



Queer-Feminist
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Queer Science
& Technology Studies

Editorial

Once upon a time... more than eight years ago, some of us found a 'reading club' which we (colleagues and former trainees at the Inter-University Research Centre for Technology, Work and Culture in Graz) met once in a while for, reading and discussing technofeminist literature. As a group we started to prepare sessions for the annual STS conference in Graz which has helped us to invite fellow researchers from the (queer-)feminist STS-community and to expand our network. For the conference in 2011 we contributed a workshop on heteronormativity – our most visible move from technofeminism to queer-feminist STS. Shortly after that we decided to take the step from reading together to writing together. In our search for a name of our collective we agreed on "AG Queer STS" ("Working Group Queer Science, Technology and Society Studies"). From that day onwards, being a member of this group has become even more rewarding.

With a proper name we were able to 'come out' as a creative collective with ideas how to queer STS. We started a Twitter (and Facebook) account that has attracted more than 800 followers by now and published quite some texts together. As members we have participated in many conferences representing the collective, sharing thoughts and bringing home new inspirations and connections. In spring 2015, we even got to teach a serial lecture course on queer STS together – Anita and Birgit have written their contribution to this first edition of Forum about this experience (see p. 5-16). Our next endeavour together is the upcoming Annual STS Conference in Graz in May 2016 which we are organising a session on queering conferences and a workshop on alternate views of kinship for.

And here we are, releasing our first edition of the Queer-Feminist Science and Technology Studies Forum, a collection of contributions by friends and members of AG Queer STS. The plan is to compile at least one edition per year for continuity, unless a burning issue urges us to slide in an extra edition. The contributions will be of random style, theoretical, empirical, reflections, insight into work in progress, reviews – just keep it queer. If you would like to suggest a contribution to Forum, you can do so via our newly set up website www.queersts.com .

So, what can you expect from this first edition?

Birgit Hofstätter and Anita Thaler present four examples of their queer approach to STS which they try to apply in research as well as in teaching (see p. 5-16). They are able to show how a little queer intervention can optimize a research project or even lead to an explicitly queer project, how the topic of queer STS attracts many students, but they also present experiences of massive counteraction against the attempt to queer a conference.

Daniela Jauk (see p. 16-22) gives a book review of J. Jack Halberstam's *Gaga feminism: Sex, gender, and the end of normal* (2012). She discusses what gaga feminism could offer for learning environments and adds tips on how to 'go gaga' in university teaching based on her own experiences as teacher.

Boka En and Andrea* Ida Malkah Klaura (p. 23-30) discuss the issue of “Living Trans*disciplinarity in academic teaching and learning”, and we literally mean discussing as they chose the format of a conversation for this article. This is not only a bit queer (something we appreciate a lot), but very readable and bears a lot of food for thoughts for teaching and interacting at conferences. The authors describe a process during their seminar in the lecture series “Que(e)r schnittmaterie”, where they began like: “... we felt that we should really do some proper lecturing” and reflected where these expectations come from (e.g. imagined or internalised authorities, institutional pressures). The article portrays the development of their trans*disciplinary approach within one specific afternoon and grounds it on their own educational paths and (inter)disciplinary socialisations. After negotiation processes with their students and themselves the authors: “ended up doing something more participatory than we had imagined”. We think this is a very valuable piece of reading for all academics who really want to engage with others (in teaching and learning) and try to overcome hierarchies.

The last section is assigned to keep you up to date on the current topics of our Working Group. In this volume, we give some short reviews on books we are currently reading. Moreover you can find a short overview of our most relevant and interesting twitter messages.

We wish you a great deal of inspiration and fun resulting from the reading of this very first volume of the Queer Feminist Science and Technology Studies Forum.

Queer STS

Birgit Hofstätter & Anita Thaler

Irritating, Intervening, Interacting: Doing Queer Science and Technology Studies



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In this article we want to reflect on our queer approach to Science, Technology and Society Studies (STS). Simply put, we have realised that we want our actions (research in particular) to have an effect on practice, maybe because we both are – among many other identities – pedagogues. We often find ourselves intervening in meetings, in our social media activities, in our university courses, during conferences, and when we do research. Most of the time, the main topics we deal with do not directly relate to queer studies but are questions concerning science, technology and society studies. Among those, the role of gender in academia may be one more closely associated with queer studies, or when we ask how to use youth media as agents for political competence training. But we also work on seemingly unrelated topics like sustainable food production or users' roles in energy efficient office buildings. However, queer and socially just thinking cannot simply be switched off once you have developed it, and, because projects on queer STS are far from being heavily funded, we often find ourselves in the role of 'queer devil's advocates'. In other words, simply by asking our queer questions¹ and thinking in alternatives, we irritate colleagues, we intervene in our classes or during conferences, and we interact with (and thereby learn from) like-minded people. Our

1 „In general, by adopting a queer perspective, we have to reflect on the ways we, as researchers, contribute to the reproduction of e.g. gender as a binary and the heterosexual norm. We have to identify hegemonic discourses in our field of research and critically question in which ways they exclude or marginalize perspectives. We have to revise our methodology and the assumptions we base our interpretations of data on. One example for these efforts is that in some cases we shifted our focus from gender as a category of differentiation and tried to find other explanations for the phenomenon at hand. This way we could avoid the reproduction of gender stereotypes and conclusions being drawn on basis of heteronormativity.“ (Hofstätter 2012, p. 4)

queer (studies) community comprises people we know from courses at university, conferences, research projects, and meetings as well as people we have never actually met physically (yet) but interact mostly via social media (although we do not think of these as two separate worlds). Twitter,² in particular, makes it possible for us to share thoughts, ideas, future events, and publications with others and discuss queer topics with scholars who work on, and think about, similar issues, geographically sometimes very close to us and sometimes rather far away. This is a very important arena of reflection for us.

Of course it would be great to generally have more funding for explicitly queer-themed STS research projects and for working on some of our ideas, e.g. on how theoretical considerations could be empirically implemented – a topic we have been interested in since founding the working group (AG) Queer STS (Hofstätter & Wöllmann 2011; AG Queer STS 2014). In any case, we would and could never stop our irritations and interventions (might these be smaller or bigger) because we think that also small dosages of queer thinking can improve almost everything, especially science and research. The following examples give an impression of what we mean by “queer interventions”:

Example number one: Queering research on technology users by challenging the way we define ‘experts’

In the research project “Build to Satisfy”,³ Magdalena Wicher (another member of AG Queer STS) and I (Anita) worked together with colleagues from the IFZ⁴ research unit “Energy & Climate” and with other researchers and experts in the field of sustainable office buildings and facility management. The main interest of this study was to find out about ways users can influence the energy performance of low energy or passive house standard office buildings. The goal was to feed all our data about users and their practices (coming from interviews and a survey) into a computer based simulation to help facility managers and architects to better plan and manage ‘green’ office buildings according to users’ needs (cf. Suschek-Berger et al. 2014). Our role was, besides doing environmental psychological research (cf. Wicher 2014), to ensure the implementation of a gender inclusive and diversity perspective in the research project. Already in our first kick-off-meeting within the project team, I explained that I wanted to work with a queer-feminist perspective and what I meant by this. In the first interim report I wrote a chapter about gender in energy research (more specifically: on ‘green’ office buildings) and took on a queer perspective in there, too. These interventions led to some questions and comments from the participating STS colleagues. Nobody seemed particularly irritated, though. When our project leader met an evaluator of our project we even got

² We are @queersts if you want to contact us via Twitter.

³ Funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology

⁴ Inter-University Research Centre for Technology, Work and Culture – a research association in Graz, Austria, some members of AG Queer STS are affiliated with.

positive feedback because, obviously, with our attempt to include queer theory into the project report we raised interest and received extra attention: “Ah, you’re the ones doing the queer stuff! That’s interesting!” So far, all sunshine and roses. And then we started with the empirical phase.

In the beginning of this phase we had the classical job of gender experts, making women visible but taking care of not perpetuating gender stereotypes, asking for diversity criteria additionally to gender etc. When the research team was looking for interviewees for expert interviews, i.e. experts in the field of green office building planning and maintenance, our STS colleagues ended up with the ‘usual suspects’: architects, facility managers, and CEOs from the research companies. And, surprise, surprise, we ended up with an all-male group of white, Austrian, around 50-year-olds, most of them with wedding rings on their fingers. So we made a small queer intervention and asked ourselves and our colleagues: How can we redefine expertise in this field in order to get a more diverse group of interviewees? We suggested including more and other staff members from the companies, people who know the buildings and their characteristics also very well but maybe from another perspective (e.g. cleaning workers). This was probably seen as an unorthodox suggestion, but it was appreciated by our STS colleagues who were committed to our approach to gender and diversity for the project. Only when adding a third gender category in our online survey, we scratched the highest irritation level of some of our STS colleagues. And finally, when we did not use gender as an independent variable to explain effects in measure variables (like satisfaction with a heat control panel) but first looked into other social or psychological criteria (like working hours or work satisfaction) to explain effects, some of these colleagues had to reconsider what they believed to know about gender-reflective research.

Though this project had not many resources for an extensive queer STS study, our small interventions could optimise the research and generate some moments of learning for all of us. We gender/queer researchers (cf. Degele 2008) learned from green office building experts and researchers, and we are sure that especially our STS colleagues gained insight into a gender-reflective, critical, diverse, and sometimes even queer STS approach.

Example number two: Attempt of installing all-gender toilet signs at an STS conference

In the advent of the annual STS conference in Graz in 2015, some new adoptions by the organisers caused me (Birgit) to look into the degree of inclusiveness of our conference. First and foremost this question was raised in the face of increased conference fees lacking the offer of reduced fees for potential contributors and attendees with low income. By looking for solutions that would cover expenses for the conference and at the same time reflect inclusion and solidarity within our scientific and stakeholder commu-

nity, I became aware of more than just financial issues an inclusive conference organisation has to deal with. Taking on a queer perspective, and throughout the years attracting a growing number of queer-minded people to the conference, we consequently had to question whether the conference was as inclusive as we had considered it by then. Based on sources provided by our friend Boka En⁵ – someone who is already experienced in organising inclusive events – I compiled general guidelines for our institute as I wanted my work to be useful not only for our annual conference but for other events such as project meetings.

One measure suggested in these guidelines addresses toilets – a representative battlefield when it comes to feminist and queer interventions (see for instance Gershenson & Penner, 2009). The question of whether to provide gender segregated toilets first and foremost is a legal one, at least in Austria: According to the regulations on workplaces (“Arbeitsstättenverordnung”), employers have to install lavatories segregated by gender as soon as there are at least five men and five women among the staff (§ 33 para. 2 AStV). The existence of transgender, genderfluid or intersexual individuals is not considered by this regulation. The law furthermore includes the instruction that around half of the facilities in men’s rooms (if there is more than one required) have to be urinals. This way, the gender binary is constructed not only by spatial segregation but also by the design of the ‘hardware’ of the facilities. One argument in favour of distinct women’s toilets could be to create a safe space for the – in our social context very intimate and tabooed – needs connected to the use of their facilities. The notion of men being potential offenders is only one problematic assumption this argument is based on. On the other hand, the segregation creates a similar ‘safe’ space for men where women do not have access to and thereby facilitates or sustains existing power relations along the gender binary. At the same time, people who are not conforming to either of the traditional gender categories and/or are particularly vulnerable to harassment because of their gender expressions find themselves in stressful situations when in need of using public – or otherwise broadly shared – toilets assigned to one or another gender. From this perspective, creating a safe space for women is not a sufficient argument for segregated toilets but needs to be taken one step ahead (or in some cases one deliberate step back). Toilets are sensitive areas where all people should feel safe from observation and harassment. The perfect solution would be lockable rooms providing all required facilities (i.e. also for washing hands, changing diapers, etc.) designed to be used by only one person at a time (except if assistance is required), regardless of their gender. This way, shared space is omitted and opportunities for harassment and abuse limited.

5 You can read a paper authored by Boka En and Andrea* Ida Malkah Klaura in this online publication.

Image 1: Gender neutral toilet signs⁶



As of the toilets provided at the premises of our annual conference, they mostly do not fulfil this ideal design of safe toilets. Nevertheless we wanted to create all-gender lavatories to raise awareness for this issue and to take into account that gender fluid individuals were among the contributors and attendees of our conference. The most suitable way for us seemed to be to cover the existing gendered toilet signs by all-gender ones, indicating only whether there were urinals in the rooms, but otherwise stating that this was a measure to make the toilets inclusive spaces welcoming all genders. It was not surprising for us that attendees were irritated by the temporary interruption of the all too familiar binary gender segregation.

But we were simply taken aback when the event management office of the university contacted our organisers and instructed them to remove the all-gender toilet signs and restore the segregation.

From what we learned in the aftermath, it was students who went to the head of the institute we rented the rooms from and complained about people not their gender coming out of what they were used to be 'their' lavatory. The head of institute contacted the event management office who had our organisers take the temporary signs down. This happened only within a few hours in the morning of the first of only two conference days. Resistance against a measure of inclusion was THAT quick and effective. Interestingly, rather than women who might have felt deprived of a safe space, it was men, members of a socially privileged group, that struggled with an intrusion into a space they claimed to be 'theirs'. Just like Taunya Lovell Banks (1990-1991, p. 267) observed a

⁶ The text below the pictures states: „For gender non-conforming individuals, just walking through the door of a (gendered) public restroom can be stressful. Everyone should have the right to use a restroom without fear of discrimination. For the time of the STS conference, this restroom is for everyone, regardless of their gender identity or expression. Thank you for your cooperation!”

quarter of a century ago: "Men can get very hostile when their bathrooms are threatened, causing one to suspect that men see bathrooms as indices of power." So far nothing seems to have changed in the past 25 years. We did not want to leave this resistance uncommented, though, and in an impulsive outburst of protest we created new toilet signs indicating which gender was meant to use the respective lavatory but simultaneously questioning the binary constructed by this.

Image 2: Resistance to the resistance



The whole intervention – from installing all-gender signs to restoring the gender segregation in an openly provocative way – made people think and talk about it. Some attendees, observing the changes of toilet signs throughout the morning, came up to us and wanted to know the details about the incident. In that sense, the protesters did us a favour by drawing even more attention to our inclusive measure, forcing us to take one step back and pointing out exactly which considerations it was based on. Furthermore, they reminded us of how deeply society (and the academic context is no exception) is soaking in heteronormative thinking and that gender segregation in public spaces serves not only a feminist purpose (in terms of protection or empowerment of women) but also create homosocial spaces for men that obviously mean a lot to some of them for sustaining a position of power, or at least exclusiveness. Another interpretation could be that (privileged) men are more outspoken when they cannot have it their way.

Example number three: transFAIRmation – creating political remix videos in the classroom

With media technologies pervading our everyday lives, enabling us to become creative and participate as producers of media, we also face educational challenges (cf. Jenkins 2009:15). With possibilities come responsibilities and thus the need to teach conscious and reflective use of these technologies. Our approach with technology education is to use a vehicle (cf. Thaler & Zorn 2010), a (non-gendered) topic the learners in question identify strongly with. With young people, music, fashion, or, in the case of our project “transFAIRmation”⁷, TV-shows work well as vehicles. These topics are used to transport technology-related knowledge. Starting point for transFAIRmation was the observation that, through self-made videos, young people express their opinions and world-views and what they have learned about society. Popular mass media like movies and TV-shows are arenas of informal learning, and videos made by recipients reflect how these contents are processed, adopted and transformed. One genre among these DIY-videos⁸ sticks out as it is self-aware of its political nature: Political Remix Video (PRV) can be defined as “a genre of transformative DIY media production whereby creators critique power structures, deconstruct social myths and challenge dominant media messages through re-cutting and re-framing fragments of mainstream media and the popular culture” (Jonathan 2009).

The main objective of transFAIRmation was to test PRV as a didactic tool in middle school to address some of the issues Henry Jenkins (cf. 2009:15) lists as challenges faced by media education:

- **the participation gap:** the difference in what the internet means to (young) users – the possibility to engage and create or a rather narrow and little important means of entertainment,
- **the transparency problem:** the misconception that children are capable of actively reflecting and articulating their experiences with media, and
- **the ethics challenge:** the misconception that children are capable of single-handedly developing the ethical norms they need for engaging in a virtual social environment.

These challenges apply for technology in general as we live in a technological civilisation that requires the training of technological competence, comprising skills in handling technologies (know-how) and the ability to reflect on e.g. social and ecological implications of these technologies (know-why) (cf. Thaler 2014). Following these considerations, for transFAIRmation we conceptualised media as technologies of learning and participation. We worked with 52 12-16-year old pupils with various ethnic and socio-

⁷ Funded by Zukunftsfonds Steiermark and received the Fairness Award 2014 from the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs.

⁸ DIY = Do It Yourself

economic backgrounds, language skills, and learning abilities. Our intention was to make transFAIRmation an inclusive project as we had the idea that if it works in a rather challenging teaching setting it would work with many other target groups as well.

The didactical concept along which we wanted to test our idea was structured into three practical phases. We began by proclaiming ‘fairness’ to be the topic of the project and the first phase was about finding a common understanding of what fairness means and looking into different examples and related topics such as dis/ability, human rights, environmental justice, sexism, homophobia, transphobia. It turned out that the pupils were massively interested in the latter topics as it seems that they hardly had the opportunity to ask their burning questions in regard to gender and sexuality and to meet people who are open about their ‘non-conforming’ gender/sexuality. This discovery set the course for the second and third phase of the project. The second step was to take a critical look at two of the pupils’ favourite TV-shows (“Two and a half men” and “The Simpsons”). We chose episodes of both series addressing the topics we discussed in phase one, preferably with focus on gender and sexuality, and analysed them together with the pupils. In the final phase these episodes served as material for remix videos the pupils created. Again, gender and sexuality were dominant topics in this process.

However, the queer intervention of transFAIRmation did not stop at the level of content by focussing on gender and sexuality in media representations. We also chose a participatory, transdisciplinary design for the project, i.e. contributions of all parties involved (researchers, teachers and pupils) were considered equally valuable. All participants had the status of experts concerning their roles in the classroom. Like in the project “Built to satisfy” (described above) we sought to queer the way we include people in our experiment, avoiding – or at least minimising – the usual researcher-subject-hierarchy by redefining expertise and in that sense considering all participants co-researchers and learners at the same time. This way, transFAIRmation grew into an explicitly queer project, even though it started out very open and unspecific in this regard.

Example number four: “Queerschnittmaterie” – Queer STS as a lecture series

Eventually, in 2015 we got the opportunity to host an explicitly queer STS lecture series at the University of Graz (in cooperation with Alpen-Adria Universität Klagenfurt who financed the lecture), where we discussed many of the topics presented in this very first edition of Queer STS Forum. If you now think, “Oh wow, they got to teach a course on queer STS, how awesome!”, let us explain a bit more:

When a number of colleagues at Alpen-Adria Universität Klagenfurt cancelled their lectures due to various reasons, the study programme director asked the staff of IFZ in Graz if anybody was interested in an additional course.⁹ It was at the end of March 2015

⁹ Background information: Some third-party funded IFZ researchers work as external lecturers for Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt and usually have to fight for these courses as they have to be paid extra.

when the question was addressed to IFZ. But since all teaching activities had already started, not many found this offer very attractive because, in order to get a course approved and paid, you need a certain number of participating students. Still, we (Anita and Birgit) thought about it and said yes, let's do this, let's include our colleagues from AG Queer STS and try to find other queer STS scholars and colleagues interested to join us on a Queer STS lecture series.¹⁰ We came up with a framework, defined the topic, found a name ("Queerschnittmaterie"¹¹), contacted potential lecturers, designed the programme for one week in May 2015, and then the organisational challenges began: First of all, the university was not very happy about a course with more than two (or, okay, at most three!) lecturers. So, one of us had to be the official lecturer and had to subcontract all the others. Soon this hurdle turned out to be of advantage for us as we could divide the salary in a more solidary and fair way among us. We decided to pay all lecturers the same amount for the same hours of teaching, regardless of whether they were teaching their lessons alone or as a team. Usually, when you teach a course with a colleague, the university assumes that you split the work and do not do team-teaching (meaning working together for the whole course). As a result of this assumption, you only get paid half for a team teaching course. In our case we had the possibility to change the system which was easier than you think.

Next, we had the risk of investing a lot of resources (time for preparing a new course, coordinating all the others, preparing the administrative tasks, and also money¹²) without knowing if we would be able to attract the minimum of eight students (remember: this was in the middle of the semester at the University of Graz). When we announced our lecture series on Twitter and Facebook, we got a first impression of the kind of interest such a lecture series could raise. We booked a room at the university premises¹³ and optimists that we are (and because of some encouraging Facebook postings and tweets we received) we booked a room for 30 students.

One last hurdle was to prove that at least eight students were attending the course in order to get paid. While the participants of the lecture received their certificate from the University of Graz the teachers were paid by the University of Klagenfurt. Nonetheless, the students had to register at both universities. Usually this administrative task is not

10 Find the description and a list of the lecturers here: <http://sts.aau.at/Media/Dateien/Downloads-IFZ/Lehre/LV-Que-e-rschnitt-materie!-Queer-feministische-Technik-und-Wissenschaftsforschung> [12.11.2015]

11 As 'queer' is related to the German word 'quer' (= 'across'), blending it with 'Querschnittmaterie' (German word for a 'cross cutting issue') added to its meaning. Furthermore, the vertical bar between 'Queerschnitt' and 'materie' points out to (post)materialist discussions in gender and queer studies.

12 We designed and printed pretty posters which you can see here:

http://www.sts.aau.at/var/ezwebin_site/storage/images/media/bilder/frauen-und-technik/queerschnittmaterie-ringvorlesungsuebung/84410-1-ger-DE/Queerschnittmaterie-Ringvorlesungsuebung_medium.jpg [12.11.2015] Thanks to Julian Anslinger!

13 Warning: Do not try this at home ... trying to find a room for a whole week in the middle of the ongoing semester, but hey: We made it! Unbelievable! Thanks to Lisa Scheer!

much of a problem, but in our case the lecture started a month after the registration deadline. With great foresight we asked for an extension of the deadline for our special case and finally, after some emails back and forth, got the permission.

We do not want to emphasize these hurdles too much, though, because “Queerschnittmaterie” was a huge success for us: More than 80 students registered, we filled our course with 34 of them; the students came from very diverse backgrounds studying IT, chemistry, social sciences, etc. All lecturers were very satisfied with the enthusiasm and participation of the students, and in the reflection in our last session we found out that the students had really learned a lot, even – or because? – without having to write an exam at the end. But let us just add that although we got the “okay” for the extended deadline before the lecture series started, our students could not register because the online system to do that had closed by then and so our 34 students stayed invisible to the statistics. In another set of emails back and forth we could convince the administrative staff that we would find a way of proving the sufficient number of participants to start the lecture and get paid for it. Despite the success story and the joy over finding enthusiastic and competent university lecturers in the middle of the semester to work on a new lecture series on the topic of queer STS and reaching more than 80 interested students with such a course, we are critical of the fact that this success was not taken notice of by the system of ‘university administration’ – maybe because it was too queer in too many ways. In any case we uncovered the rigidity of the procedures and how powerful technologies of administration are. So, while organising and teaching we intervened, interacted, and irritated a lot, and we like to think of the whole thing as a queer intervention process. In this sense it feels right, because this is what we do.

Conclusion

In this article shared our queer approach to Science, Technology and Society Studies with you. One main motivation in our research and teaching (and especially from a queer-feminist point of view) is to have an impact on practices and people. Maybe because our ‘daily businesses’ are often not directly related to queer studies we developed a habit of doing queer interventions by asking queer questions, thinking in alternatives, irritating colleagues (like in our example one, where we challenged colleagues with our definition of ‘experts’; or example two, where we tried to install all-gender toilet signs at an STS conference) and students (like in example three about creating political remix videos in the classroom; or example four, the Queer STS lecture series). Finally, we told you about our regularly interactions with other queer scholars and ‘queer-minded’ people in our research and at conferences (face-to-face and online), but here is the thing we learned:

A queer perspective can enlighten and broaden so many more issues than just STS, so we use our methods of queer irritating, intervening and interacting more and more in our everyday lives.

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Gaga-feminist Teaching¹



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The following few pages were intended to be a brief book review of J. Jack Halberstam's *Gaga feminism: Sex, gender, and the end of normal* (2012). While it probably could still pass as such (albeit not a timely one), I realized that the smart little book is particularly inspiring for *teaching* sex, genders, and sexualities, thus I focus on some of the lessons I take away for my queer_feminist teaching practise in and beyond acadmia. I am writing this as a person who holds a PhD in sociology and was prepared to be a college teacher through the professional socialization machine that is grad school. As grad students we are often forced to teach, yet often vastly underprepared and under-supported to do this job. I still feel like an insufficient „teacher“ at times, and would not consider myself particularly passionate about the learning environments that are created at universities as I came to know them in Austria and the US. Jack Halberstam is a child of the same acadmic environment, and with this accessible text he inspires us to „go gaga“ as gendered sexual persons, as acadmics, and as teachers.

In the first chapter Halberstam lays out the characteristics of Gaga feminism as he2 sees it. Lady Gaga's performances and work become a metaphor for a new proclaimed feminism that is „about unbecoming a woman, undoing the category, to „take it apart like a car engine and then rebuild it, so that it is louder and faster.“ (p. ivx). Lady Gaga performs new feminities in her Warholesque love for attention, but Halberstam suggests that ultimately being gaga is being phony, utilizing gender performances as a playing field and social experimentation. This feminism or „pheminism“ of the phony signifies a gender politics for a new generation, that loudly refuses the categories that have been assigned to them. „Gaga feminism is a politics that brings together meditations on fame and visibility with a lashing critique of the fixity of roles for males and females. It is a scavenger

¹ Heartfelt thanks to Sol Haring for inspiration and valuable comments on earlier drafts of this review. My sincere gratitude also to Michelle Jacobs for her continuous writing support; and to Lisa Scheer and the editorial team for their kind input.

² This is the first book of Halberstam's that appears under the name Jack instead of Judith. I thus refer to the author with male pronouns. He also shares that his partner's kids are more comfortable with a male pronoun for him and call him „stepdad.“

feminism that borrows promiscuously, steals from everywhere, and inhabits the ground of stereotype and cliché all at the same time“ (p. 5).

Particularly in the beginning and the end of the book Halberstam makes it clear that he is inspired by social movements of the 21st century and accordingly Gaga feminism is a way to translate new methods of social changemakers to gender relations, to „occupy gender.“ Gaga feminism is hereby not stuck on a discursive level (a limitation of much queer theory pointed out frequently and with a passion by sociologists). It has structural implications: „The gaga feminist, in other words, cannot settle into the house that the culture has built for her. S/he has to tear it down, reimagine the very meaning of the house in form and function and only then can s/he rebuild.“ (p. xiv). Gaga feminism is thus also a lens through which we see how much energy we have already put into reimagining our worlds and creating non-normative intimacies, families, and futures and how to build on that. It could be an anti-depressant and uplift in the tides of anti-feminist backlash, neoliberalist re-traditionalization, and masculist lobbywork in Austria and elsewhere in the world.

Halberstam advocates a „childcentric“ approach to gender and feminism that dares to disrupt and explore. He draws from his own experience as he was introduced to his partner’s kids when they were little and *gender* was not yet a closed binary category to them. They were three and five and upon trying to decide if Halberstam was a „boy“ or a „girl“, they came up with the category „boygirl.“ Children are all too often a justification for social and political conservatism and outright censorship. According to Halberstam the excessive training we give to boys and girls turns them from „anarchic, ungendered blobs into gender automatons,“ which is dangerous, unnecessary, and also unrealistic. Halberstam turns it around and emphasizes the anarchic and „gaga“ potential of a pre-socialized and pre-disciplined child. He also advocates to stop denying and policing children’s sexuality and disrupt the transmission of moralistic and inadequate narratives of sex, love, and marriage.

The core three chapters are case studies in which Halberstam applies a gaga feminist lens to genders, sexualities, and (gay) marriage. It is in particular monogamous hetero-inspired marriage arrangements that Halberstam attacks. He unmasks traditional conceptions of parenthood even in seemingly queer constellations such as pregnant men or women having babies without men using a biotechnological path. He agitates against gay marriage. The reactive, weak politics of inclusion maintain the status quo, he argues, and rights should not be marriage dependent. Alternative intimacies are not served by the oppressive ideology of the marriage model; instead, new models that extend benefits to any other person, independent of kinship status, should be developed. „Gaga politics“ is „less oriented towards legal inclusion and more oriented to a queer project of reimagining life worlds“ (p. 125).

It is not only here that the reader clearly recognizes a US and a biographical bias. It flares up particularly when it comes to lesbian parents that are variably gendered, as represented by Halberstam himself. He considers butch dads the quiet revolution heralding a new gaga feminist component to the queer family, breaking the fortress of fatherhood that has been preserved for men only. I beg to question the butch daddy's exclusive right to this quiet revolution. Gender expression per se is not necessarily representative of the (gaga) feminist mindset. Butch lesbians and trans men may exert just as „retro“ gender roles as their bio counterparts. Also, we may consider family formations that are located well beyond the standardized queer identities of butch-femme, particularly in an international context. Look to Stacey's *Unhitched* for information and inspiration about queer parenting (e.g. Stacey, J. 2011. *Unhitched. Love, Marriage, and Family Values from West Hollywood to Western China*. New York: NYU Press, <http://nyupress.org/books/9780814783825/>).

In the last chapter the author outlines a „Gaga Manifesto“ and makes connections particularly to the 99% movement as didactical inspiration, as a form of „political response that does not announce itself as politics; instead, it enters quietly into the public sphere, sits down, and refuses to leave“ (p. 134). This movement, like Gaga feminism, refuses to envision an outcome and embraces a sense of „carnavalesque failure.“ There is no return to normal life, because normal life is an illusion. Halberstam insists that this also requires that we organize separately from organizations and engage in creative anarchy, i.e. move beyond academia (where some may point out he himself sits comfortably in a full professor's chair, benefits included).

In sum, Gaga feminism is a feminism that recognizes multiple genders and should contribute to the collapse of the binary gender system. It is concerned with the reconfiguration of the meaning of sex and gender. Halberstam advocates heteroflexibility referring to Lisa Diamond who argues that sexual orientation ebbs and flows in some people, changing over the life course, not settling on one body or another. The coexistence of desires, such as bi- or pansexuality, is interestingly left out by Halberstam altogether and would deserve space and discussion in any learning environment (this may not come as a surprise given his own location as butch lesbian). Halberstam gives feminism a new twist as a political project, locating Lady Gaga as „merely the most recent marker of the withering away of old social models of desire, gender, and sexuality, and as a channel for potent new forms of relation, intimacy, technology, and embodiment“(p. 25).

It also makes sense to examine what Gaga feminism might have to offer for learning environments. I want to continue this conversation with a few takeaways I distilled for my own teaching practise:

Try a „what if“ approach.

Gaga is a form of feminism „that lives between the ‚what‘ and the ‚if“ (p. 8). Halberstam’s „what if“ approach is valuable for any learning environment and leaves space for creative answers and more questions. Halberstam raises questions that serve as useful guidelines and starting points for any genders and sexualities classroom: What if we gendered people according to their behavior? What if we acknowledged that sexuality may shift over the lifecourse? What if boys wear skirts? The „what if“ approach may also work applied to the very methods we teach. What if we turned around or at least shared the power and made students our teachers?

Apply a „how weird is that“ lens.

Halberstam rightly points out that heterosexuality gets little attention in college classrooms. The (heteronormative) assumption is that we all know how heterosexuality works and thus we look at the „weirdos“ at the fringes and discuss non-normative sexualities and gender identities. (Also because they have the aura of the exotic and catch the attention of students, I would add). In his own teaching practise, Halberstam switches from a „try to be tolerant of these weirdos“ approach to a „how weird is that“ approach. The focus is on the strangeness of heterosexuality and normative masculinity and femininity as well as their unhealthy implications. For Halberstam „[...] what we call „men“ and „women“ are bodies that have generally been trained in either the interruption of desire (women) or its free flow (men)“ (p. 12). This is well manifested in the social reality of Viagra for men, and plastic surgeries for women.

Operate from and within the lifeworlds of your students.

Halberstam uses a wealth of US-centric examples from pop culture, film, and media. Using Lady Gaga as a metaphor is an attempt to connect contemporary feminism to the iconography students are familiar with (p. 6). Gaga feminism is tech-positive feminism; it acknowledges the possibilities of the interpenetration of humanity and technology in a Harraway-tradition. For Halberstam this feminism is not about women. It is about shifting, morphing, and keeping up with multimedia environments – „and if you don’t go gaga soon, you may wake up and realize you have missed the future and become the past“ (p. 29). As much as this will help to connect to students in a classroom, some may rightly argue that this puts the pressure on to assimilate to mainstream culture and tech environments. So are we then helping to build the very house and the surveillance mechanisms we wanted to dismantle as gaga feminists? Also, if we take seriously that students bodies are way more diverse and extend beyond the white, middle class, 18 to 26 year old segment, we have to be wary not to be exclusive (and boring) when picking from (white/young) pop culture (as Halberstam mostly does) in order to deconstruct the gender order and the power differential in the classroom. Even more interesting it might be to let students pick examples from their experience and interest areas to illustrate the concepts we seek to illustrate. This approach of a “reversed classroom” would also

enable us teachers to learn from students in non normative and constructive ways (see also below).

Honor, question, and develop further the basic principles of gaga feminism.

Halberstam lays out a few principles or rules for gaga feminists that leave the reader unsatisfied as they remain somewhat rudimentary and vague. They deserve deeper exploration and substantiation with practical illustrations, which might even be a fun assignment in a (gaga) feminist classroom.

- i. *Let go of basic assumptions of bodies, people, and desire.* For teachers, this also means -- *let go of assumptions about your students.* For instance I have students fill out name cards on the first day of class, and I also tell them to note their preferred pronoun in order to prevent assumptions about their gender identity. This exercise usually results in some perplexed faces which in turn sparks a good discussion. We can as a group go from there and gently remind ourselves during the semester when we make unreflected assumptions about ourselves and social phenomena.
- ii. *Look at the margins, don't watch the ball, watch the crowd.* Halberstam explains that in baseball you don't evaluate where a ball goes by watching the ball itself but by watching the crowd react to it. With this brief example he argues to look at the peripheries and the margins for social transformation. His book -- mainly based on mainstream cultural examples -- is not a good example of this very strategy. Also, Halberstam's use of Lady Gaga might be quite a risk, since we do not know yet where the crowd will be looking in a decade from now. Will Lady Gaga be even around then in our minds? Will it prove to be short sighted to use such a mainstream cultural icon as the frame for a new brand of feminism? But maybe these questions also do not matter since we are not to watch the ball but work with and learn from the crowd.
- iii. *Think counterintuitively, act accordingly.* In every sociology 101 class, you learn to question common sense and dare to transgress normativity as person, as students and as teacher. What does this practice look like in concrete terms? In your classroom?
- iv. *Practice creative non-believing* - „God has got to go go religion is a no no.“ When it comes to gender norms, religion is the root of all evil. Gaga feminism is a dedicated „anti-christian doctrine“ (p. 28) that encourages people to become non-believers or at least keep their spiritual beliefs to themselves. With this principle, the inclusive vision of Gaga feminism is undermined. How could we reformulate this suggestion to allow for a queer embrace of spirituality while rejecting fundamentalism in every faith (not only the Christian faith)?

Learn in unusual, non-normative places

Halberstam's inspiration for the book comes from Lady Gaga, a famed „monster“, but also from contemporary social movements and children. He states that „the art of going gaga“ is „a politics of free falling, wild thinking, and imaginative reinvention best exemplified by children under the age of eight, women over the age of 45, and the vast armies of the marginalized, the abandoned, and the unproductive“ (p. xv). That means for *us* as facilitators of learning to learn in non-normative places, but also allow students to explore the margins and the unusual in order to better understand the social world around them. Along these lines he asks: „What if we actually let up on the training of children and allow ourselves to be retrained instead?“ (p. xxv). So, what if we actually go into a classroom and radically learn from our students? So what if we send them out to participate in a protest instead of projecting the 67th PowerPoint into tired faces?

Going gaga, as I understand it, means to take risks as an academic, both in our scholarship and in the classroom. „As we go loudly and grandly gaga, we should be aiming for nothing less than intellectual emancipation, nothing less than total transformation of learning, and nothing short of chaos. In order to disorder the university, we need to think small but act big, take risks, and propel ourselves into the path of all kinds of coming insurrections.“ (p. 145). It is of course questionable how gaga we can go *and* continue to get a paycheck. Halberstam, a white, popular, full professor, is certainly able to take bigger risks without having to fear loss of reputation and income generating work. Going gaga feminist is also not radically different from feminist pedagogy as we have known it for decades – questioning power balance in the classroom, making sure marginalized voices are represented, leading by example and treating students respectfully while encouraging them to question the unquestioned. Yet Halberstam puts a new spin on it, gives us new terminology, and a lot more freedom to combine, reassemble, and create a queer bricolage style classroom. Gaga, as popularized by Lady Gaga, is associated with nonsense, madness (going gaga), surrealism (Dada); along these lines Gaga feminism „is a form of political expression that masquerades as naive nonsense but that actually participates in big and meaningful forms of critique“ (p. xxv).

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Boka En & Andrea* Ida Malkah Klaura

Living Trans*disciplinarity in academic teaching and learning – a conversation



Boka En has dabbled in, among other things, Gender & Sexuality Studies, Science & Technology Studies and applied existence. Hoping to do some good for the world, they occupy themselves with all kinds of relationships, including relationships between art, academia and activism; interpersonal and nonhuman relationships; and their own personal relationships to the world and the people in it.

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This essay is dedicated to all the publications, people and projects that never saw the light of day or had to spend their listless lives in loneliness because they weren't written or spoken in English. May you rest peacefully, and may you cause unrest when one day you will emerge from your unmarked and forgotten graves.

The conversation below is based on in-/authentic transcripts of a short range of inter- and transviews involving a variety of humans and non-humans. None of the opinions expressed are the authors' alone. Feel free to join this conversation at <https://livingtransdisciplinarity.noblogs.org/>.

An interviewer: No, seriously, what happened? Tell me.

Another interviewer: Well, it all started in March 2015. We were asked to do a session as part of this course on 'Queer STS' at the University of Graz (Austria, Fortress Europe). We jumped at the opportunity, of course. And then we realised that we needed a topic. So we thought, why not do something on 'Feminist Technoscience and Trans*ing Science & Technology Studies'? Having sent off our little abstract, we started asking ourselves what we had actually meant by it. The bit about 'Feminist Technoscience'

seemed rather straightforward, but what would ‘Trans*ing Science & Technology Studies’ entail? We decided to share our uncertainty¹ with the other participants in the course (aka ‘students’), to try to find out what this strange phrase might mean.

Another interviewer: And, what happened?

Another interviewer: Well, we joined in the communion of several sessions for preparing the course and kept oscillating between the things that we thought we were supposed to do and the things that we felt we wanted to do. In the (not quite) end, a hybrid was born.

Another interviewer: What do you mean, you ‘oscillated’ between these positions?

Another interviewer: Well, there was this tension between ‘What do we want to do?’ and ‘What are we supposed to do?’ On the one hand, we asked ourselves this question: ‘If there is one thing that we want our (‘our’) students to take home with them, what would it be?’, and we answered it with ‘a more critical approach to authorities’. We wanted them to question authority.

Another interviewer: And on the other hand, we grappled with (or submitted to) the authorities that told us what we were supposed to do.

Another interviewer: Actually, it wasn’t just about authorities, but also larger frameworks. We wanted students to be critical of these frameworks that we are presented with and embedded in. Which is something that, for me, very much comes from Feminist Technoscience. Questioning science. Or capital S Science. Or capital with/through science. Asking what is possible, what is being done, what the reasons for that are. Questioning the whole framework. And we ourselves had to question this framework as well, while at the same time orienting ourselves towards it, because we thought that we were expected to do so.

Another interviewer: Yes, and I guess this framework, these authorities, they were, at least to an extent, imagined authorities, or internalised authorities. Because it’s not like Birgit or Anita would have come up and rapped us over the knuckles. So we had this strong internalised feeling, ‘What do they expect of us?’ And so it happened that we had these 6 or 7 hours, and we cut more and more ‘normal’ bits away from these 6 or 7 hours, but then we came to a point at which we said, well, but they probably expect some form of input from us. They expect us to do a lecture thing. We’re supposed to do a lecture thing. And then it turned out that the lecture thing didn’t work all that well.

Another interviewer: Yes, that’s also what they [the students]² told us wasn’t too necessary. Although they also said that it wasn’t so much the content that was unnecessary,

¹which is one of principle, of course!

²Ah, yes, of course, the students are just ‘they’. The two of us, we have personalities, we are individuals, but they’re a homogeneous mass. Notes on ‘the mainstream’ in CrimethInc.’s (2001) *Days of War, Nights of Love* made us more aware of certain presuppositions and presumptions that we held/hold.

but rather the way we incorporated it into the session. Because we started with this very interactive approach and then suddenly switched over to a lecture-style lecture.

Another interviewer: Yes, that was probably symptomatic of our own conflictedness. Because we had wanted to involve the students in the whole course. So we started out in a rather interactive way. We proudly proclaimed that we didn't really know what 'Trans*ing STS' might be and that we wanted to find out together. We did a few rounds of academic 'speed dating' to think about the relationships that we form in academic contexts and elsewhere and the things that we consider important in them. And we asked students to define – find possible meanings for – a range of terms that we considered relevant for the session, including 'transdisciplinarity', 'Science & Technology Studies', 'Feminist Technoscience', 'Trans*ing', etc.

Another interviewer: But then, after so much student input, we felt that we should really do some proper lecturing. So we lectured them. For an hour. On Feminist Technoscience, Participatory Design, Public Engagement ... I think everyone was relieved when we finally stopped and went into the lunch break.

Another interviewer: Yes, maybe we should have put the input at the beginning where people expect that kind of thing, and then get more interactive afterwards. That's also closer to where we wanted to get, as a process. You start from this authoritarian framework, and then you slowly leave it and enter a more participatory, more interactive one. Because participation was definitely a keyword for us, also as a key feature of trans*disciplinarity. Enabling – and soliciting – participation for and by groups and people and whatever who can't usually participate that easily. In the context of the course, this meant participation by students who may otherwise be seen more like canvases that 'we' can fill with our wisdoms.³

Another interviewer: I do think that input has its place, but it's a question of how we arrange it and who can decide its form and place. Because people want to learn, and there are many forms of learning, and the question is, how can they themselves decide how they want to learn? How can they choose the form that works for them in a specific moment? And that can also depend on how they individually feel on that particular day. So, ideally, we'd have some sort of process in which people can say, 'Right now, having a half-hour lecture bit would be really interesting, let's do that.' And in that sense, our course didn't really work that well because people didn't have that much influence over the process.

Another interviewer: Although that's also linked to what happened after the break that we had after the lecture. Because we gave out copies of four different academic texts on what we felt could be considered (not) trans*disciplinary: Public Engagement with Science and Participatory Action Research (Fals-Borda, 1991; McIntyre, 2008; Stevens,

³See also Paulo Freire's (1993 [1970]) concept of the 'banking' idiom of teacher-student relations.

2008; Bensaude Vincent, 2014). We asked students to engage with these texts during the lunch break, so we'd be able to discuss them afterwards.

It turned out, however, that that wasn't quite what they wanted. Instead of sticking to our pre-ordained topics, they instead chose to talk about their experiences with hierarchies at the university. So we went with it. If our idea of trans*disciplinarity was that it was about breaking down hierarchies and involving people and parties in decision-making processes that would not usually be welcome in them, our students were living that trans*disciplinarity. We started out wanting to talk about Participatory Action Research and ended up doing something more participatory than we had imagined.

Another interviewer: Yes, it was very much a process. But I think it's also important to keep in mind that there are both individual and collective processes going on. And because it is a collective process, you just can't completely eliminate that element of 'I have to do this right now.' You could only have that in a system where it's clear that people can come and go whenever they want. But even if we had told our students that, it wouldn't have worked. So all we can do is try to give them more opportunities for shaping the process.

Another interviewer: And in our case, our students just created these opportunities themselves by moving the directions of our discussion. Although, 'created opportunities' sounds a little romanticising, as if there hadn't been any power relations between them and us.⁴ We could of course have stopped them. But maybe that's also an aspect of trans*disciplinarity: trying out things together, being open to where they may lead us?

Another interviewer: Yes. That kind of leads us to the question of which knowledges⁵ and which forms of knowledge – and knowledge creation – are seen as legitimate.⁶ So, for example, the course was very different from, e.g., weekend seminars that I sometimes do, which are much more about collectively developing – or discovering – knowledges, not about communicating and solidifying canonised knowledges and canonised forms of knowledge: books, papers, important people that you just have to refer⁷ to.

⁴See Arzmann, Wintersteller and Wöhrer (forthcoming, 2016) for an interesting take on power relations in PAR. See also Sara Ahmed's (2015) piece 'Against Students' for thoughts on people's moaning about students' having a say in where courses go.

⁵We spoke about frameworks of learning, teaching and knowledge creation earlier. In the same sense, we usually refer to knowledge in its plural form as long as we are not talking about a specific form or knowledge. This of course is not just our own way of seeing things, but inspired by Donna Haraway's paper on situated knowledges (Haraway 1988), as well as what we made of it in ongoing conversations with yet other interviewers outside the scope of this paper. Of course, this already points to the fact that for us 'knowledge' is always tied to practice and power. Speaking of knowledges as a plural points towards the existence of different frameworks of 'knowledge' – and, perhaps, even actually different knowledges. Of course, which form is most adequate depends on the specific situational context and our own involvement in it.

⁶Actually, it didn't. But we can't have unpolished incoherence and disjointedness in this text, can we? Law (2004) offers some interesting thoughts on the role of coherence and what we/you/one could call coherencing in research.

⁷defer?

And for my parts of the class, I also had that in the back of my mind: ‘but people have to be able to make these connections to canonised knowledge’.⁸

Another interviewer: Which brings us back to these internalised pressures that we exert on ourselves, doesn’t it? Because we’ve been talking a lot about the things that we ‘have to’ do or that ‘they’ ‘have to’ do, but there’s the question of where that ‘have to’ comes from. And yes, there are of course institutional pressures. But I think part of it is also a sort of performative drilling. We keep repeating these norms to ourselves.⁹

And, speaking of performativity. You know, I’m doing this other course at the University of Salzburg with Mercedes Pöll. And in that course, we talked about what ‘normal’ means. And one of our students said that if you just repeat something often enough, it becomes normal. And I thought, Yes, that’s performativity right there! I didn’t really react to it in that situation because it was too unexpected, but I think that that’s a way of forming these connections that you talked about. That we might connect the outcomes of these collective processes to canonised knowledges.

Another interviewer: And that’s a different approach, maybe a less authoritarian approach to knowledge and knowledge generation. Because people generate knowledges in these collective processes. And we could then kind of come in and say, ‘Yes, indeed, that’s really interesting. And there are these other people who have also thought about similar issues in similar ways and they have called this XYZ. And if you want to, you can go and have a look at that.’ And I imagine that people might also feel more appreciated that way. Because if you have a more input-driven approach, there’s this ‘higher’ form of knowledge, the established people, and before you can do anything else, you first have to follow these people.

Another interviewer: Yes, and of course, that gives you a foundation that you can build on. But the question is whether that foundation is a prefab house, and you put that prefab house somewhere and people can maybe decorate the walls, or whether it’s more like Lego bricks.¹⁰ And then you can try to help people make these connections, alt-

⁸There is this saying, ‘mit Kanonen auf Spatzen schießen’ – ‘using cannons to shoot at sparrows’. Using sledgehammers to crack nuts. Maybe it’s not just about cannons, but about canons as well?

⁹See, e.g., what Judith Butler (1997, 2006 [1993]) has to say about the role of iterability and citationality in performativity. ‘The doctor who receives the child and pronounces – “It’s a girl” – begins that long string of interpellations by which the girl is transitively girded: gender is ritualistically repeated, whereby the repetition occasions both the risk of failure and the congealed effect of sedimentation. Kendall Thomas makes a similar argument that the subject is always “raced”; transitively racialized by regulatory agencies from its inception. The power to “race” and, indeed, the power to gender, precedes the “one” who speaks such power, and yet the one who speaks nevertheless appears to have that power.’ (Butler, 1997, p. 49; see also Ehlers, 2006)

¹⁰Even though we’re not particularly happy about the gendered politics of Lego (Feminist Frequency, 2012a, 2012b). And it seems that Lego may have become more like prefab houses than it once was as well if it’s moving from creatively using bricks to build according to your own imagination to following instructions in order to emulate pre-built suggestions. We believe this to be a potentially productive metaphor for how we deal with knowledges, so we’ll leave you with it.

hough of course, that's not all that easy, because you just can't be prepared for everything all the time. But maybe that could be handled as a sort of homework for all participants. So you'd have not one 6-hour session with a break in between, but two shorter sessions on different days, and in between these sessions, 'students' as well as 'teachers' think about which connections they may be able to form. And this also means that there are very different impulses for the direction that a course can take.

Another interviewer: Yes, and splitting it up like that would also make it easier for people to take part in shaping the process. Because in the first session, you can collectively talk about what you'd like to do in the second one.

Another interviewer: On the other hand, that also makes it more difficult for people to decide whether they want to be in the course in the first place. If you don't have some overarching topics or methods that you want to work with and that they can rely on. Because if you say, 'We'll just decide in our first session', then people have no basis on which to decide whether or not they want to take part in the first place. So, again, different people may want different things, and you'll always exert some degree of force.¹¹

Another interviewer: Well, what we could also have done was: you know, we had these four texts for people to choose from for reading during the break. And we could also have included our input in these texts, as another offer that they can choose from. Or we could have broken the input up into more smaller pieces. Not saying, 'Now I'm gonna lecture you for 2 hours', but having it as smaller bits. And maybe we could have given people more agency in choosing which bits they want to engage with when. Like the prefab house and the Lego bricks.

Another interviewer: Okay, yes, of course, this would create spaces for interactivity and provide opportunities for students to gradually adopt to – and adapt – our negotiations with them about what the relevant knowledges, theories and practices are. Because usually, we don't start out as being on a level playing field with them – or they not with us, as a more common academic perspective might frame it. And this might be a way to bring 'us' and 'them' closer to each other and refine our understandings on the go, while iteratively deciding where to go. However, just recently, yet another inter(re)viewer was skeptical about this. Because while it may all sound nice and fluffy, when you think it through, it might also mean that we are dodging our responsibilities as teachers: to provide our knowledge(s) to the students, as well as to advance our students' knowledge(s). There's no guarantee that the students would take up our offer to negotiate on content and to participate and, in that way, to learn anything at all.

Another interviewer: No, there's no such guarantee. But you never get that kind of guarantee that people will learn something if they don't want to, no matter how interactive, how participatory, how laissez-faire or how pre-structured the teaching. If students

¹¹See also Brigit McWade's keynote on Mad Studies at the Changing Worlds conference in Vienna in 2015, in which she suggested that in creating spaces for a diversity of people, there will probably be 'conflicting needs': fulfilling one person's needs may mean violating another's.

mostly want to get a course done without much effort and without learning anything, I won't be able to force them to learn much.¹² So, yes, if people had simply wanted easy course credits, they could have gotten them in our setting. But the same would be true if we had adhered to a very focused structure and presented much more focused inputs. However, I think that if you take a student who primarily wants to get easy credits (and, of course, this would only be their *primary* motivation, because they're still in this one course and not any of the many others you can get easy credits in), the probability that they take something away from the course other than the credits is probably higher when you try to interact with them and find out what matters to them and therefore let them partake in choosing which path the course should take. Of course, the paths people want to stroll along might differ from mine or yours, but we can always try to come together from time to time and tell each other stories of our wanderings through these various knowledge landscapes.

Another interviewer: And I think what's also important there is how you treat people. Because I think that in contexts like these, where you get tech people and sociology people in the same context, tech people often feel like they're being treated as if they were stupid. And that you need to be super-critical in a very specific way. And I think that we managed that reasonably well – to include different perspectives on the subject and make them feel valued. Because I have the feeling that you also get settings where that doesn't work at all, where you get these processes of inclusion and exclusion. And sometimes these processes are something you want, and maybe good and even necessary.¹³ And sometimes they aren't.

Another interviewer: Yes, I agree. But what do you think of all of this?

Another interviewer: <https://livingtransdisciplinarity.noblogs.org>

¹²bell hooks (1994) also wrote about this in her book 'Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom'.

¹³E.g., think of safer spaces.

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What we are currently reading ...

“Bad Feminist” by Roxane Gay (2014, HarperCollins Publishers)

Roxane Gay’s book can be read as a collection of moving and entertaining, personal stories, always with a feminist notion but without the prerequisite of reading tons of feminist theories before understanding them. One essay about “Scrabble” is such a piece, on the surface very entertaining, but can also be read as text about academic careers, which also means: moving from one university (city) to another, leaving friends and family behind, searching for ways to get connected with people to not only work, sleep and eat.

However, Roxane Gay’s book is most importantly a very well written book about feminism and the necessity to recognise diverse ways of feminism in order to fight against misogyny and anti-feminism instead of debating whether or not some feminists have read all the important books and talk about the ‘right’ feminism. To tell it with Roxane Gay’s own eloquent words (p.318):

“No matter what issues I have with feminism, I am a feminist. I cannot and will not deny the importance and absolute necessity of feminism. Like most people, I’m full of contradictions, but I also don’t want to be treated like shit for being a woman. I am a bad feminist. I would rather be a bad feminist than no feminist at all.”

“Between the world and me” by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015, Penguin Random House LLC)

Ta-Nehisi Coates’ book is a beautifully written letter to his son, answering questions about what inhibiting (and living in) a black body in today’s US America means. His explanations on ‘race’ and racism and “the process of naming ‘the people’” (p.7) is very relevant for all kinds of social categories, which are the basis for hierarchies in society. Moreover the author embraces ‘black beauty’ and connects US American history with very personal stories of his family with one concern, to keep his son safe.

When the book was published unarmed ‘black teenagers’ (again and again) have been killed by US-American police, so Ta-Nehisi Coates’ words about “lynching” remain painfully relevant (p.42):

“‘White America’ is a syndicate arrayed to protect its exclusive power to dominate and control our bodies. Sometimes this power is direct (lynching), and sometimes it is insidious (redlining). But however it appears, the power of domination and exclusion is central to the belief in being white, and without it, ‘white people’ would cease to exist for want of reasons.”

What we tweeted about ...



Queer STS
@QueerSTS

We had a good year, lots of traveling, met lovely, queer(-minded) people. We wish you all a happy new queer-year!



LIKES
2



8:40 PM - 31 Dec 2015

<https://twitter.com/QueerSTS/status/682647561791008772>



Queer STS
@QueerSTS

Frauenrechte & Feminismus dürfen nicht instrumentalisiert werden um Rassismus zu legitimieren. [@marthadear](#) [@ZDFheute](#)

[View translation](#)

ZDF heute



RETWEETS 51 LIKES 40



10:06 AM - 8 Jan 2016

<https://twitter.com/QueerSTS/status/685387056474906624>



Queer STS
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Judy Wajcman: “technologies are crystallisations of society, they are frozen social relations” aeon.co/essays/digital ...
^[@ThomasBerger42](#)

RETWEETS 7 LIKES 4



9:35 AM - 12 Feb 2016

<https://twitter.com/QueerSTS/status/698062809242931200>



About the queer potential and social justice issues of technology:

queersts.com/2016/02/29/abo ...

shiny new website



RETWEETS 12 LIKES 8

5:41 PM - 29 Feb 2016

<https://twitter.com/QueerSTS/status/704345641498091520>



Finding Foucault.



RETWEETS 9 LIKES 12

1:29 PM - 17 Mar 2016

<https://twitter.com/QueerSTS/status/710442980474286080>



Queer Science
& Technology Studies