

Look Who's Computing

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Hi everyone, welcome to Look Who's Computing.

Teaching and Learning on this module will take place in a few different ways: by students reading and viewing texts independently week to week, and then coming together once a week for a two-hour webinar in MS Teams; in week 6 we will have a mid-module assessment which is also part of our learning-- each student will design a seminar handout based on the reading we have done so far on the module; at the end of the module each student will be able to undertake their own research into one of the topics we have discussed for an essay which is the final assessment.

Each week students will be expected to have read/watched the material for discussion in advance of the webinar. In the webinars we will have some discussion, and we also do other short writing activities; during the webinars I may introduce fresh material for us to develop our discussion. If a particular topic interests you and you want to read more, there are suggested extra readings in the weekly descriptions on QMplus, and also an extensive module bibliography. There is no expectation students read beyond the assigned reading to prepare each week. If you have any questions about the reading itself, or accessing material, of the webinars, you can always email me or use my drop in hours, in addition to our webinars.

You will see that most weeks are a mix of reading essays from the module pack and reading/viewing companion texts. The only books we are reading (i.e. not in the module pack) are Margot Lee Shetterly's *Hidden Figures*, and Eugene Lim's *Dear Cyborgs*. Both of these should be widely available (second hand, in the library, as ebooks) but please let me know if you are not able to access copies. We are also watching 4 films and 1 TV show: *The Imitation Game*, *Conceiving Ada*, *The Last Angel of History*, *Black Panther* and *Mr Robot*. These should all be widely accessible but please get in touch if you cannot access these.

Prep for week 1:

Please check you can access all the texts for the module and let me know if there are any issues.

Module Outline

Week 1: We, The Computer Subject: Introduction. Hi! We will be thinking a bit about ourselves as computer subjects, no prep necessary for this discussion.

Week 2: Ada's Analytic Engine: This week kicks off a 4 week block of computer histories, or computer origin stories. We discuss the first computer programmer, Ada

Lovelace, and different ways of representing computing history and who gets to be expert in this history. See QMplus weekly outline for reading.

Week 3: **Hidden Figures:** We continue our discussion on computing history and representation to think about how that history is raced and gendered, and the labour of telling history. See QMplus weekly outline for reading.

Week 4: **Queer Histories of Computing:** Building on the first couple weeks we now look at stories of computer programmers that queer history, or that present the computer itself as a queer subject. See QMplus weekly outline for reading.

Week 5: **Future Histories of the Computational:** This week we face forward to look back, as we study Afrofuturist texts that represent histories of technology and computing as always *about* the future-- whether that be securing it, opening it out, or making new horizons. See QMplus weekly outline for reading.

Week 6: **Researching Origin Stories:** This week students will prepare a handout for further research on any of the topics we have covered in the last four weeks. Instructions are in the weekly QMplus outline and also in the assessment area. In the webinar in week 6 we will share our handouts and discuss the process of working on them. This week's activity is 25% of the overall module assessment.

Week 7: READING WEEK

Week 8: **Cyborgs:** This week we begin three weeks of thinking about ourselves as computer subjects-- are we cyborgs? how do we live with our machines? what sort of political reality is computational life? See QMplus weekly outline for reading. We will read a 1984 essay by the Feminist Science and Technology Studies scholar Donna Haraway to get some language with which we may want to understand and answer these questions.

Week 9: **More Cyborgs:** This week we read a novel which is, amongst other things, trying to work out what it might be like to try and write, think, and act as a cyborg subject; we read it with a recent work of critical theory by Wendy Chun which works to describe the affordances of our lives as networked subjects.

Week 10: **Robots and Cyborgs:** Rounding off this section of the module we will be thinking about the ways our subjectivity is automated and how recent fiction and scholarship has alerted us to do this, and what kind of activism we might want to undertake (or not) as a result.

Week 11: **Essay Workshop:** A webinar devoted to planning and prepping essays, workshopping our ideas.

Week 12: **Individual Essay Consultations.**

Week by Week Schedule

Week 1: We the Computer Subject

This week will be an introductory session and no advanced preparation is required. Please use your study hours for the module this week to get ahead on reading for the coming weeks.

Week 2: Ada's Analytic Engine

Sydney Padua, "Ada Lovelace: The Secret Origin!" (chapter 1) in *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage* (London: Penguin, 2015), pp. 11-39. [in MP]
Sadie Plant, "The Future Looms: Weaving Women and Cybernetics", *Body & Society*, 1 (3-4), (1995): 45-64. [in MP]

Questions for discussion:

- How are bodily and textual matters brought together in Ada Lovelace's analytic engine?
- To what extent might software contain, or emerge from gendered and classed labour practices?
- In what ways does Ada Lovelace's history invite us to think about computation as imaginative and speculative?

Bibliography:

Sandy Stone, "Will The Real Body Please Stand Up?: Boundary Stories About Virtual Cultures", in Michael Benedikt, ed., *Cyberspace: First Steps* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991)
Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997)
Judith Halberstam, "Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminism in the Age of the Intelligent Machine," *Feminist Studies* 17, no. 3 (1991): 439-60.

Week 3: Hidden Figures

Margot Lee Shetterly, *Hidden Figures: The Untold Story of the African American Women Who Helped Win the Space Race* (London: William Collins, 2016). Please focus on reading: the prologue, chapters 1, 2, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and the epilogue.

Questions for discussion:

- What narrative methods does Shetterly use to find and foreground the "hidden figures" of NASA?
- How does Shetterly write about new technologies and workplace and institutional norms—how are novelty and ordinariness described?
- How are race and computing articulated together in *Hidden Figures*?
- What historical threads might connect Dorothy Vaughan's work with software and the story of Ada Lovelace?

Bibliography:

Nathan Ensmenger, *The Computer Boys Take Over* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010)
David Alan Grier, *When Computers Were Human* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Marie Hicks, *Programmed Inequality: How Britain Discarded Women Technologists and Lost Its Edge in Computing* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2017).

Jennifer S. Light, "When Computers were Women", *Technology and Culture* 40. 3 (1999): 455-483.

Tara McPherson, "U.S. Operating Systems at Mid-Century: The Intertwining of Race and UNIX" in *Race After the Internet*, eds. Lisa Nakamura and Peter Chow-White (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 21-37.

Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2006)

Week 4: Queer Histories of Computing

The Imitation Game, dir. Morten Tyldum (2005)

Conceiving Ada, dir. Lynn Hersman Leeson (1999)

[on QMplus] Jacob Gaboury, "A Queer History of Computing", *Rhizome*, 2013

Questions for discussion:

- How is cinema being used to "imagine" the computational and its histories?
- How are queer and computing articulated together in these films, and in Gaboury's histories?
- Thinking back over the last three weeks, how are subjectivity and computation being intertwined, or narrated together? What historical relation between subjects and computers emerges?

Bibliography:

Zach Blas and Micha Cárdenas, "Imaginary computational systems: queer technologies and transreal aesthetics", *AI & Soc* 28 (2013): 559-566.

Marie Hicks, "Computer Love: Replicating Social Order Through Early Computer Dating Systems", *ADA: A Journal of Gender New Media and Technology*, 10 (2016).

Kara Keeling, "Queer OS", *Cinema Journal*, Volume 53, Number 2, Winter 2014, pp. 152-157.

Sam McBean, "The Gamble of Reproduction: *Conceiving Ada's* Queer Temporalities", *Studies in the Maternal* 6.1 (2014): 1-16

G.S. Voss, "'It is a beautiful experiment': queer(y)ing the work of Alan Turing", *AI & Soc* 28 (2013): 567-573.

Week 5: Afrofuturism

The Last Angel of History dir. John Akomfrah (1996)

Black Panther dir. Ryan Coogler (2018)

Excerpts (in MP) from:

Ramon Amaro, "Afrofuturism", in *Posthuman Glossary*, eds. Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 17-20.

Mark Dery, "Black to the Future" in *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1994).

Questions for discussion:

- How does Afrofuturism think about “futuraity” and “historicity”, and “the future” and “the past” across the texts this week?
- How do these films think about technology? How do the films themselves appear as technology?
- How do the films represent racialised subjects in relation to technological subjects?

Bibliography:

Kodwo Eshun. "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 2 (2003): 287-302.

Kara Keeling, *Queer Times Black Futures* (New York: NYU press, 2019).

Namwali Serpall, “Afrofuturism: Everything and Nothing”, *Public Books* (04.01.2016).

Ramzi Fawaz, *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics* (New York: NYU Press, 2016).

Rebecca Wanzo, “Black Nationalism, Bunraku and Beyond: Articulating Black Heroism and Cultural Fusion in Comics”, *Multicultural Comics: From Zap to Blue Beetle*, ed.

Frederick Aldama (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 93-104.

Ytasha Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013).

Week 6: Researching Origin Stories

This week you will be presenting the handouts you have put together for the first assignment. For this assignment, each student will produce a handout of 1000 words on one of the texts listed in the extended bibliographies for weeks 1-4. Instructions for how to put together a handout are below. Before starting this assignment, please read the document “Reading and Writing Critical Theory”, which is posted in in week 6 on QMplus.

This assignment is inspired by an essay on reading critical theory by Kyla Wazana Tompkins, and the pedagogical practice described in that essay. See Tompkins, “Some Notes On How To Ask A Good Question About Theory That Will Provoke Conversation And Further Discussion From Your Colleagues”, *Avidly* online September 13, 2016, <http://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2016/09/12/we-arent-here-to-learn-what-we-know-we-already-know>.

Your handout should include:

1. The full reference for the text you have read
2. A summary of the text (please do not copy and paste the abstract—the summary should be based on *your* reading).
3. 3x bullet points listing what you think are the three key moments in the text
4. A short discussion of the bit of the text you found most sticky—the bit that excited/bothered/agitated you.
5. A question you would like to ask someone who has also read the text
6. Use the bibliography of your chosen text and select 3 items for further reading you think would be interesting (you don’t have to read them).

Week 7: Reading Week

Week 8: Cyborgs

Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", in *The Cybercultures Reader*, eds. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (London, New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 291-324. [in MP]

Questions for discussion:

- How are human and nonhuman actors figured together in the manifesto?
- How does Haraway's cyborg figure emerge out of feminist discourse? What is the significance of gendered labour practices to Haraway's manifesto?
- What tensions are there between liberation and enclosure in Haraway's representation of cyborg praxis?
- What does the manifesto call for?

Bibliography:

Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media and Technology (online journal—browse)

Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

Sarah Franklin, "Staying with the Manifesto: An Interview with Donna Haraway", *Theory, Culture & Society*, 34.4 (2017): 49-63.

Donna Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene", *e-flux* 75 (September 2016).

Posthuman Glossary, eds. Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

Chela Sandoval, *Methodologies of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 2000), 167-178.

Week 9: More cyborgs

Eugene Lim, *Dear Cyborgs* (2017)

Excerpt from Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2016). [in MP]

Questions for discussion:

- What is this novel about, what is it interested in?
- Once you have read the novel think about the title, "Dear cyborgs". What does this unlock about the novel?
- Having read Chun's chapter—how do you understand 'crisis' and 'impasse' in relation to technology, and to Lim's novel?
- Think about your own experiences as a technological subject: are they in this novel?

Bibliography:

Jennifer Chan, "Notes on Post-Internet," in *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications, 2014), pp. 106-123.

Jodi Dean, "Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics," *Cultural Politics* 1, no. 1 (2005): 51-74.

Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2016).

Seb Franklin, *Control: Digitality as Cultural Logic* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2015)

Oliver L. Haimson and Anna Lauren Hoffmann, "Constructing and Enforcing 'Authentic' Identity Online: Facebook, Real Names, and Non-Normative Identities." *First Monday* 21, no. 6 (June 2016).

Joss Hands, "Introduction: Politics, Power and 'Platformivity'", *Culture Machine* 14 (2013): 1-24.

Week 10: Robots and cyborgs

Mr Robot season one (2015)

Excerpt from Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019) [in MP]

Questions for discussion:

- How does the series think about the 'user'?
- How does the series represent computational processes?
- Who/what is Mr Robot?

Bibliography:

Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015)

Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "Race and/as Technology or How to Do Things With Race", *Race After the Internet*, Eds. Lisa Nakamura and Peter A. Chow-White, (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 38-60

Matthew Fuller, "Algorithmic Tumult and the Brilliance of Chelsea Manning," in *A Feminist Companion to the Posthumanities*, eds. Cecilia Åsberg and Rosi Braidotti (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, forthcoming)

E. Gabriella Coleman and Alex Golub, "Hacker practice: Moral genres and the cultural articulation of liberalism", *Anthropological Theory*, 8, no. 3 (2008): 255-277, doi: 10.1177/1463499608093814

Eds. E. Gabriella Coleman and Chris Kelty, *Limn 'Hacks, Leaks, and Breaches'*, 8 (2017).

Zara Dinnen, *The Digital Banal: New Media and American Literature and Culture* (New York: Columbia UP, 2018).

Ellen Ullman, *Close to the Machine: Technophilia and Its Discontents* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1997)

Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online, eds. Julie Rak and Anna Poletti (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014)

Sam McBean, "Digital Intimacies and Queer Narratives", *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Narrative Theories*, eds. Zara Dinnen and Robyn Warhol (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2018), 132-144.

D. E. Wittkower, "Facebook and Dramauthentic Identity: A Post-Goffmanian Theory of Identity Performance on SNS." *First Monday* 4, no. 19 (April 2014).
Christine T. Wolf, "DIY Videos on YouTube: Identity and Possibility in the Age of Algorithms," *First Monday* 21, no. 6 (June 2016).

Week 11: Essay Writing Workshop

Week 12: Essay Tutorials