

**ARAM SINNREICH**

American University



**VICTORIA SIMON**

Felician University



**NATHANIEL LAYWINE**

York University, Toronto



**TUESDAY**

25 JUNE 2024



**TIME**

9:00 AM - 10:15 AM



**VENUE**

OUT KELVIN GROVE,  
E BLOCK, ROOM 557  
(IN PERSON ONLY)

**REGISTER HERE**

## *“Is This Thing On?”*

### *Large Language Models (LLMs) and the Cultural Risks of Bad Jokes*

In this interactive seminar and workshop, we will draw on explicitly Jewish epistemologies that contrast the affordances of large language models (LLMs), and their associated chatbots with the context-based logics of Jewish joke craft and storytelling. We assert that the fundamentally literalist and positivistic construction of meaning inherent to LLMs is structurally inconsistent with the theory of meaning inherent to Jewish humor, which relies heavily on nonlinear signification to do its cultural work. These orthogonal logics, in combination with the implicit biases and exaggerated stereotypes inherent to virtually all AI-generated depictions of ethnicity and identity, bring to light the risk of cultural erasure that is posed by the positivist, denotative meanings associated with ChatGPT's attempts at producing jokes for, or about, Jews.

Seminar participants will engage in the experimental methodology of kibbitzing; a Yiddish term that has taken on a cultural meaning of casual conversation, somewhere between teasing, gossiping, debating, and joking around. We understand kibbitzing as a form of collective inquiry and self-reflexive praxis. We kibbitz about ChatGPT precisely because we can't chat about it. While chatting is formal, transmissive, and institutional in its structural logics, kibbitzing is casual, playful, and collective. One may chat to someone or something, but one can only kibbitz with someone because the practice is inherently intersubjective.

In the practice of kibbitzing, we will share contextual understanding and build consensual, situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988). By examining our assumptions and positionalities, we actively engage in a process of shared techno-critical self-awareness (Brock, 2020), while exploring the role that AI plays in our personal and public lives. We will also crack jokes! (Whether or not they are funny remains to be determined.)