



MUSIC 9542
POSTHUMAN MUSICAL FUTURES
FALL 2024

Instructor: Dr. Kevin Mooney
Office hours: By appointment

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Course Description

On May 7, 2024, Apple announced the release of its new iPad Pro with a short ad that went viral for all the wrong reasons. The ad, entitled “Crush,” shows a gigantic hydraulic press slowly flattening an assemblage of creative artifacts—musical instruments, paint cans, a sculpture—before lifting away to reveal the latest, thinnest, and presumably fastest version of the popular tablet. We are meant to see human creative potential squeezed into an indispensable device. What many saw instead was the pulverization of human connection, culture, and, indeed, creativity. In a rare instance of corporate humility, Apple pulled the ad and issued a public apology: “We missed the mark with this video, and we’re sorry.”

The barrage of criticism prompted by “Crush” signals our increasingly ambivalent attitude to technology. We are living in a world of profound technological change: smart devices, social media, streaming, data centres, Internet of things, 3D printing, gene editing, geo-engineering, virtual reality, cyber warfare, artificial intelligence. How is this revolution changing our lives? How is it changing the ways we think, and our sense and experience of ourselves? What does it mean to be human in our networked, virtualized, technologically mediated, and physically degraded world? Is the concept “human” in need of a reboot?

Posthumanism responds to these and related questions. This course begins by exploring some key texts and themes of critical posthumanism. We will then pursue the central claim that we are already “posthuman” and consider some implications of that idea. Finally, we will turn to music as a specific instance of our posthumanity and begin to plot musical futures along four sight lines: composition, performance, consumption, and collaboration. The posthuman musical future is now. This course will look into its eyes and extend our gaze forward to consider the promise, peril, and possibility of our brave new world!

Course Materials

Course readings and links to audio and video resources will be provided by the instructor.

Course Learning Outcomes

Students will gain an understanding of scholarship addressing music and posthumanism.
Students will learn to interpret texts and formulate viewpoints on music and technoculture.
Students will become aware of the potential and pitfalls of emerging AI technologies.
Students will develop research skills to explore cross-disciplinary relationships.
Students will learn how concepts or models from other fields can inform the study of music.
Students will learn to communicate relationships between music, culture, and technology.

Course Requirements

Assigned readings, class participation, AI project, final paper proposal and bibliography, final paper.

Evaluation

Participation (20%)
AI project (20%)
Proposal and bibliography (10%)
Final paper (50%)

Participation

I expect you to come to class prepared to make informed contributions. You should be ready to respond to any discussion questions distributed in advance. If you miss more than one class without prior approval, you will forfeit this portion of your grade.

AI Project (3-5-page paper)

You will select either a language-based generative AI model (e.g., GPT-4, Gemini, Claude) or a media-based AI model (e.g., DALL-E, MuseNet, Suno) and write a short paper that critically explores the model's capabilities, the industries or fields it impacts, and the ethical considerations it raises. Due Oct. 21–25.

Proposal and bibliography

Submit a final paper proposal and bibliography to me by email by Nov. 4–8. This should include a 1-page overview of your planned project and a working bibliography (5–10 sources).

Final Paper (4000–6000 words)

Your final paper, 10–15 pages in length (excluding bibliography), should be submitted by email as a properly formatted Word document by midnight, December 6.

Enrollment Restrictions

Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in the Music, as well as any student who has obtained special permission to enroll in this course from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student's home program.

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously, and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

Note especially that plagiarism is a major scholastic offence. Students are expected to write all assignments in their own words. If you take an idea from another author, you must acknowledge this by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing.

Statement on Health and Wellness

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health Support at <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Statement on Accommodation for Medical Illness

The Graduate Program in Music recognizes that a student's ability to meet his/her academic responsibilities may, on occasion, be impaired by illness or injury. To ensure fairness and consistency for all students, academic accommodation for work representing 10% or more of the student's course grade shall be granted only in those cases where there is documentation indicating that the student was seriously affected and could not reasonably be expected to meet his/her academic responsibilities. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the office of the Associate Dean (Graduate Studies), not to the course instructor.

Students with special learning needs or other circumstances are asked to inform the instructor as soon as possible so that necessary accommodations can be considered.

Accessible Education Western (AEW)

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program. Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI)

Students *may* use generative AI tools such as ChatGPT to ideate or ask research questions, to create an essay outline, to edit or receive feedback on self-authored work for the purposes of revision.

Students *may not* use generative AI to produce the final submission of written assignments. Content produced by generative AI and incorporated into your work must be cited appropriately

(see [HERE](#)). You should keep a log of any GAI-produced content and be prepared to disclose this upon request.

Finally, remember that AI results can be biased, inaccurate, or invented (“hallucinations”). You are responsible for any AI-assisted work you submit. Avoid sharing copyrighted material, personal information, and Western institutional data with AI tools.

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Western University is located on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeevak and Chonnonton Nations, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. This land continues to be home to diverse Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) whom we recognize as contemporary stewards of the land and vital contributors of our society.

