The Wolfe Institute

The Ethyle R.Wolfe Institute for the Humanities,
presents

The American Android:
Sex, Suffrage, and Science Fiction

Image by Ed "Emsh" Emshwiller

The androids in our pockets, not quite sentient, are nonetheless haunted by history. Say "android" to a science fiction fan and you may receive a learned extemporization on *Star Trek's* Data, *Battlestar Galactica's* Cylons, the *Terminator*, *Blade Runner's* replicants (and the andys of the movie's literary genesis, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*), and oodles more. The android has another history, though, as an humble adjective: "resembling that of a man." With those five words, the android becomes bound up in an ancient history of medicine, sex, and gender, traversing Galen and the European Enlightenment and reaching its nadir in the virulent debates about women's suffrage in the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth century.

In this talk, Dexter will trace the history of the android in the United States from nineteenth-century medicine and morality to the "Golden Age" of science fiction which spanned the dawning of the atomic age and the "cybernetic fold" of the late 1950s. He will pay particular attention to Isaac Asimov's 1953 "robot novel," *The Caves of Steel*, showing that in this apparently unremarkable, if popular story, the android mobilizes ideas of gender, empire, and queer desire. These ideas continue to orbit the android, as demonstrated by R&B artist Janelle Monáe's ongoing *Metropolis* saga, the multi-album epic of the "ArchAndroid" Cindy Mayweather.

Scott Dexter is professor of computer and information science at Brooklyn College, and recipient of a 2013-14 Fellowship from the Wolfe Institute. His most recent book, *Decoding Liberation: The Promise of Free and Open Source Software* (Routledge, 2007), co-authored with Samir Chopra, treats the multiple potentials of free software to transform aesthetics, property, science, and politics. He currently serves as director of technology for the Harry Watkins Diary transcription project, providing a custom web platform supporting a dozen transcribers working with a manuscript of nearly 1200 pages.

Wednesday, April 9, 2014
11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.
Woody Tanger Auditorium
Brooklyn College Library

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