures: the journal for thematic dialogue*, 9, 67-80. **[we will annotate this piece]**

On the practice of interviewing: Svende Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale. 2015. "The qualitative research interview as context" and "Conducting an interview." In *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*, 3rd edition. Sage Publications, 103-122, 149-166.

Spradley, James (1979/2016). "Asking descriptive questions," "Asking structural questions," and "Asking contrast questions." In *The ethnographic interview*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 78-91, 120-131, 155-172.

Friday November 24, 2023: Analysis at the Minor Scale

Content Note: This week's readings examine three qualities of relationality at the small scale: friction, texture, and the gestural (which interviews and participant observation are quite effective at studying). Erin Manning's chapter will serve as a theoretical intervention into thinking about research in the "minor key." Minna Ruckenstein's chapter from her new book *The Feel of Algorithms* draws from Anna Tsing's approach to friction in her earlier ethnographic research on the rubber industry in Indonesia to focus on friction as an entry point into ethnographic studies of how people interpret algorithmic culture in their lives. Stef Torrabla interviews Alexander Weheliye, a Black post-humanist scholar, on the analytic of texture, while Elena Pilipet focuses on the gestural in the study of TikTok videos.

Manning, Erin. (2020). Introduction: In a minor key. In *The minor gesture*. Duke University Press. **[we will annotate this piece]**

Pilipet, Elena. (2023). Hashtagging, duetting, sound-linking: TikTok gestures and methods of (in)distinction. *Journal of media art study and theory*, 4(1). <https://www.mast-journal.org/2023vol4no17>

Torralba, Stef. (2023). Textures of other dimensions: An interview with Alexander Weheliye. *Liquid blackness* 7:1 DOI 10.1215/26923874-10300506

Ruckenstein, Minna. (2023). Friction in algorithmic culture. In *The feel of algorithms*. University of California Press, 133-163 (the whole book is included in MyCourses).

Friday December 1 (last day of seminar): Staying with the Trouble and Mess of Research

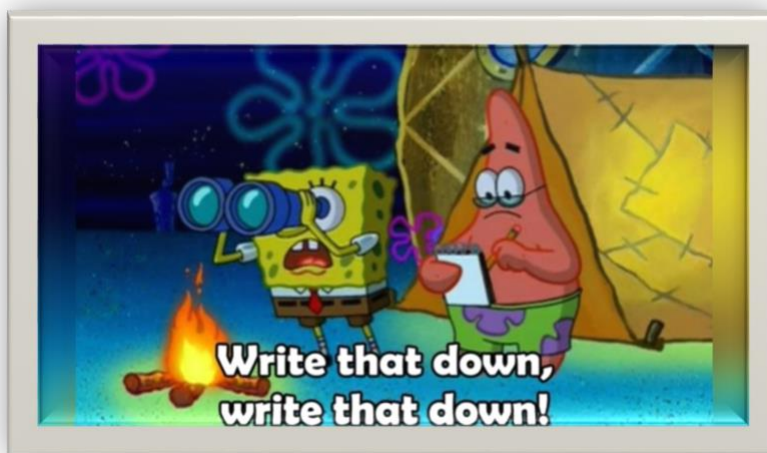
Content Note: In this final week of seminar, we will read John Law's book *After Method* as a "wrap-up" text to consider some of the productive messes of research and the variety of ways for doing methods. The book programmatically articulates an approach to social research that holds onto mess, ambiguity, fluidity, change and multiplicity in the context of research. The full book is available in pdf in MyCourses. We will also read an interview with Susanna Paasonen who references Law's book as part of a conversation on doing research that holds onto ambiguity and affect in digital culture.

Markelj, Jenji and Claudio Celis Bueno. (2023). Ambiguity and affect in digital culture: An interview with Susanna Paasonen. *The Journal of Media Art Study and Theory*, 4(1). <https://www.mast-journal.org/vol-4-no-1-2023>

Law, John. (2004). *After method: Mess in social science research*. Routledge. [we will annotate one of the chapters]

Recommended: Donna Haraway (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Rowe, Desiree D. & Michaela Frischherz (2023). Introducing the anti-method paradigm [or, when reviewer #2 says your interdisciplinary work is vague, messy, and unrecognizable]. *Review of communication*, DOI: 10.1080/15358593.2022.2161833.



[image description: a Spongebob Squarepants meme with the caption "Write that down!"]

Final Essay Due: Friday December 8, 2023
Submit via the Assignment Portal in MyCourses