

🎵 I'm So Alone 🎵

The Art of Surveilled Bodies Amidst a Global Epidemiological Cluster#@%\$

Professor: Sydney Skybetter
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Location: The Granoff

Schedule: Wednesdays, 9:30am - 12pm

Office Hours: [By appointment only](#)

Note: Syllabus is *categorically guaranteed* to change

"Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence."
- Rebecca Mead, et al.

"I'm present when I'm absent, speakin' when I'm not there."
- Megan Thee Stallion, *Body*



Janelle Monáe in IBM's 'Let's Put Smart to Work.'

So before **literally** anything else:

To call the process here, we're still in the midst of a horrific global pandemic. I know you know this. But I want to acknowledge its traumatizing effects on you, and me, and everyone else taking this class. If you tell me that you're having trouble, there will be no judgement on my part.

You should know that:

- 1) Under no circumstances should you feel obligated to share personal information about your health, or anything else, at any time.
- 2) I am happy to discuss matters with you by appointment and over office hours. I'm here to be a resource and facilitator for you, though I should also note that as a professor, I am designated a "[Responsible Employee](#)" and am required to report "details of incidents or suspected incidents of sexual and gender-based harm or discrimination."
- 3) If I can't help you, or be of use or service, chances are good I can connect you to a university resource or person who *can* help, or be of use or service.
- 4) If you need extra time on anything, or help in some fashion, or need to miss class, just let me know. We'll figure it out. We'll get through this.

Course Description

Since the emergence of COVID-19, the enforcement of "social distancing" has become a civic prerogative and state mandate. Transnational technology companies such as Apple and Google are engineering smartphone software to facilitate supposedly anonymous epidemiological contact tracing, efforts that (however apparently well intentioned) are nonetheless incursions on personal and bodily privacy growing out of the melee of surveillance capitalism. The novel choreographies and performances of "social distancing" will broker a confluence of bodily gestures, disciplining technologies, discriminatory health practices, and state power. This braid of bodies, the algorithmic interpretation of movements across space and time, and state and corporate interests are of urgent concern for scholars and artists working on and against questions of state violence, racial and gender inequity, computational bias, accessibility and expressivity. How have the development and application of social distancing and surveilling technologies incorporated ideologies of embodied difference (for instance, in terms of race, gender, or disability)? How can theorists, technologists, and artists join forces to increase awareness and inform public policy concerning the vast range of technologies that now track and analyze us as data bodies under the auspices of health and well being?

This course will center the individual research and artistic interests of course participants, and facilitate discussions on the subject of critical, technological, and artistic practices that explore the power dynamics of structural discrimination and racism embedded within techno-cultural systems. With diverse readings that highlight contemporary work in sociology, surveillance studies, interface studies, artistic practice and performance studies, featured presenters and participant facilitators will explore the intersecting histories and emerging possibilities of bodies in motion and the surveillant systems that track them. Through these conversations we will ask, how are digital architectures prejudiced against the movements, ability, health, wealth, expressiveness and access of different bodies, specifically and especially in the emerging post-COVID-19 world?

This is an explicitly interdisciplinary course that seeks to draw from a variety of artistic and scholarly knowledge bases, particularly those of seminar participants. It is informed by the belief that COVID-19 does not effect everyone equally, and as such, a variety of disciplinary and institutional perspectives are required to understand its impacts as fully as possible. Undergirded by common historical and theoretical frameworks, this course will constellate across Fortnite, contemporary poetry, Electronic Dance Music, East Village avant garde performance during the AIDS crisis, robots, Michael Crichton, ballet, Black Mirror, J. Lo, the film "Contagion," Steven Sondheim, the practice of "zombombing," Basquiat, tech bros being tech bros, feminist cartography and bodyhacking, among other subjects. By establishing a common historical knowledge base and critical / creative lexicon, this course seeks to understand our emerging creative, techno-historical and epidemiological moment so as to quickly and forcefully intervene in it.

Class Structure:

This course meets once per week, with time allocated for media viewings, workshops and discussion. Please note that this is a reading intensive course, with a typical weekly reading load of over 100 pages. Over 10 weeks, participants will spend 2.5 hours per week in class (25 hours total). Required readings and collaborative project work is expected to take approximately 7.5 hours per week (115 hours). Additionally, researching and composing weekly responses and individual presentations is estimated at a total of approximately 40 hours over the course of the term.

Projects and Grading:

Participation: 30%

Participants are expected to complete all readings in a timely fashion, actively listen during lectures and presentations, ask questions and be fully engaged in class discussion and workshops. Classroom contributions can be in the form of posing critical questions to advance class conversation, sharing of key passages, responding to instructor prompts, or other means to be determined.

Group Presentations: 20%

Groups will receive a shared grade and feedback on the basis of the effectiveness of their presentation, and facilitation of class discussion.

Individual Presentation: 30%

Individuals will receive a grade and feedback on the basis of the effectiveness of their presentation, and facilitation of class discussion.

Weekly Responses: 20%

Attendance and Presence:

This course will take place synchronously and in person amidst an aforementioned global pandemic. Asynchronous engagement with course material is absolutely fine, pending an individualized, agreed-upon plan and continuous communication with the instructor. While on a Zoom call, video participation is optional. Absence from scheduled zoom calls or class time will not result in a lowered grade, but lack of overall engagement and unexcused tardiness submitting course materials will. Please also be prepared for the possibility of class to move online with or without advance notice.

Individual Presentations:

Course participants will receive class time to present on their work (through textual, critical, creative, compositional, discursive means or otherwise) and facilitate discussion in a fashion that is useful or interesting to them. This can take the form of an art crit, presentation of pre-published draft language for group consideration, a collaborative making of some thing, or pretty much anything else. Participants should review intended presentation plans over office hours in advance of presenting. Plan on presenting for no more than fifteen minutes, including ensuing facilitation of class conversation.

Group Presentations:

Participants will be assigned to small groups to present on weekly texts and media. Groups should review draft presentation plans over office hours. These presentations must include:

- Contextual overview of agreed upon materials, including historical frame, authorial biodata, and cultural and theoretical usages.
- Analysis germane to that week's readings, emphasizing the means by which relevant materials were made, how they work, intended usages and creative applications.
- A group activity that explores a performative, formal, poetic, computational or choreographic vector pertaining to the week's readings and media.
- Facilitation of classroom discussion.

It is recommended that participants research varying modes of presentation and facilitation, like [this](#), for example. Note that the individuals you are facilitating may be connected to Zoom calls via audio only or audio + video. Plan on presenting for not more than 15 minutes, including the group's ensuing facilitation of class conversation.

Weekly Responses to Readings

Each week, please upload a some sort of internally coherent response to Canvas by 5pm the evening before class. This response can take the form of any sort of media (visual, audio, textual, notational, archival) but should gesture towards questions that catalyze class discussion. If you are presenting that week, you do not need to compose an additional weekly response. For a sample of a reading response, see [here](#).

Media:

Media will be made available online, in the library, and by appointment, TBD. If you are unable to access any assigned material, let me know and we'll troubleshoot / workaround together.

Names and Pronouns:

If you would like to be called by a different name or wish to be referred to by a different gender pronoun than the one under which you are officially enrolled, please let me know. Participants are expected to respectfully refer to each other by their names and pronouns in class.

Academic Integrity:

Breaches of academic integrity will not be tolerated and will be reported immediately. Infringement on the academic code entails penalties ranging from reprimand to suspension, dismissal, or expulsion from the University. Please familiarize yourself with [Brown's Academic Code](#).

Accessibility and Accommodations:

If you require any special accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible so that your learning needs can be met. To ensure accommodations, participants are advised to contact the [Student and Employee Accessibility Services](#).

Email:

You are welcome to email me with questions and concerns. Please note that requests or questions regarding scheduled assignments received after 5pm the night before that assignment is due may not receive a response. If you've read this far into the syllabus, email me your favorite animated gif by the second class.

Required Texts:

Each participant will be required to acquire the following books. Additional texts will be assigned on the basis of individual projects and class interests.

Note that if your Brown undergraduate financial aid package includes the Book/Course Material Support Pilot Program (BCMS), concerns or questions about the cost of books and course materials can be addressed to bcms@brown.edu. For all other concerns related to non-tuition course-related expenses, whether or not your Brown undergraduate financial aid package includes BCMS, please visit the Academic Emergency Fund in E-GAP (within the umbrella of "E-Gap Funds" in UFunds) to determine options for financing these costs, while ensuring your privacy.

If cost of / access to textbooks remains an issue, please let me know, and I will literally wield whatever professorial clout I have to get you what you need.

Note that there are also more books available on OCRA than are assigned. Interested in film history and body data? Check out "Choreometrics: A Method for the Study of Cross-cultural Pattern in Film." Thinking about quintessential queer art history? Read through "[In the Shadow of Forward Motion](#)."

Apropos a conversation about access- some of these texts deal with questions of Theory with a capital 'T'. This entails a specialized sort of reading and writing that doesn't come like, naturally, and requires practice. We can discuss in class or office hours, but as a starting point, [check out this excellent twitter thread on the subject](#) by kickass queer scholar, Dr. Roy Pérez.

Required Texts:

- Benjamin, Ruha, Editor. "Captivating Technology: Race, Carceral Technoscience, and Liberatory Imagination in Everyday Life." Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.
- Benjamin, Ruha. "Race After Technology." Medford: Polity Press, 2019.
- Browne, Simone. "Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness." Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.
- D'Ignazio, Catherine and Klein, Lauren F. "Data Feminism." Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020.
- Gere, David. "How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS." University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.
- Gray, Kishonna L., and Anita Sarkeesian. "Intersectional Tech: Black Users in Digital Gaming." Louisiana State University Press, 2020.
- Hendren, Sara. "What Can a Body Do? How We Meet the Built World." New York: Riverhead Books, 2020.
- Hong, Sun-ha. "Technologies of Speculation: the Limits of Knowledge in a Data-Driven Society." New York University Press, 2020.
- Pederson, Isabel and Iliadis, Andrew, Editors. "Embodied Computing: Wearables, Implantables, Embeddables, Ingestibles." Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2020.
- Russell, Legacy. "Glitch Feminism: a Manifesto." Verso, 2020.

Articles:

- Borradaile, Glencora and Reeves, Joshua. "[Sousveillance Capitalism](#)"
- Cárdenas, Micha. "[Trans of Color Poetics: Stitching Bodies, Concepts, and Algorithms](#)"
- Chee, Alexander. "[In This Pandemic, Personal Echoes of the AIDS Crisis.](#)"
- Davies, Brenig. "[Equine](#)"
- Elswit, Kate. "[Dancing With Our 'Coronasphere' to Navigate the Pandemic](#)"
- Foster, Susan Leigh. "[Choreographies of Protest.](#)" *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 3, Oct., 2003.
- Fussell, Sidney. "[How Surveillance Has Always Reinforced Racism.](#)"
- GoLocalProv News Team. "[Brown Has One Surveillance Camera for Every 9 Undergrads - Student Raises Concerns](#)"
- Gupta, Abhishek. "[Disability, Bias, and AI \(Research Summary\)](#)"
- Hao, Karen. "['I started crying': Inside Timnit Gebru's last days at Google—and what happens next](#)"
- Keseru, Julia. "[The unwanted touch of the digital era](#)"
- Knemeyer, Dirk and Follett, Jonathan. "[Making Art with AI](#)"
- Mac, Ryan and Haskins, Caroline and Sacks, Brianna and McDonald, Logan. "[Surveillance Nation](#)"
- Moro, Jeffrey. "[Against Cop Shit](#)"
- Nooney, Laine. "[How the Personal Computer Broke the Human Body](#)"
- Nucera, Diana and Berhan, Taye and Costanza-Chock, Sasha and Sifray, Micah and Stempeck, Matt. "[Pathways through the Portal](#)" Deck
- Nucera, Diana and Berhan, Taye and Costanza-Chock, Sasha and Sifray, Micah and Stempeck, Matt. "[Pathways through the Portal](#)" Site (Skim / Click Around)
- Pendergrast, Kelly. "[Home Body](#)"
- Rotondi, Flavia. - "[Italy's Art Museums Are Open Again, and Big Data Is Watching](#)"
- Roy, Molly. "[Systems of Choreography: Performing Normal in Public](#)"
- Stokely, JD. "[Speculating Black Queer Futures](#)"
- Thorp, Jer. "[Woke-washing IBM's Dirty Computers](#)"
- Tufekci, Zeynep. "[The Pandemic Is No Excuse to Surveil Students](#)"
- Weise, Jillian. "[Common Cyborg](#)"
- West, Sarah Meyers. "[AI and the Far Right: A History We Can't Ignore](#)"

Media:

- [@aannggeellll's Tommy Hilfiger Ad](#)
- ["ACT UP: A History Of AIDS/HIV Activism"](#)
- ["Can You Bring It: Bill T Jones and D-Man In the Waters,"](#) via OCRA.
- ["Dark Elegies"](#) by Sydney Skybetter.
- ["Disability Justice"](#) Produced by The Laura Flanders Show.
- ["Duet from Concerto Six Twenty-two"](#) by Lar Lubovitch.
- ["Enemy of the State"](#) via OCRA.
- ["Ghost in the Shell,"](#) via OCRA.
- [Google Maps Hacks](#) by Simon Weckert.
- [Human-out-of-the-loop](#) by Simon Weckert.
- ["IBM Commercial | Let's Put Smart To Work"](#) via YouTube.
- [If Robots Could Dance | At Home](#) by Alexander Reben, Alice Sheppard.
- ["If You Had My Love"](#) by Jennifer Lopez.
- ["If You Build It..."](#) Produced by On The Media.
- ["INDUSTRY BABY"](#) by Lil Nas X and Jack Harlow.
- ["Industry Baby' video as a fundraiser for the Bail Project"](#) via Twitter, @rapalert4.
- [Instagram #DickRunning](#) by Claire Wyckoff.
- @lpoupyrev's ["We @GoogleATAP have been working..."](#)
- ["Johnny Mnemonic"](#) via OCRA.
- ["The Matrix"](#) via OCRA.
- ["Minority Report"](#) via OCRA.
- ["Mixtape podcast: Artificial intelligence and disability"](#) by Henry Pickavet, Megan Rose Dickey.
- ["Money," "Hard Feelings"](#) and ["Machine"](#) by Miquela.
- [Revel In Your Body](#) // Directed by Katherine Helen Fisher // Artistic Director/Choreographer/Dancer: Alice Sheppard // Choreography Collaborator/Dancer: Laurel Lawson // Wheelchair Design: Laurel Lawson, Paul Schulte.
- ["San Junipero"](#) via OCRA
- ["Tightrope," "Q.U.E.E.N.," "Many Moons"](#) and ["Dirty Computer"](#) by Janelle Monáe.

Week to Week Schedule:

Readings and media listed under each heading are expected to be completed for that day. Be ready to discuss in class.

Class #1 // 1.26.22: *Introductions Slash WTF Is This Class*

What are we doing here? How does this work? After class, sign up for [solo presentation slots here](#) and [group facilitation slots here](#), [office hours here](#). (Note: articles are listed in suggested reading order)

Readings (Please complete before class):

- ["Against Cop Shit"](#)
- ["Brown Has One Surveillance Camera for Every 9 Undergrads - Student Raises Concerns"](#)
- ["Home Body"](#)
- ["Speculating Black Queer Futures"](#)
- ["Dancing With Our 'Coronasphere' to Navigate the Pandemic"](#)
- ["The unwanted touch of the digital era"](#)

Media (Please watch before class):

- ["Dark Elegies"](#) (I know I know I assigned a thing I made please forgive the narcissism)
- ["If You Had My Love"](#) by Jennifer Lopez

Class #2 // 2.2.22: *Big Dick Data*

(Note: Class #2 on 2.2.22! Pretty cool!)

Readings:

- From Data Feminism:

(-) "Acknowledgements"

(-) "Introduction"

(-) "The Power Chapter"

(-) "Collect, Analyze, Imagine, Teach"

(-) "On Rational, Scientific, Objective Viewpoints from Mythical, Imaginary, Impossible Standpoints"

(-) "What Gets Counted Counts"

(-) "Unicorns, Janitors, Ninjas, Wizards, and Rock Stars"

(-) "Now Let's Multiply"

- "[Pathways through the Portal](#)" Deck

- "[Pathways through the Portal](#)" Site (Skim / Click Around)

- "[The Pandemic Is No Excuse to Surveil Students](#)"

Media:

- Claire Wyckoff's [Instagram #DickRunning](#)

Class #3 // 2.9.22: *Fleshy Bottlenecks*

Readings:

- From Technologies of Speculation:

(-) Selections TBD

Media:

- "[Tightrope](#)" and "[Q.U.E.E.N.](#)" and "[Many Moons](#)" by Janelle Monáe.

- "[Money](#)," "[Hard Feelings](#)" and "[Machine](#)" by Miquela.

Class #4 // 2.16.22: *Jim Crow Jesus Rose Again*

Readings:

- From Race After Technology:

(-) "Preface"

(-) "Introduction"

(-) "Engineered Inequality"

- "[AI and the Far Right: A History We Can't Ignore](#)"

- "[Making Art with AI](#)"

- "['I started crying': Inside Timnit Gebru's last days at Google—and what happens next](#)"

- "[Woke-washing IBM's Dirty Computers](#)"

Media:

- "[IBM Commercial | Let's Put Smart To Work](#)"

- "[Dirty Computer](#)" by Janelle Monáe.

Class #5 // 2.23.22: *One Pill, Two Pill, Red Pill, Blue Pill*

Readings:

- From Race After Technology:

- (-) "Default Discrimination"
- (-) "Coded Exposure"
- (-) "Technological Benevolence"
- (-) "Retooling Solidarity, Reimagining Justice"
- "[Italy's Art Museums Are Open Again, and Big Data Is Watching](#)"

Media:

- "[The Matrix](#)" (Note: This media contains rampant gun violence, images of blood, and strobe effects.)

Class #6 // 3.2.22: *There's History Here*

Note: Fanon isn't assigned in this seminar for lack of time, but his work haunts the hell out of this class. When you're done with the semester, if you do one thing, read "The Fact of Blackness" from *Black Skin, White Masks*. In fact, [here's a PDF of it](#).

- From: Dark Matters:
- (-) "Acknowledgements"
- (-) "Introduction, and Other Dark Matters"
- (-) "Notes on Surveillance Studies"
- (-) "Everybody's Got a Little Light under the Sun"
- (-) "Branding Blackness"
- "[Sousveillance Capitalism](#)"
- "[Systems of Choreography: Performing Normal in Public](#)"
- "[How Surveillance Has Always Reinforced Racism.](#)"

Media:

- "[Enemy of the State.](#)" (Note: This dumb media contains violence.)

Class #7 // 3.9.22: *Game Culture, meet Intersectional Feminism*

Readings:

- From Intersectional Tech:
- (-) "Foreward"
- (-) "Acknowledgements"
- (-) Introduction
- (-) "The 'Problem' of Intersectionality in Digital Gaming Culture"
- (-) "#TechFail: From Intersectional (In)accessibility to Inclusive Design"
- (-) "Queering Intersectional Narratives: Claiming Space and Creating Possibilities"
- (-) "Conclusion: Resisting Intersectional Marginalization Using Transmediated Technologies in the Digital Era"
- "[How the Personal Computer Broke the Human Body](#)"
- "[Common Cyborg](#)"

Media:

- "[Disability Justice](#)"
- "[San Junipero](#)"

Class #8 // 3.16.22: *Where Bodies End and the World Begins*

Readings:

- What Can A Body Do?
- "[Disability, Bias, and AI \(Research Summary\)](#)"

Media:

- [@aannggeelll's Tommy Hilfiger Ad](#)
- "[If You Build It...](#)" (Particularly the "Body Meets World" segment, though the entire episode is great.)
- "[Mixtape podcast: Artificial intelligence and disability](#)"
- "[We @GoogleATAP have been working...](#)"

Art to Review:

- [If Robots Could Dance | At Home](#)
- [Revel In Your Body](#)
- [One + One Make Three](#)

Class #9 // 3.23.22: [B*tch I'm a Ghost](#)

What echoes of earlier epidemics can be gleaned from within the one we live within?

Readings:

- From: [How to Make Dances in an Epidemic](#):
- (-) "Acknowledgements"
- (-) "Introduction"
- (-) "Blood and Sweat"
- "[Duet from Concerto Six Twenty-two](#)"
- "[Choreographies of Protest](#)"
- "[In This Pandemic, Personal Echoes of the AIDS Crisis](#)."
- "[ACT UP: A History Of AIDS/HIV Activism](#)"

Media:

- "[Johnny Mnemonic](#)." (Note: This dumb media nonetheless contains violence, images of blood, strobe effects and sexual content.)
- "[Can You Bring It: Bill T Jones and D-Man In the Waters](#)."

Class #10 // 4.6.22: *Endgame*

"But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!" - Samuel Beckett, "Endgame"

Art to Review:

- [Google Maps Hacks](#)
- [Human-out-of-the-loop](#)

Readings:

- From [Embodied Computing](#):
- (-) "Acknowledgements"
- (-) "Introduction"
- (-) "Will the Body Become a Platform? Body Networks, Datafied Bodies, and AI Futures."
- (-) "Designing Technological Compartment: On Wearable Technology, Digital Rituals, and Non-Users."

Media:

- "[Ghost in the Shell](#)"

Class #11 // 4.13.22: *First they came...*

"And so it is not I who makes a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me." - Frantz Fanon, [Black Skin, White Masks](#).

Note: So this course is shaped by intersectional feminist approaches to technology, embodiment, surveillance and capitalism. A text that is intentionally *not* assigned is Shoshana Zuboff's [The Age of Surveillance Capitalism](#). It's an important book on a zeitgeist-y level, but ignores surveillance studies as a field and makes the argument that Surveillance Capitalism is like, the wrong capitalism, I guess? And what we really need is a better, different, new-and-improved capitalism. Which is bananas. Anyway. Read the book if you have the time and the stomach, but probably simpler to listen to this artful podcast takedown, "[Zuboff is a PSYOP](#)" and read Evgeny Morozov's incredible, "[Capitalism's New Clothes](#)."

Readings:

- From [Captivating Technology](#):

- (-) "Foreward"
- (-) "Acknowledge"
- (-) "Introduction: Discriminatory Design, Liberating Imagination"
- (-) "This is Not Minority Report: Predictive Policing and Population Racism"
- (-) "Shadows of War, Traces of Policing: The Weaponization of Space and the Sensible in Preemption"
- (-) "Racialized Surveillance in the Digital Service Economy"

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Media:

- "[Minority Report](#)" (Note: This dumb-but-useful media contains violence, images of blood, vomit and drug use.)
- "['Industry Baby' video as a fundraiser for the Bail Project](#)"
- "[INDUSTRY BABY](#)"

Class #12 // 4.20.22: *Onwards*.

Readings:

- [Glitch Feminism](#):
- "[Equine](#)"
- "[Trans of Color Poetics: Stitching Bodies, Concepts, and Algorithms](#)"

Final Questions:

- What did you find most valuable in this class?