



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

Convenors: Prof Laura Bear (LSE) and Dr Teodor Zidaru-Bărbulescu (LSE)

Workshop Dates: November 2nd – 6th, 2020

250-word abstracts, submission deadline: September 7th, 2020

Submit abstracts to: dialogues-on-ai@outlook.com

Attendance at the workshop will be entirely remote.

Data Science and the Social Sciences: Dialogues on Artificial Intelligence -Call for Papers-

Artificial Intelligence technologies are said to augur the fourth industrial revolution. In the drive to realise such forecasts of economic growth and productivity, data science has taken centre stage. More and more governments and industries are funding data science research to develop and integrate AI technologies in everything from healthcare, urban planning, governance, journalism and language translation, to finance, marketing, logistics, and manufacturing. By contrast, the relevance of the social sciences to AI projects is less recognised. Rigid demarcations between the social and the technical, displayed in computer science curricula as well as in the allocation of public research funds, continue to replicate this interdisciplinary imbalance. Some social science contributions unfold as post-hoc external critiques. Others are recognised within a shared yet limited conversation around ethical principles for AI and the trustworthiness of AI systems. We believe the social sciences can and should actively shape the design and implementation of AI technologies. We take inspiration from current attempts within LSE to achieve this, and we would like to push these cross-disciplinary dialogues further.

We propose that a shared focus on language and trust can create further scope for constructive interdisciplinary dialogues. Language and language-like forms are critical to the design of contemporary datasets and machine-learning algorithms, and yet critical linguistic anthropology has rarely been used to understand these. More than merely about formal systems made up of signs and syntax, the 'linguistic' here also refers to a broad variety of discursive forms and practices (e.g. words, statements, narratives, styles, registers, texts, genres, ideas about language) as media for social action and the (re)constitution of inequalities in political and economic life. As such, a focus on language promises to re-align the ways in which AI systems encode experience as information with the broader social and historical contexts that such processes of inscription and classification are situated in.

Similarly, AI technologies have brought questions of trust into the public and scientific limelight, yet such debates have nevertheless had more to do with the trustworthiness of AI systems, as a quality attainable through technical and ethical fixes, rather than with trust as an irreducibly social activity, as per the anthropology of trust. Rarer still is the acknowledgement of linguistic forms as critical to experiences of trust, scepticism, and uncertainty across a variety of scales, ranging from the interpersonal to the institutional.

Departing from the interface of the anthropologies of trust and language, we call for a theory of trust as emerging in and through language, which mediates communication and thereby allows the terms of trust to be negotiated, imposed, enforced, or otherwise subverted. Since linguistic forms are dynamically entangled in broader social relations of extraction, accumulation, surveillance, as well as empathy and care, a focus on language can help foreground how specific modes or regimes of trust emerge at the confluence of linguistic and metalinguistic phenomena. Thus, we welcome contributions that engage with – but are not exclusive to – the following questions:

- ❖ What language ideologies and ontological assumptions inform meaning-making in data science? What implications do such ideas and assumptions bear for how AI systems perceive the world and communicate with humans? Do the patterns, correlations, and languages that AI systems create merely represent the world in new ways, or are we otherwise seeing world-making processes being set in motion? If the latter, what then are the politics and pragmatics of automated words, texts, voices, gestures, actions, and other communicative events?
- ❖ How are narratives about the trustworthiness of AI systems influencing their development? What do tropes such as ‘transparency’, ‘privacy’, or ‘ethics’ achieve in scientific and statistical work on AI? What implications do such tropes bear for the conceptualisation of trust under other ideas about language and AI, such as those emerging from the fields of law, management, or media and communication studies? What representations of trust and sociohistorical change do programming languages reflect or obscure? What is the effect of algorithmic media on linguistic and sociocultural practices of trust and scepticism? To what extent do algorithmic evaluations of human lives make rethinking trust a pressing interdisciplinary concern?
- ❖ What are the inequalities generated or reproduced by big data and algorithmic analytics? Do these inequalities link up with certain assumptions about language and speech or with metalinguistic discourses? How diverse are the ways of hearing, reading, and speaking characteristic of machine-learning algorithms, and to what extent do such linguistic or semiotic ideologies rub off the corporations and institutions that create, commission, or otherwise seek to influence the implementation of AI systems?
- ❖ How does the labour of translation between human and digital modes of communication dovetail with the production of economic value? What kinds of biopolitical subjectivities emerge while living with algorithms and participating in data ecologies? How do historical patterns of surveillance, extraction, and accumulation create differential vulnerabilities for individuals and communities?
- ❖ Must AI always perpetuate the biases of its human makers? Or could we design AI systems that can objectify and revise their own biases as they encounter different ethical, aesthetic, and culturally specific values, histories, and modes of existence? In other words, how might the social sciences push for design justice by redefining what counts as ‘intelligence’ in the development of AI?

This online-only workshop will take place through a series of short meetings spread out over three to five days between November 2nd – 6th 2020, according to participants' availability. We think of it as a 'discovery meeting', the first of two conversations. As such, we invite contributions that draw on your current work while opening prospective paths of engagement with the themes and questions outlined above. Participants will deliver 20-minute presentations in panels of three, with roughly 60 minutes of small-group and plenary discussions for each panel. We are prioritising interdisciplinary contributions and discussions. To participate as a presenter, please submit a paper abstract of no more than 250 words by September 7th to: dialogues-on-ai@outlook.com