

# Rhetorics of Queer Technology

Graduate Seminar

Expected Enrollment: 8-10 Students.

Lecture and Writing Lab Instruction.

## Course Description

Is digital media gender neutral? The problem of analyzing, performing, and subverting gender and sexuality *as* media, rather than simply *through* media, has called for an interdisciplinary set of theoretical and technical commitments across humanities scholarship, gender and sexuality studies, and STEM research. Questions of *how is media gendered* often become *how is gender represented through digital media?* or *How is sexuality performed by digital subjects in digital media?* These important questions are leading to further, more difficult lines of inquiry, and it is the task of a queer analysis of software and digital technology to look at how gender is performed as media: as epistemology, as ideology, and as interface. As calls for, and applications of, interdisciplinarity in research increase, an intersectional study of media as gendered offers a space for scholars to investigate and mobilize instances of digital, gendered activism and performances.

**Rhetorics of Queer Technology** approaches the question of gendered media through a confluence of three areas of research: media studies, gender and sexuality studies, and digital rhetoric studies. Core readings will include work from queer activists and scholars working with or through digital media, rhetorical scholars invested in rhetorics of new media, and media scholars redefining what it means to communicate and mediate. Working with the sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit connections between these areas of study, we will work on theoretical material and apply it to software, computer code, and network interfaces. Select weeks during the semester will also involve the application and analysis of theory to software and code provided by the instructor. Our theoretical inquiry will involve understanding the ways in which software functions in a gendered and rhetorical manner, and how activism and advocacy through software can destabilize hegemonic norms like sexuality and gender.

## Course Assignments

**Session Leader and Response:** Each student will present a given reading or set of readings in a course-leading discussion focused on teaching and/or demonstrating that reading to the class. Discussions will also make connections between the theory that we read, any code examples assigned for that week, and any current developments to digital communication technology more broadly (this can include social impact, personal use, or professional development).

Furthermore, the presenter will write a 2 page, single-spaced response to that reading.

**Gender and Technology Assignment:** Each student will write and present a queer investigation of some piece of software or communication technology. This will include the application

of course theory toward an understanding of digital technology—its operation as well as its social and epistemological formations. Presentations will focus on the communicative and gendered aspects of the technology, how they are examined through theory, and how they invite subversion or critique. This assignment will include a performance of the technology in question, either as a demonstration or as an in-depth discussion of the technology itself. As the particulars of this requirement will vary greatly depending on the technology in question, close work with me in fashioning your presentation is mandatory. Furthermore, I will require a multi-entry, narrative "user experience" journal regarding your experience with the technology, focusing on your awareness of, practice with, and (potential or realized) subversion of the gendered and sexualized norms at play.

**Major Assignment:** Each student will complete a major assignment for the class. This can take the form of one of two choices:

- A **Seminar Paper** on a topic related to the class. If you are working in a similar area and are currently seeking to write a paper for publication, a conference, or as a chapter in your dissertation, this would be acceptable. However, if seeking this route you must consult with me regarding its applicability and scope before proceeding.
- A **Project proposal** that outlines the potential for a research project based on some topics discussed in the class, but focusing heavily on a technology or collection of technologies. Proposals will include basic components such as an introduction, literature review, implementation discussion, conclusions, scope, costs, etc., but will ground itself specifically in the content of the course, and its application and potential intersections with activism and cultural praxis.

**Performance and Technology:** Regardless of the Major Assignment option chosen, each student will incorporate their work into a performance for the class. This performance will embody and enact the potential for activism and social engagement in that student's work. The criteria of each performance will vary between projects, but will focus on the Major project the student committed themselves to, as focus on the relationship of digital media and gender. There is no need to know how to code or develop software: performances are to be experimental in terms of medium, approach, and critical lens. Performances will take place at the end of the semester.

## Schedule

### Week 1: Introduction to Queer Computing

*Readings:*

Blas, Zach, and Micha Cardenas. "Imaginary Computational Systems: Queer Technologies and Transreal Aesthetics." *AI and Society* (October 2013).

Gaboury, Jacob. "On Uncomputable Numbers: The Origins of a Queer Computing." *Media-N*. <http://median.newmediacaucus.org/caa-conference-edition-2013/on-uncomputable-numbers-the-origins-of-a-queer-computing>.

## **Week 2: Programming and Rhetoric**

### *Readings:*

Sample, Mark and Annette Vee. "Introduction to the Role of Computational Literacy in Computers and Writing." *Enculturation* (October 2012). <http://enculturation.net/computational-literacy>.

Cummings, R.E. "Writing With Power: Toward a Rhetoric of Computer Coding and Composition." *Computers and Composition* 23 (2006): 430 - 443.

Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press (2011).

## **Week 3: Performance and Gender with New Media**

### *Readings:*

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *The Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press (1990).

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York, NY: Routledge (1993).

Plant, Sadie. *Zeros and Ones*. New York, NY: Doubleday (1997).

Example Software: Python Code Selections.

## **Week 4: Queer Praxis in New Media**

### *Readings:*

Fotopoulou, Aristeia, and Kate O'Riordan. "Queer Feminist Media Praxis," *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*. (Special Issue).

Stone, Sandy. "The 'Empire' Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto." Department of Radio, Television and Film, the University of Texas at Austin (1993).

Example Software: Reddit.

## **Week 5: Queer Enactments in New Media**

### *Readings:*

Rhodes, Jacqueline and Jonathan Alexander. *Techne: Queer Meditations on Writing the Self*. Logan, UT: Computers and Composition Digital Press/Utah State University Press (2015). <http://ccdigitalpress.org/techne>.

Blas, Zach. *transCoder*.

Example Software: Julie Levin Russo's *Slash Goggles*: <http://thearchive2.livejournal.com/1465.html>.

## Week 6: Activism, Digital Art, and Agency

### Readings:

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performances of Politics*. Minneapolis, MNL University of Minnesota Press (1999).

Rand, Erin. *Reclaiming Queer: Activist and Academic Rhetorics of Resistance*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press (2014).

Example Software: The Names Project: <http://www.aidsquilt.org>.

## Week 7: Mediation

### Readings:

Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press (1994).

Gill-Peterson, Julian. "The Technical Capacities of the Body: Assembling Race, Technology, and Gender." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (August 2014): 402-418.

Fotopoulou, Aristeia. "Remediating Politics: Brand(ed) New Sexualities and Real Bodies Online." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 17, no. 3-4 (253-266).

## Week 8: Software and The Swarm

### Readings:

Bowker, Geoffrey C. "Emerging Configurations of Knowledge Expression." *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*. Edited by Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J. Boczkowski, and Kirsten A. Foot. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press (2014): 99-128.

Cooper, Marilyn. "Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted." *College Composition and Communication* 62, no. 3 (2011): 420-449.

Example Software: BitTorrent: [http://www.bittorrent.org/beps/bep\\_003.html](http://www.bittorrent.org/beps/bep_003.html),  
TCP/IP : [http://www.tcpipguide.com/free/t\\_TCPIPProtocols.htm](http://www.tcpipguide.com/free/t_TCPIPProtocols.htm).

## Week 9: Artificial Intelligence and Artificial Life

### Readings:

Kember, Sarah. *Cyberfeminism and Artificial Life*. New York, NY: Routledge (2003).

Halberstam, J. Jack. "Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminism in the Age of the Intelligent Machine." *Feminist Studies* 17, no. 3 (1991): 439-460.

Miller, Carolyn. "What Can Automation Tell Us About Agency?" *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (2007): 137-157.

Example Software: Conway's Game of Life: <https://bitstorm.org/gameoflife>.

## **Week 10: Expressive Intra-Relationships**

*Readings:*

Stormer, Nathan. "Articulation: A Working Paper on *Taxis*." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 3 (2004): 257-284.

Barad, Karen. "Posthuman Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Material Feminisms*. Edited by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press (2008): 120-156.

Holmes, Steve. "Rhetorical Algorithms in Bitcoin." *Enculturation* (August 2014). <http://enculturation.net/rhet>

Example Software: Bitcoin: <https://bitcoin.org/bitcoin.pdf>.

## **Week 11: Spring Break**

*Readings:* none.

## **Week 12: Literacy and Society**

*Readings:*

Fabretti, Fedarica. "Does It Work? The Unforeseeable Consequences of Quasi-Failing Technology." *Culture Machine* 11 (2009).  
<http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/388/409>.

Wajcman, Judy. *Technofeminism*. Malden, MA: Polity Press (2004).

## **Week 13: Procedure and Play**

*Readings:*

Ruberg, Bonnie. "No Fun: The Queer Potential of Video Games that Annoy, Anger, Disappoint, and Hurt." *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* 2, no. 2 (2015): 108-114.

Halberstam, Jack. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press (2011).

Blas, Zach. *Queer Bombs*.

## **Week 14: Formations**

*Readings:*

Terranova, Tiziana. *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*. Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press (2004).

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991). 1242-1299.

## **Week 15: Circulation**

*Readings:*

Galloway, Alexander and Eugene Thacker. *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press (2007).

Gries, Laurie. "Iconographic Tracking: A Digital Research Method for Visual Rhetoric and Circulation Studies." *Computers and Composition* 30, no. 4 (2013): 332-348.

Dingo, Rebecca. "Securing the Nation: Neoliberalism's U.S. Family Values in a Transnational Gendered Economy." *Journal of Women's History* 16, no.3 (2004): 173-186.

## **Week 16: Presentations**

*Readings:*

none.