



Humanities, AI, and Graduate Education



Council of Graduate Schools Meeting

Thomas A. Lewis, Dean of Graduate School
Brown University
July 2025

Humanities, AI, and Graduate Education

- Preliminary thoughts/caveats
- A humanities lab

Models-Scale-Context: AI and the Humanities

- Three (interacting) lines of inquiry
- A final note on writing and critical thought

Preliminary thoughts/caveats

- Distinguishing our questions
Beyond Good or Evil
- Following and supporting our students

Models-Scale-Context: AI and the Humanities

- A lab, hosted by the Cogut Institute for the Humanities
- Led by **Holly Case**, Professor of History and Humanities, and **Suresh Venkatasubramanian**, Professor of Data Science and Computer Science and Humanities and Interim Director of Data Science.
- <https://humanities.brown.edu/programs/chi/ailab>

— Models

We have been struck by different levels of awareness and instrumentalization of what is left out of models across disciplines. Though modeling is viewed more critically in the humanities generally, the humanities are also prone to presume that modeling is a largely unreflexive undertaking in the sciences, which it is not. However, there is a difference in the function of reflexivity across disciplines. We plan to study:

- How models are understood across disciplines and various techno-creative endeavors.
- The relationship between models and metaphors/analogies, theories, or ideal types/forms, and how these valences in the meaning and function of models inform our approach to large language models.
- How to characterize the relationship between a model and the thing itself, or instances in which models take on lives of their own, and how this quality of emergence relates to the notion of subjectivity/personhood.
- How different data and algorithmic models are understood and operate the world, and what aspects of society need rethinking given recent technological advances such as text-to-image diffusion models, LLMs, and other deep/machine learning breakthroughs.

+ Scale

+ Context

PERSPECTIVE

'Sovereignty' Myth-Making in the AI Race

RUI-JIE YEW, KATE ELIZABETH CREASEY, SURESH VENKATASUBRAMANIAN / JUL 7, 2025

This piece is part of “Ideologies of Control: A Series on Tech Power and Democratic Crisis,” in collaboration with [Data & Society](#). Read more about the series [here](#).



NVIDIA CEO Jensen Huang delivers remarks as President Donald Trump looks on during an “Investing in America” event, Wednesday, April 30, 2025, in the Cross Hall of the White House. (Official White House [photo](#) by Joyce N. Boghosian)

In late May, US President Donald Trump made an official trip to a number of [Arab Gulf States](#) accompanied by over three dozen CEOs from US-based big technology companies that resulted in over \$600 billion dollars worth of deals and celebratory proclamations by Gulf leaders, including Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, that their countries would now become hubs for independent, groundbreaking AI research and development in the [Middle East](#). In what can only be

AUTHORS



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Rui-Jie Yew is a PhD student at Brown, where she conducts research on AI policy. She holds an S.M. from MIT.



KATE ELIZABETH CREASEY

Kate Elizabeth Creasey is a historian interested in AI and sovereignty in the Global South. She is currently finishing her PhD dissertation on the 1980 military coup d'état in Turkey at Brown University.



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Suresh Venkatasubramanian directs the Center for Tech Responsibility at Brown University, where he is a professor of Computer Science and Data Science.

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JUNE 15, 2025

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BOOK SERIES

***Mechanema: AI & the Humanities*, a Cornell UP book series**

μηχάνημα: 1. *machine, mechanical device*, esp. *engine of war*; 2. *subtle contrivance*, freq. in tragedies.

While Artificial Intelligence has been with us for decades, the recent rise of high-performing models is due to both technical changes (the “transformer” architecture) and an emphasis on “generation.” Generative AI, as exemplified by systems such as GPT or DeepSeek, is now able to output increasingly convincing poems, narratives, historical summaries, translations, images, movies, and music—all productions usually seen as the “natural objects” of the humanities. But is *generation* the same thing as *creation*? Are we and our machines speaking the same language? Are we even communicating with each other? Why, and when, should humans outsource their speech, imagination, or symbolic life to their own devices? And, by the way, who is controlling whom, and what? Such are some of the questions this new book series intends to tackle.

AI offers both a monumental challenge and, yes, a timely opportunity for the humanities to rethink, clarify, and assert themselves by making an unequivocal claim to the specificities of their scholarship. In a technological time dominated by big data and probabilistic prediction, by surveillance and social conformism, the individual volumes in this series demonstrate the paradoxically increased relevance of the humanistic dedication to both *plurality* (of historical eras, of cultures, of agencies) and *singularity* (of experience, of a text or artwork, of a situated practice or idea).

Elements to highlight

- Interdisciplinary
- Collaborative
- Respectful
- Pluralistic

Three (interacting) lines of inquiry

- Historical, political, and social contexts
E.g., history of earlier attempts to provide mechanistic accounts of thought; political dynamics of current adoption
- Probing the theoretical limits of AI (and ourselves)
E.g., conceptual, philosophical questions around the nature of intelligence and consciousness
- How AI will transform the way we do work in the humanities

Thank you



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