

Dialogues on Feminism and Technology (femtechnet)

Department of Modern Culture and Media, Brown University
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Course Description:

In her book *When Species Meet*, celebrated feminist and STS theorist, Donna Haraway, reflects on the entertaining tale of her job talk at the University of California, Santa Cruz years ago. She remembers a dinner where a whole host of faculty and graduate students discuss the eating of placenta (mixed with onions) from a recent birth of a mutual colleague. While the dinner guests talked toxins and religion at the table philosophizing over their food, Haraway reflects on the event as a moment in which the posthuman body and experimental thought about “speciesism” became practice and not just theory. She noted how the participants began to “explore the obligations of emergent worlds where untidy species meet,”¹ and the primal importance of ingesting and eating as a bio-social ritual. From stomach-to-stomach, the placenta to guest became more than just an encounter about foreignness; it became an encounter about the epistemic nature of “crossing” DNA within a body, not in a petri plate.

Haraway’s anecdote highlights many issues central to contemporary theorizations of feminisim and technology, issues about the body, difference, affect, surrogacy, ethics, labor, race, sexuality, transformation, taboo, and bioengineering. This experimental course asks students to reexamine the critical practices and discourses of science and technology through a feminist lens. “Dialogues on Feminism and Technology” is part of a worldwide network of feminist scholars, artists, and activists called *femtechnet*. Together, instructors from around the world have collaborated to form a shared set of resources, ideas, and creative assignments to strengthen and innovate feminist discussion about technology. Therefore, our discussion will extend across campuses, regions, and intellectual histories and disciplines to consider the many dimensions of the ever-evolving conversation between feminism and technology. We will ask students to consider how feminist thought and contribution to computing, hacker culture, new media, nanotechnology, game development, surrogacy, genetic culture and a wide range of related topics. Students will be expected to participate in the discussion of the class both online and in person, give short presentations on assigned readings, write a research paper, and complete a creative assignment such as a zine outlined in the the syllabus.

Lastly, you will have to meet the challenge of what it means to participate in a highly experimental course. This should be a fun, safe, and collaborative environment where your ideas about the role of feminism in science and technology are crucial to developing the language for the future of femtechnet and its related courses and activities.

Key Theoretical Fields: Feminist Epistemology, New Materialisms, Posthumanism, Animal Studies, Affect Studies, Queer Culture, STS, Race Studies, etc.

¹ Haraway, *Species*, 294.

Readings

Archive:

Selections from Stacy Alaimo: *Material Feminisms*

Elizabeth Grosz: "Sexual Difference and the Problems of Essentialism"

Body:

Selection from Stacy Alaimo: *Bodily Natures*

Selection from Colin Milburn: *Nanovisions*

Difference:

Selection from Mel Chen: *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*

Discipline:

Selection from Judith Butler: *Same Sex*

Selection from Michel Foucault: *A History of Sexuality*

Ethics:

Selection from Sianne Ngai: "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde" and selections from *Zany, Cute, Interesting*

Selection from Jane Bennett: *Vibrant Matter*

Labor:

Kalindi Vora: "Limits of Labor: Accounting for Affect and the Biological in Transnational Surrogacy and Service Work." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 111:4, Fall 2012. pp. 681-700. <http://saq.dukejournals.org/content/111/4/681.full.pdf+html>

Kalindi Vora: "Medicine, Markets and the Pregnant Body: Indian Commercial Surrogacy and Reproductive Labor in a Transnational Frame." *Scholar & Feminist Online*. 2010. http://barnard.edu/sfonline/reprotech/vora_01.htm

Machine:

Donna Haraway "The Cyborg Manifesto"

Selection from Wendy Chun: *Programmed Visions*

Selection from Eugene Thacker: *Biomedica*

Place/Space:

Selection from Karen Barad: *Meeting the Universe Halfway*

Selection from Trinh T. Minh Ha: *Woman, Native, Other?*

Race:

Selection from Lisa Nakamura: *Digitizing Race*

Chela Sandoval: "New Sciences: Cyborg Feminism and the Methodology of the Oppressed"

Sexualities:

Selection from Mel Chen: *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*

Selection from Eliz

Systems:

Selection from Katherine Hayles: *How we Became Posthuman*

Selection from Wendy Chun: *Control and Freedom*

Transformation:

Selection from Donna Haraway: *When Species Meet*

Selection from Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylińska: *Life After New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process*

Assignments and Grade Structure:**Attendance (10%)**

It is absolutely mandatory that you attend class. Your absence is detrimental to your participation grade and to the rest of the class. In most circumstances, in-class activities and assignments cannot be made up. If you do miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes and homework from a classmate.

Participation (15%)

You will earn your participation by engaging in a variety of in-class work, which may include but is not limited to discussion, freewrites, small group work, close reading exercises, dramatic exercises, etc. These activities will only enrich your understanding of the material if you come to class prepared. The frequency of these assignments will be based on the directions and diligence of the class. In other words, if students appear to be reading the material and coming to class prepared, I will not have to enforce extraneous assignments. However, if I feel that participation is faltering or that students are not fulfilling the requirements of the course, extra assignments will be necessary to ensure meaningful discussion of the material. Your participation grade will also depend on a class presentation you will be responsible for based on a weekly reading.

Keyword Video Assignment (20%)

Students will create keyword videos with the help of the instructional technology department at Brown University on one of the weekly term topics from the course. The videos should be about 10 minutes and provide contextual information from the readings in the course as well as imaginative interpretations and examples from contemporary culture. For example, perhaps you want to discuss the term “Body” in the context of Colin Milburn’s molecular erotics from his book, *Nanovisions* or transgressive animacies Mel Chen’s book, *Animacies*. What do these texts emphasize in terms of how we desire? How do they figure “proper” or “appropriate” ways for bodies to interact? In turn, you could offer a discussion of how these theories are enacted in the popular, political, or aesthetic sphere.

Essay Assignment (25%)

Questions and topics to be assigned. Papers should be 10-12 pages in length (no shorter). Papers due in class on a date TBA; hard copies only. Paper should have at least three peer reviewed sources.

Creative Assignment (30%)

Similar to the Cotton Widow Project or Eleni Sikelianos' *Body Clock*, you are required to collaborate on a creative assignment. You will present your project to the class in a formal presentation with some written supplementary material. Be imaginative with this assignment. Consider conducting a video interview with a biology professor (with permission) and understanding a perspective on feminist issues outside the humanities. Find a local environmental platform in the area and follow them with a camera one day during a campaign. How do issues of materiality and the body figure into their rhetoric? Create a zine with your classmates and other students through the femtechnet network on questions related to the course such as Reproductive Technologies, Surveilling the Female Body, The Unnatural Woman, Women in Computing, etc. I encourage you to use the resources of Brown University and the surrounding area including consulting researchers who work in the Cave, the Science and Technology program, and the Rhode Island School of Design.

Class Policies

Paper Format:

Response papers must be typed, double-spaced, with 12 points Time New Roman font, 1- inch margins, page numbers, and a heading at the upper left-hand corner that includes your name, the instructor's name, the course title, and date, and include citations and a Work Cited page formatted according to MLA or APA style. Do not include a cover page and please assemble/ staple your work prior to class. Printing on both sides of the page is encouraged in order to save paper.

Statement on Academic Dishonesty:

Academic dishonesty is an assault upon the basic integrity and meaning of a University. Cheating, plagiarism, and collusion in dishonest activities are serious acts which erode the University's educational and research roles and cheapen the learning experience not only for the perpetrators, but also for the entire community. It is expected that UCSB students will understand and subscribe to the ideal of academic integrity and that they will be willing to bear individual responsibility for their work.

Diversity in the Classroom:

In all classes policies of tolerance and mutual respect are strictly enforced. I expect each student to show sensitivity towards his/her classmates. Hate speech and other acts of targeted or prejudicial speech will not be tolerated. Any behavior that attempts to intimidate or harass a student will be severely punished by the University Judicial System.

Feedback:

Please understand that I want you to do well. I expect you to work hard, while keeping in mind that you have other classes, work, and social lives that demand your attention. If you are struggling with anything, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can approach me before or after class, during office hours, or via email to let me know of any concerns, questions, or unease.