

## *Femspec* special issue: A FEMINIST *BLACK MIRROR*? RETHINKING GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE THROUGH CHARLIE BROOKER'S DYSTOPIA

Call for Contributions (critical essays and creative writing)

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*Black Mirror* (Channel 4 and Netflix, 2011-present) is one of the last decade's most iconic dystopias, a cultural phenomenon that has popularly become synonymous with the worst of the digital age. Even though it is an anthology show made of narratively independent episodes, the whole coheres around its thematic focus on digital technologies (see Duarte & Battin, McSweeney & Joy). Still, insofar as each episode gives voice to diverse users who interact with different technologies, the series does not offer a single metanarrative of injustice in the digital age, but rather a polyphony of critical narratives which make the political very personal. The show's brand image makes clear that the black mirror refers to a fractured screen, and a fractured perspective is precisely what the series offers. Nonetheless, this prismatic polyphony is arguably one of the show's strengths, potentially the narrative basis of an intersectional critique of the digital. But is this what *Black Mirror* really is?

So far, the majority of scholarly approaches to the series have primarily focused, on the one hand, upon the series' reflexivity, in the sense that most episodes examine the digital medium through which the series itself circulates (see Conley & Burroughs, Duarte & Battin, Elnahla, Greer, Kim, McSweeney & Joy, Nee, Panka, Sebastián-Martín, Sorolla-Romero et al., Telotte). On the other hand, a number of studies have put the emphasis upon the series' rich transtextuality, examining how many of its episodes are rewritings of pre-existing narratives, mostly literary (see Artt, Egginton, Laraway, McKenna, Panka, Sebastián-Martín, Winkler & Huertas-Martín). However, questions of gender and sexuality have remained secondary except in a few cases (see Artt, Bailey, Greer, Modugno & Krijnen, Rocha & Rocha), even though both of the other main approaches could be expanded, amended and/or put into dialogue with an intersectional, feminist and/or queer perspective, especially given the long-standing association of feminism and rewritings, as well the enduring inequalities and the entrenched biases of the digital milieu.

Trying to address this significant gap in the series' critical reception, this special issue of *Femspec* welcomes **contributions which address questions of gender and/or sexuality** which still demand an answer. To what extent does *Black Mirror* favour a feminist, queer and/or intersectional perspective on the digital age? How does the series represent perspectives and characters of different genders and sexual orientations? How do the episodes relate with issues of gender (in)justice in digital environments? To what extent does the show live up to its potential as a critical dystopia?

To answer these questions, we welcome **both critical and creative contributions**, which should **adhere to *Femspec*'s educational philosophy and to its [Submission Guidelines](#)**. Contributions may pay attention to those aspects of *Black Mirror* that are centrally and ostensibly about gender and/or sexuality (e.g. examining episodes such as "San Junipero," "Black Museum," "Arkangel," "Striking Vipers," or "Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too"), but they can also focus on the gaps, omissions or misrepresentations that conform with and/or reinforce patriarchal normativity. Regarding **creative contributions**, we encourage writers to submit feminist rewritings of any episode of *Black Mirror*, especially if they aim at deepening and/or amending the narratives (i.e. by changing endings, revising specific aspects, giving voice to "background" characters, etc.). With respect to **critical contributions**, we welcome essays that (a) engage in

close analyses of specific episodes, that (b) reflect upon recurrent topics of the whole series, or that (c) examine the series' own context of production.

Besides the above-mentioned questions, some possible topics for critical analysis and themes for creative writing can be found in the following list. In any case, **these topics should be examined with a central emphasis on their intersection with questions of gender and/or sexuality:**

- ◆ Algorithmic biases
- ◆ Artificial creatures, androids, robots and other Frankensteinian creatures
- ◆ Bodily modifications and transhuman corporeality
- ◆ *Black Mirror* and blackness
- ◆ *Black Mirror's* production (writers, actors, producers, etc.)
- ◆ Digital control
- ◆ Digital domesticity and domotics
- ◆ Digital (gendered) labour
- ◆ Digital racialisation
- ◆ Femininities, masculinities, and/or non-binary gender expressions
- ◆ Intersectional perspectives and interpretations
- ◆ Memory and history
- ◆ Motherhood, fatherhood and parenthood
- ◆ New technologies in medical praxis
- ◆ Private and public spaces in the digital age
- ◆ Self and subjectivity in digital environments
- ◆ Sex work and exploitation
- ◆ Sexuality and sexual orientations
- ◆ Spectators and users, passivity and interactivity
- ◆ Subversive and/or non-conforming practices
- ◆ The mediated gaze
- ◆ Virtual realities and cyberspaces

The **deadline** for submissions is **January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023**.

Submissions must be sent **via *Femspec's* [Submission Form](#)**. All contributors are **required to subscribe**, using the [Paypal forms](#) found on the journal's website.

Expressions of interest and enquiries about this issue can be emailed to [miguelsm@usal.es](mailto:miguelsm@usal.es)

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