

AWP Panel Outline Draft (February 2020)

EVENT INFO

Event Title: **Queer and Femme Digital Literature**

Event Time/Location: Thursday, March 5th, 3:20-4:35pm CT, in Room 205 (González Convention Center, Meeting Room Level)

Event Description: YES FEMMES, a digital publishing experiment. HELLO SELFIE, a URL/IRL performance. LADY MOUTH, an intersectional feminist chatbot. EMOJI COLLAGES W/ MATISSE, a drag & paste world. THE INFINITE WOMAN, a computational poetry platform. Panelists discuss their approaches to queer and femme digital literary forms, aesthetics, and processes. What's queer about code? What's femme about remix, pixels, hypertext, emojis? How do queer/femme aesthetics impact the form, content, and interactive experience of multimedia poetry and fiction?

Event Category: Multiple Literary Genres Craft and Criticism

Event Organizer and Moderator: Katie Schaag

Event Participants and Bios:

[Sarah Ciston](#) makes feminist tactical media and writes in prose, poetry, and Python. One of *SF Weekly's* "Best Writers Without a Book," their work appears in *Ada Journal*; *ZYZZYVA*; *Hobart*; and soon in *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*. They hold an MFA from UCSD and are an Annenberg Fellow in Media Arts + Practice at USC.

[Sam Cohen](#) is the author of *SARAH LAND* forthcoming from Grand Central Publishing. Her fiction is recently in *BOMB Magazine*, *Fence*, and *DIAGRAM*. She is a PhD Candidate in USC Dornsife's Creative Writing and Literature PhD, a MacDowell Fellow, the Fiction Editor of *Gold Line Press*, and the Founding Editor of YES FEMMES.

[Kate Durbin](#) is the author of the poetry books *HOARDERS*, *E! Entertainment*, and *Ravenous Audience*. Her interactive poetry app *ABRA: A Living Text*, won an Expanded Artist's Book Grant and the Turn on Literature Prize for Electronic Literature. She's a Visiting Professor of English at Whittier College.

[Feliz Lucia Molina](#) is a poet, writer, and clinical social worker. Her books include Undercastle, The Wes Letters, Roulette (forthcoming), Crystal Marys, and Hair Hearts Flip. While writing a semi-autobiographical screenplay, her social work/therapy practice is focused on the homeless crisis in Los Angeles.

[Sandra Rosales](#) is a queer digital designer and front-end web developer.

[Katie Schaag](#) publishes poems, play scripts, and essays in print and digital journals, and presents her work at museums, libraries, and theatres. She teaches in the Writing & Communication Program at Georgia Tech, where she's also developing a digital creative writing project, The Infinite Woman.

EVENT OUTLINE

Opening Moderator Remarks, Announcements, and Introductions (10 min)

Welcome to our panel on “Queer and Femme Digital Literature.”

[Accessibility statement]

A few accessibility reminders before we begin:

- For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let me know and a printed copy of the presentation will be delivered to you.
- Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
- Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
- Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing perfume.
- Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone's use of an accommodation, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.
- If you have any questions or concerns regarding conference accessibility, please call or text the Accessibility Hotline (503) 455-4127 or email events@awpwriter.org.

[Updates, Agenda, Statement of purpose]

Again, welcome to the “Queer and Femme Digital Literature” panel.

My co-panelists were unable to join us in person, but in the spirit of the digital, they will still be presenting from afar. We also have an additional digital presenter, Sarah Ciston, who wasn’t listed in the original event info.

First, I’ll introduce each speaker in alphabetical order. Then each speaker will do a short presentation – either live or video-recorded. Next, our digital presenters will join us for a roundtable discussion, followed by audience Q&A.

The purpose of our panel is to move toward defining a queer/femme digital literary aesthetic. Each speaker will discuss their approaches to queer or femme digital literary forms and processes, with specific examples drawn from their current projects. Then we’ll attempt to glean some patterns toward a working theory of queer/femme digital aesthetics. What’s queer about code? What’s femme about remix, pixels, hypertext, emojis? How do queer/femme aesthetics impact the form, content, and interactive experience of multimedia poetry and fiction? These guiding questions will frame what we hope will be an energizing, wide-ranging conversation.

[Introduce and identify all speakers in alphabetical order,
with bio photos projected on screen.]

Sarah Ciston makes feminist tactical media and writes in prose, poetry, and Python. One of *SF Weekly*'s “Best Writers Without a Book,” their work appears in *Ada Journal*; *ZYZZYVA*; *Hobart*; and soon in *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*. They hold an MFA from UCSD and are an Annenberg Fellow in Media Arts + Practice at USC.

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Sandra Rosales is a queer digital designer and front-end web developer.

I, Katie Schaag, publish poems, play scripts, and essays in print and digital journals, and present my work at museums, libraries, and theatres. I teach in the Writing & Communication Program at Georgia Tech, where I'm also developing a digital creative writing project, The Infinite Woman.

Individual Presentations (40 min)

Sarah Ciston (8 min)

LADYMOUTH, an intersectional feminist chatbot

[video presentation]

Presentation Details:

(FYI a very intense project about misogyny, with offensive, disturbing language throughout.)

LADYMOUTH is a chatbot that tries to explain feminism to misogynists on Reddit. I wrote this code to investigate how harmful language is embodied and embedded in our everyday lives. By resituating the interactions of misogynists with a feminist bot into creative and critical public spaces, I wanted to ask how how machine bodies and flesh bodies process digital information, and whether technology can help us address the very problems it exacerbates. Visit ladymouth.wtf to sample the bot and contribute to its next version.

Sam Cohen & Sandra Rosales (8 min)
YES FEMMES, a digital publishing experiment

[video presentation]

Presentation Details:

YES FEMMES is an online experiment that publishes writing and digital projects working toward a femme aesthetic. We're interested in writing that explores the limits of the body, that's campy or fannish, that engages with witchcraft or the occult, that has an excess of feeling, that looks to animals and plants as models or collaborators, that considers how digitality might be femme, and that moves toward the horizon of queerness.

Kate Durbin (5 min)
HELLO SELFIE, a URL/IRL performance

[video presentation]

Presentation Details:

Hello Selfie is an URL/IRL performance about gender and the selfie phenomenon. First performed with femme performers for Perform Chinatown in Los Angeles (2014), the piece consists of performers covered in hello kitty stickers taking selfies in a public space for an hour straight, uploading the selfies in real time to a FB event wall, and ignoring the IRL audience in the spirit of what Durbin calls "passive aggressive performance art." The IRL audience became a part of the piece by taking their own selfies within the space of the performance.

The piece was subsequently performed in Union Square NYC with Transfer Gallery (2014), and in Miami with Transfer Gallery for the Pulse Art Fair (2015).

Feliz Lucia Molina (10 min)

EMOJI COLLAGES W/ MATISSE, a drag & paste world

[video presentation]

Presentation Details:

Emoji Collages w/ Matisse is a relation between the pictorial and speedy language of emojis and the collage or painterly scene which reconfigures the narrative environment of Matisse. It's a way to collage another 'world' in whatever Matisse painting by using emojis to describe the re-imagined world. It's also a fun way to project my own fantasies onto a painting or scene by using the ordinariness of emojis. The result is funny because it took some effort just to look banal.

Katie Schaag (8 min)

THE INFINITE WOMAN, a computational poetry platform

[live presentation]

Presentation Details:

The Infinite Woman is an interactive poetry platform hosted at theinfinitewoman.com. A continuously mutating digital book, *The Infinite Woman* computationally performs contemporary poetic techniques of remix (combining two or more texts) and erasure (removing or extracting existing language to reveal patterns). It's a cross-platform web app and should be compatible with all devices and all internet browsers (except Safari). With my creative direction, the platform was designed and implemented by Alayna Panlilio, Ryan Power, Josh Terry, Alex Yang, and Jeffrey Zhang at the Georgia Institute of Technology in 2019.

As a feminist critique and artistic intervention, the project remixes excerpts from Edison Marshall's novel *The Infinite Woman* (1950) and Simone de Beauvoir's philosophy book *The Second Sex* (1949). Marshall's novel is a melodramatic, male-authored, first-person fictional narrative in the voice of Lola, a protagonist who embodies the ideal of natural womanhood. Beauvoir's existentialist philosophy of gender deconstructs the myth of "the eternal feminine." The web app digitally recontextualizes the voice of "the infinite woman" as a machine.

An n-gram algorithm procedurally generates infinitely scrolling sentences that recombine and recontextualize the two source texts' vocabulary and syntactic patterns. By remixing Marshall and Beauvoir, the algorithm infinitely generates language that attempts to describe and critique an eternal feminine essence. Revealing patterns through iterative permutations, the algorithm stretches the logic of the infinite woman to the breaking point. Meanwhile, fog slowly erases the screen – materializing “the misty mirror of the eternal feminine” (Marshall + Beauvoir).

Users can select sentences from the infinitely scrolling text to send to the canvas workspace, where they can erase words and rearrange sentences. These user-generated erasure poems are multivocal repetitions with a difference, rewriting the ephemeral voice of the infinite woman. The deconstructive gesture becomes a generative gesture, proliferating possibilities for reimagining womanhood and femininity with trans and nonbinary perspectives at the forefront.

Roundtable Discussion (15 min)

[Kate, Sam, and Sarah will participate via video chat]

Moderator Questions

followed by initial responses of each participant:

#1. How would you define a queer/femme digital aesthetic? Does it exist? If so, what is it? What's femme about code? What's queer about erasure? What's femme about remix, pixels, hypertext, emojis? Based on features of your own work, the other panelists' work, and/or broader trends, what formal techniques, methods, platforms, mediums, and/or processes do you associate with specifically queer or femme multimedia literature?

Sarah Ciston

I would say there is no one queer/femme aesthetic but a multitude of aesthetics, that the plurality itself is part of the aesthetic. That said, certain patterns emerge: drawing on earlier analog lineages and material practices that are dismissed as non-legitimate knowledge (e.g. craft/domestic/women's work).

In relation to digital media and code, I often look to Kara Keeling's idea of the QueerOS—it signals how our cultural and technical systems are incredibly material and intertwined, and it proposes a socio-technical operating system “to facilitate and support imaginative, unexpected, and ethical relations,” working at odds with the logics of the current systems it recognizes itself within.

Sam Cohen

I would associate explosive feelings, a refusal of linear logic, decorative prose, longing, shifting or plural subjectivity with queer and femme literature in general. And, yes, as you say Katie, remix--a need to tell a story again and again, in different ways, from multiple perspectives, or to find within it what's untold. Digital forms can help with this as hypertext is ready to tell a story with multiple pathways, a digital palimpsest can offer multiple or hidden meanings within a text, and there are ways that the user can be included in authorship.

Kate Durbin

From 2011-2013 I created an archive on Tumblr for what I called "the teen girl tumblr aesthetic," a hyper-femme Internet aesthetic. **Women as Objects** is a curation of tumblr posts that revel in the glittering, pastel, abject, girly, grotesque, (dis)embodied, and angsty. The posts for the project highlight the creativity, intelligence, and ambivalence of a particular subset of young femmes, growing up on the Internet.

I was especially interested in the way authorship functioned on Tumblr, where users primarily reblogged and altered images from the Tumblr stream, as opposed to creating wholly original content, and where the original author was frequently unattributed. There was something about the way images and ideas were shared on the early Tumblr platform that felt very anti-hierarchical. It's also significant that the teen girl tumblr aesthetic was ripped off by high end fashion brands and

celebrities, like the work of many radical, artistic subcultures have been throughout history.

Feliz Lucia Molina

Anything strange, odd, beautiful, and unique, is queer without needing to be framed in a sexual or gendered way. I believe that aesthetics in analog and digital form is inherently queer because we, the creators, exist. And so, whatever we create in the virtual and IRL is a chance to continue this love affair we have with our own otherness and queerness which is to say, the situation of being alive. Because I am dead without my otherness and othering and contradictions. Erasure, as a textual device, is of course linked to the history and ongoing present of queer bodies and queernesses in general (be it ideological) being erased, done away with, destroyed. The classic example is Alan Turing - queer father/mother of the internet who was forced to ingest hormones by the British government to essentially unqueer himself during WWII even while his Turing machine was pivotal to codebreaking and fighting Nazis. Now I'm thinking about Juan Pujol aka Agent Garbo, the double-agent for the Allies who created various identities for himself to orchestrate a beautiful fake victory to trick the Nazis into thinking they won over some territory which effectively helped to end their genocide. This is getting out bounds of what I'm trying to say about erasure practices in relation to queerness but I want to stress that when a specific race, class, or gender attempts to erase whatever is perceived as other, it's a cruel act of annihilation. Erasure is more than a verb - it's an ideology that is witnessed every day in the way that structural systems neglect and abandon the poor and privilege the celebrated and the rich. And isn't having to do work of any kind in order to survive, itself an erasure of the 'human spirit' and a type of drag for the sake of customer service and the like? There is no other place rich with the drag-of-the self than the place and situation of one's work. While I agree with some that everything is drag, I feel this especially in the spaces of work or however way we get our money.

Queerness>erasure>money>survival not in that order. Femme has enabled me to 'exist' or 'survive' in predominantly heteronormative spaces and situations whenever i feel like not questioning my identity and role as a daughter, sister, wifey, pronoun, or place. I don't think of myself as femme in a way that I might/may have idealized it from constructivist brainwashing <3

Katie Schaag

For me, a queer femme aesthetic is like a hyper-saturated, self-conscious, postmodern, performative femininity. Glitter, sequins, lip gloss, nail polish, dELiA*s magazine. Lots of neon pink and slime green. This feeling is informed by my '90s childhood and teenhood, and my '00s teenhood and adulthood. As a Gender Studies major I disidentified with femininity, and then I re-identified with it as a transformed, queerer aesthetic mode. Digitally, I think the queer femme aesthetic was innovated in spaces like Tumblr and MySpace, with tools like Blingee and Angelfire Dollz. And of course it's so much more than that, but the nail polish emoji is still pretty key.

I think that Sam Cohen and Sandra Rosales' digital publishing project *Yes Femmes* crystallizes a queer femme digital aesthetic. In Issue #1 I love the huge pink hand with pointing finger cursor with red nail polish outlined in neon green, hovering over purple text superimposed on floating pink clouds. Their project "considers how digitality might be femme," and by curating contributions as well as shaping the look and feel of the website itself, they create a space for this aesthetic to be collectively crafted and revised. The second issue celebrates how fandom and "gushiness" can "open portals to worlds." The diversity of form and content in the multimedia work featured in the two issues is a testament to the richness of the contemporary landscape of queer femme digital artistic and literary production.

Kate Durbin's early online projects *Women as Objects* and *Gaga Stigmata* shaped and reflected women and femmes' key contributions to internet aesthetics. Her performance project *Hello Selfie* activates the female gaze online and IRL, values femme labor in image production, and invents a sequence of aesthetic palettes that reference and reshape the landscape of femme self-making. I love the mermaid tones and Hello Kitty sticker proliferation, and the mediated interface between the digital and the physical. Her collaboration with Amaranth Borsuk, *ABRA*, is an analogue and digital femme spellbook that genders the interactive writing process, and her books *E! Entertainment* and the forthcoming *Hoarders* meditate on the speech and actions of women in reality television shows without trivializing them.

Feliz Lucia Molina's early epistolary projects *Nail Hearts Clip* and *Hair Hearts Flip* mirrored and invented the femme internet aesthetic. The twin projects archive a series of multimedia blog posts made by two friends, elevating everyday musings to the status of art and celebrating female friendship. I love the assemblage of writing styles, tonal registers, and media elements in this project, as well as the humor throughout her work. Her book *Undercastle* is saturated with internet

language, grappling with the mediation between the digital and physical worlds. Her visual project *Emoji Collages with Matisse* playfully remixes early 20th century painting with early 20th century emojis, recontextualizing how we use images to represent and shape our environments.

Sarah Ciston's intersectional feminist chatbot project *ladymouth* uses computational techniques to disrupt sexist online discourse. The aesthetics of the project can be located in the process of writing code to procedurally generate responses to sexist comments, selecting feminist texts to inform the chatbot's speech, and crafting language to intervene in the resulting conversations. Their project *UNCERTAINTYINDEX*, an "interactive poem of the quantified self," situates lines of poetry alongside a running log of data tracking mental, physical, and financial health, and their language-based GIFs query the boundaries between text and image. I love that her computational aesthetics always foreground affect, mediation, and embodiment.

Finally, my digital poetry platform *The Infinite Woman* visualizes the linguistic aesthetics of remix and erasure in the form of an endlessly scrolling litany of gendered utterances, and a fog that slowly rolls in and erases the page. The project critiques the constructs of womanhood and femininity while also opening creative space for cis, trans, and nonbinary women and femmes to renegotiate the language that shapes and reflects lived experience. The accent color is pink to invoke this color's use as one of sexism's many essentialist tools (e.g. "It's a girl!" = pink) as well as its reclaiming as a queer feminist gesture (e.g. Janelle Monae's *PYNK*). The aesthetics of the platform embody some of the stereotypes of femininity (cold, mysterious, surface-oriented), as a satire and also as a space for creative play.

Of course, our panel represents only a small sample of the vast field of queer and femme digital aesthetics. From N. Katherine Hayles to Amaranth Borsuk and Lillian-Yvonne Bertram, women, femmes, and nonbinary people have been at the forefront of defining and making electronic literature.

Moving forward, I think a key queer femme intervention into digital aesthetics will be insisting on the haptic, the tactile, the kinaesthetic, and the embodied. Women, femme, and queer subjects have long been associated with exteriority over interiority, surface over substance. The centrality of the flat screen to digital objects has been a fascinating space to renegotiate the surface *as* substance, and the movement to consider hardware, software, platforms, and programming as the behind-the-scenes mechanisms producing user interfaces has been an important development toward complicating the binary between digital and physical.

Whether with virtual and augmented reality, analog-digital artist's books, or multimedia literature performances, I predict that queer and femme digital aesthetics will continue to act at the forefront of renegotiating the boundaries between computational abstractions and fleshy sensations, between mind and body, between online and IRL.

#2. What can a queer/femme digital literary aesthetic *do*? How do queer/femme aesthetics impact the form, content, and interactive experience of digital, computational, and new media poetry and fiction?

Sarah Ciston

My favorite literature and artworks open up spaces of possibility and permission. They create a sense of what language was perhaps always capable of that I couldn't access before, until the container for it was created. Digital work in particular lets me play with and disrupt form, which necessarily changes content. If the container is a different shape, the words that fill it will be different. Form I guess is a kind of proposition in that way, a generative prompt. And that feels very queer, creating more possibilities for how to be in the world.

Also, I am hopeful for this idea that we can use queer theory, queer experience to read technology against the grain or reimagine language, but also that we can use technology to reframe questions about identity, gender, sexuality. I guess that queer/femme could be both a lens or a stance or approach toward these heteronormative digital systems, but also could be finding what latent generative poetic, queer, femme energy and power already exists there.

Finally, very operationally, I sometimes think of the work as direct intervention. I talk with my creative-critical coding students about the different types of interventions they can make with code and media work. So far, we have grouped them into a few buckets (likely there are more): Inform (e.g. reveal hidden info, visualize) / Disrupt (converse, challenge) / Reframe (redesign, recontextualize) / Reflect (aesthetic, affective). These extend beyond the literary, of course, but might be useful for choice of tactics, style, medium, genre, etc.

Sam Cohen

Something I've been thinking a lot about is the risk that femme embodiment poses. Lipstick, cleavage, big hair, etc. renders a person highly visible and femme dykes move through the world with *risk*. I love that a femme digital space allows for femme expression without its ancillary risk. On a digital platform, you can be as femme as you want to be and know that your body is protected, away from whatever images you've constructed. On the Yes Femmes site, for example, there's a photo of Artemisa Clark naked and blood-splattered in a gallery, her hands against the wall and ass out. It's a vulnerable, almost pornographic pose. Men are standing behind her watching. It feels like she's at risk, if not of actual violence, then at least of interpretation, mis-interpretation. But in the image online, the viewer can gaze at the men, heads cocked, standing behind her watching. Their inability to *see* Clark--to see what she's doing--becomes part of the image. And online, Clark is safe.

Something I learned through YES FEMMES is that perhaps the pleasures of femme expression feel exciting and liberating to everyone--not just femmes. For example, when I walked my father through the site and he got to our landing page, where the cursor is a manicured index finger, he said "ooh! I have nails!" This made me think a lot about how the digital allows for a kind of role-play, a kind of almost-embodiment. This feels very queer to me -- the ability to take on multiple identities, to find pleasure in various expressions, none of which feel quite *natural*. Literature does this of course, too--reading invites us to inhabit other people--but it is usually relegated to the cerebral, the emotional--and of course there are multiple ways to read a text that don't involve identification. But the avatar, the cursor, offer alternative embodiment that is just so *immediate*--before you've gotten to think about it, you suddenly **have nails**.

Kate Durbin

It depends on the project, of course. I like the different angles that Sarah is thinking about in her answer, particularly in relationship to intervention and coding. I am thinking of some early works of mine that were very much about taking back the means of cultural production, or projects that were sites of cultural exchange and play. For example, *Gaga Stigmata* was an online pop cultural criticism journal founded by me, and co-edited with Dr. Meghan Vicks, that was independently run, not affiliated with any institutions or sponsors. We published critiques of Lady Gaga's pop cultural project in real time, or close to real time response, in order to

actively participate in popular culture. The journal had a strong following by a diverse audience of academics, journalists and pop culture fans, and was taught at academic conferences as a phenomenon in its own right, as a new way of doing academic criticism in the era of the Internet. One of the most interesting aspects of *Gaga Stigmata*, and the most difficult to quantify, is the influence *Gaga Stigmata's* writers had in shaping Lady Gaga's project. By helping to shift the public discourse around her work to an art conversation, and by feeding ideas to her and her team through projective criticism, Lady Gaga and *Gaga Stigmata* were involved in a symbiotic "chicken or egg" relationship of which the ultimate cultural impact can only be speculated about.

Feliz Lucia Molina

Experience of otherness creates the form, content, and experience of the digital. The digital is just a tool and platform to play with, investigate, explore, understand, study, critique, etc., infinite forms and expressions of otherness. The internet is a mirror, lake, ocean to see more clear or distorted versions of our othered narratives. Dragging and pasting emojis onto a Matisse mise-en-scene isn't a gesture of détournement in the sense of making some political statement on the absurdity of the art market. It's a simple relation or co-existence between the ordinary/common pictorial speedy language of emojis in an albeit painterly scene which reconfigures the narrative environment of Matisse. I love to imagine a real/fantasy world in whatever Matisse painting by using emojis to describe that world. It's a fun process that has made me stay up all night and laugh in bed while making it on my phone. It's an easy way to make myself happy while passing time. It's a way to cheer myself up which in the moment feels kind of eternal. The process of making it feels like a slumber party with friends even though it's done alone.

Katie Schaag

For me, form is performative and transformative. It shapes, constraints, and acts on its contents. Experimental and avant-garde formal innovation is / has always been a method for minoritarian subjects to intervene in homogenous discourses, disrupt dominant paradigms, and create the kinds of worlds they/we want to live in. Too often, discussions of art and literature by women, people of color, queer people, etc. is siloed to the realm of content representation: work that is self-consciously *about* gender, race, and sexuality, rather than work that is harder to categorize and at least as concerned, if not more concerned, with form than content.

Queer and femme digital aesthetics reorient the reader/viewer as a situated subject. Queer and femme digital aesthetics disrupt the assumed “neutrality” of digital spaces, and destabilize the binary identity logics encoded in social interactions online and IRL.

#3. How do we make visible the presence of queer and femme identities in a disembodied digital space? Beyond the mediated representation of bodies and identities as thematic content, how do gender and sexuality become abstracted into form?

Sarah Ciston

I’m resistant to the idea that digital space is disembodied. But we can make work that shows how it’s always been embodied, highlighting what’s missing and what’s been naturalized, who is missing from the conversation—not falling into the trap of thinking that any space or technological choice is neutral or can be abstracted from material impacts. It’s never “just math” or “just the machine” but actual human choices compounded through the speed and quantity that computation allows.

More broadly, I’m interested in how can we bring tactics from intersectional queer, feminist, antiracist theory to tech spaces—but I think has to be considered across all levels of scale—from line-by-line of code to infrastructures level. It’s not as simple as representational diversity in hiring; but do we listen to the people we hire, who do we design for, and do we consider the cultural impacts that we have on them.

Sam Cohen

Design can allow for ways to reclaim or express our queerness. As I said before, a cursor with nails, but also a messy collage, a fairytale that spirals out but doesn’t follow a clear or singular pathway, explosions of color, mess. I love a lot of the simple design choices Sandra made with Yes Femmes--rainbow gradients, pastels, pink clouds. It doesn’t feel like any other online spaces I inhabit--as soon as you arrive, it feels like a space for femmes. It feels warm to me, glowing. I often complain about how masculine all design is -- I want more curvy lines, more

spirals, more colors, more sparkles. Everywhere. Creating our own space allowed us to make a little digital femme world--one that is not cheesy or childish but that I think invites boldness, wonder, connection in a way that spaces with stark lines and clean black-and-white do not. I really think the hegemony of “good design” limits the kind of connection and feeling we can have with each other--if we know how to code, the digital sphere is a place where we can play with the kind of design that might allow us to feel and connect in other ways.

Feliz Lucia Molina

The dominant gaze turns gender and sexuality into pure abstract form and fantasy. Until we get rid of the vertical gaze and only have a horizontal way of reading signs and signifiers, we remain oppressor and oppressed. This seems utopian because financial capitalism reigns while it’s destroying us all.

Katie Schaag

I think a lot about how identity markers persist in disembodied spaces. Gender, race, sexuality, class, ability, etc. are not only mapped onto physical bodies and visual representations of those bodies, but also encoded at every level of concrete and abstract analog and digital systems. Recent work on online identity formation (e.g. Andre Brock’s *Distributed Blackness: African American Cybercultures*), biased algorithms (e.g. Safiya Umoja Noble’s *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*), and challenging the “neutrality” of data (Catherine D’Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein’s *Data Feminism*) reminds us of the key role that minoritarian artists and humanists play in digital spaces. For instance, Sarah Ciston’s project *ladymouth* intervenes in online sexist discourse.

In queer and femme digital literature, I think that the presence of minoritarian subjectivities is evident in the aesthetic and formal innovation. From web 1.0 onward, women and femmes have been at the forefront of defining digital aesthetics, and that labor has not always been recognized. Kate Durbin’s Tumblr project *Women as Objects* emphasizes the key role teen girls played in shaping internet aesthetics. And Sam Cohen and Sandra Rosales’ publishing project *Yes Femmes* tracks the contemporary development of this aesthetic. Feliz Lucia Molina’s visual project *Emoji Collages with Matisse*, Durbin’s screen-to-page project *Hoarders*, and my remix/erasure platform *The Infinite Woman* are three of

the rapidly proliferating examples of women and femmes creating experimental work in which gender is abstracted into form (emojis, syntax).

#4. Conceptually, aesthetically, and technically, how can digital forms perform queer and femme affects?

Sarah Ciston

I'm noticing my forms often rely on excess and error, and on what I've started calling the queer digital interstitial (gap, glitch, break). I use digital forms almost always to think about the digital and the body together, to comment back recursively on these forms—asking how is this data stuff getting processed through the machine but also processed and digested through our bodies (for example, as anyone is reading the comments on the internet everyday, or as I read the bot's responses as live performance at poetry readings.) What is the relationship between the code as container and conduit and my body and my relationships as container and conductive material?

I'm not sure if that gets at the question beneath: What are queer and femme affects? What does it feel or mean to be in a porous body? Tand trauma; but I don't know.

I do know there are long histories from analog to digital of queer femme aesthetics that recontextualize preexisting music or images; use the closhen: How does code or our digital situation reconfigure or amplify that? I don't know. I am currently circling around this site for a new project on queerness, code, e focus of the bedroom, body, or intimate space; take technologies and tools and toys cast off or meant for other purposes and adapt them to new tasks. One of my favorite examples of all three: Sadie Benning's "It Wasn't Love" (1992).

Sam Cohen

Digital forms allow us to play with possibilities for queer and femme ways of being and knowing that might be too scary, too expensive, or otherwise impossible to figure out in physical life.

Kate Durbin

Something I find interesting about the earlier (say 2010-2013) queer and femme internet is the way that information, ideas, and art were freely exchanged there. I talked about this a bit already with *Women as Objects*, and *Gaga Stigmata*, how they were structured as playful and porous sites of cultural production and exchange. One of the things that was unique about *Gaga Stigmata* was that all of us writing for it were fans of Lady Gaga - we were not pretending to have a kind of objective neutrality about her project, even though we treated it with seriousness and rigor, and we weren't into pissing on pop culture just so we could be seen as serious scholars. And with *Women as Objects*, I was struck by how the teen girls in that project reveled in teenage feelings - from depression to apathy - and shared them openly with one another. Embracing fandom, and teen feelings, is very internet-y and also is part of what makes these projects femme and queer, I think. I also think it's no coincidence that as the Internet has become more corporately controlled, and with the rise of the alt-right online, these modes of exchange have become less safe and less possible.

Feliz Lucia Molina

Digital forms are a technology to liberate queer and femme affects.

Katie Schaag

I think that much of the contemporary queer and femme digital literature overlaps with the "post-conceptualism" movement, which, for me, signifies a rejection of conceptual writing's rejection of authorship and affect. As post-conceptual writing, queer and femme digital literature is informed by critical theory but not beholden to it, invested in machinic procedural processes but not to the point of erasing the author-body who initiates those processes, and serious about intellectual abstraction but not divorced from concrete feelings. Queer and femme digital literature is curious about distributed subjectivity, an online assemblage saturated with affect.

#5. Can you share some practical tactics and methods in queer and femme digital literary production? If an audience member is interested in

creating their own multimedia work inflected by queer/femme aesthetics, what are some approaches to form and process that they could consider?

Sarah Ciston

Being iterative and rapid prototyping. Not being afraid to just go be weird and do it a lot. Going deep into your obsession or neurosis, even if it's "just" the minor or domestic or the easily dismissed—if you're drawn to it, stay with that thing and tease it out, and continually iterate it. I find this comes up a lot as a very femme, feminist approach.

Also, Katie's comment (see below) about intimidation around learning to code absolutely rings true for me, and it's the reason I started an organization called Creative Code Collective, which tries to help provide a more supportive alternative to that "tech bro" atmosphere. It draws on my own many false starts and my experience that there are SO MANY different ways to learn and make with code that are completely valid. We are working on an approachable resource page and it's one of my favorite topics to talk with people about (LADY MOUTH was my first Python project ever!), so please be in touch: creativecodecollective.com

Kate Durbin

If you don't want to learn to code yourself, you can work with collaborators. That's what Amaranth Borsuk and I did with ABRA--we worked with a programmer. The artist Lynn Hershman Leeson does this with her code-related projects, too.

Feliz Lucia Molina

One approach I would start with is knowing and owning your ancestors and lineage and doing a deep psychic dive into why you love certain artists and writers. Did someone or some institution tell you how and why to love who you love? Start with knowing that. Then start writing about this in Rich Text File or MS Word or Google Doc or your phone. Love is the form and the way you live is the process. I've been writing this screenplay because this story wants to be told in pictures. It doesn't know how else to come through. And so now I have to write it in Final

Draft - a screenwriting program. Love for this story tells me it has to be written this way even if I don't love having to use the program.

Katie Schaag

Don't be intimidated by technology. The default sexist "tech bro" atmosphere surrounding computing substantially contributes to the lack of women in the field. I have always been intimidated, and I'm finally starting to feel more comfortable. Although I've been a media artist for years, I've found that proficiency in sound and image production does not necessarily translate to a knack for programming, so I've avoided it. I teach computer science students the software development process at Georgia Tech, and I still don't know how to code. But through the process of conceptualizing, designing, and directing the development of my own digital poetics platform with a team of programmers, combined with what I've picked up from teaching the course I teach, I'm slowly starting to feel more comfortable with the field, and I'm going to start learning to code this spring. Whatever it is you want to do, don't be intimidated by everything you don't know. Reach out to someone who does work you like, and ask them how they started. Take a workshop in a program you want to learn. Start experimenting.

Audience Q&A (10 min)