

CFP: “Critical Technical Practice(s) in Digital Research”

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The criticism of knowledge technologies has a long tradition in science and technology studies (STS), feminist studies and media studies approaches often addressing the ways in which technologies frame epistemic processes in scientific and technical settings (e.g. Latour, 1987; Latour and Woolgar, 1979; Haraway, 1988 and 1997; Chun, 2011; Galloway, 2012; Manovich, 2013). Knowledge technologies are not just the preserve of natural scientists and engineers, but also present in a wide variety of everyday and professional settings – including social and cultural research, in particular, in critical approaches to ‘Big Data’ and algorithmic systems. Importantly, these tools frame how we approach our objects and sites of study; they are not neutral, but active mediators impacting the ways knowledge is produced and disseminated.

This special issue explores the contemporary relevance of the notion of ‘critical technical practice’ (Agre, 1997a) to digital research in the humanities and social sciences including internet studies, critical data studies (e.g. Iliadis and Russo, 2016), critical algorithm studies (Gillespie and Seaver, 2016), and software studies (e.g. Rieder, 2020). Philip Agre (1997a and b) coined the notion of critical technical practice (CTP) in his work on artificial intelligence, proposing the challenge of having ‘one foot planted in the craft work of design and the other foot planted in the reflexive work of critique’ (Agre, 1997b: p. 155). The issue aims to bring together, advance, and reflect on recent work on the relevance of critical technical practice(s) for scholarship, pedagogy, and public engagement around digital devices and computational tools in the context of social and cultural research. It takes up recent calls advocating the relevance of such approaches to tool development, research, and education in cultural and social studies in order to approach digital media as both objects and instruments of investigation (e.g. Dieter, 2014; Gray, Bounegru, Milan, and Ciuccarelli, 2016; Gray and Bounegru, forthcoming; Rieder & Röhle, 2012 and 2017; Van Es, Wieringa, Schäfer, 2018; Van Geenen, 2018 and 2020).

The editors welcome contributions from a range of disciplinary perspectives that explore questions such as:

- How can researchers organise critical inquiry *with* and *about* such digital tools, methods, and data collections?
- How can devices such as network graphs, spreadsheets, scrapers, APIs, machine-learning tools, and code libraries be repurposed in cultural and social research, with a critical sensibility towards their genealogies and sociocultural lives?
- How can methods be taken as sites of experimentation around the composition of collective life, between research and other areas of practice (e.g. activism, education, journalism, or policy)?

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Please send a 500-word abstract and a 100-word bio to the guest editors: daniela.vgeenen@uni-siegen.de, k.f.vanes@uu.nl and jonathan.gray@kcl.ac.uk

Authors of accepted abstracts will be invited to send full contributions by 2 August 2021.