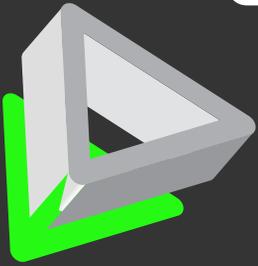
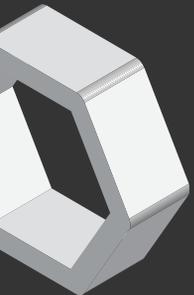




# Function Keys 3



Conference  
Of New Technology  
& Digital Culture



2016 Catalogue  
[www.functionkeys.ca](http://www.functionkeys.ca)



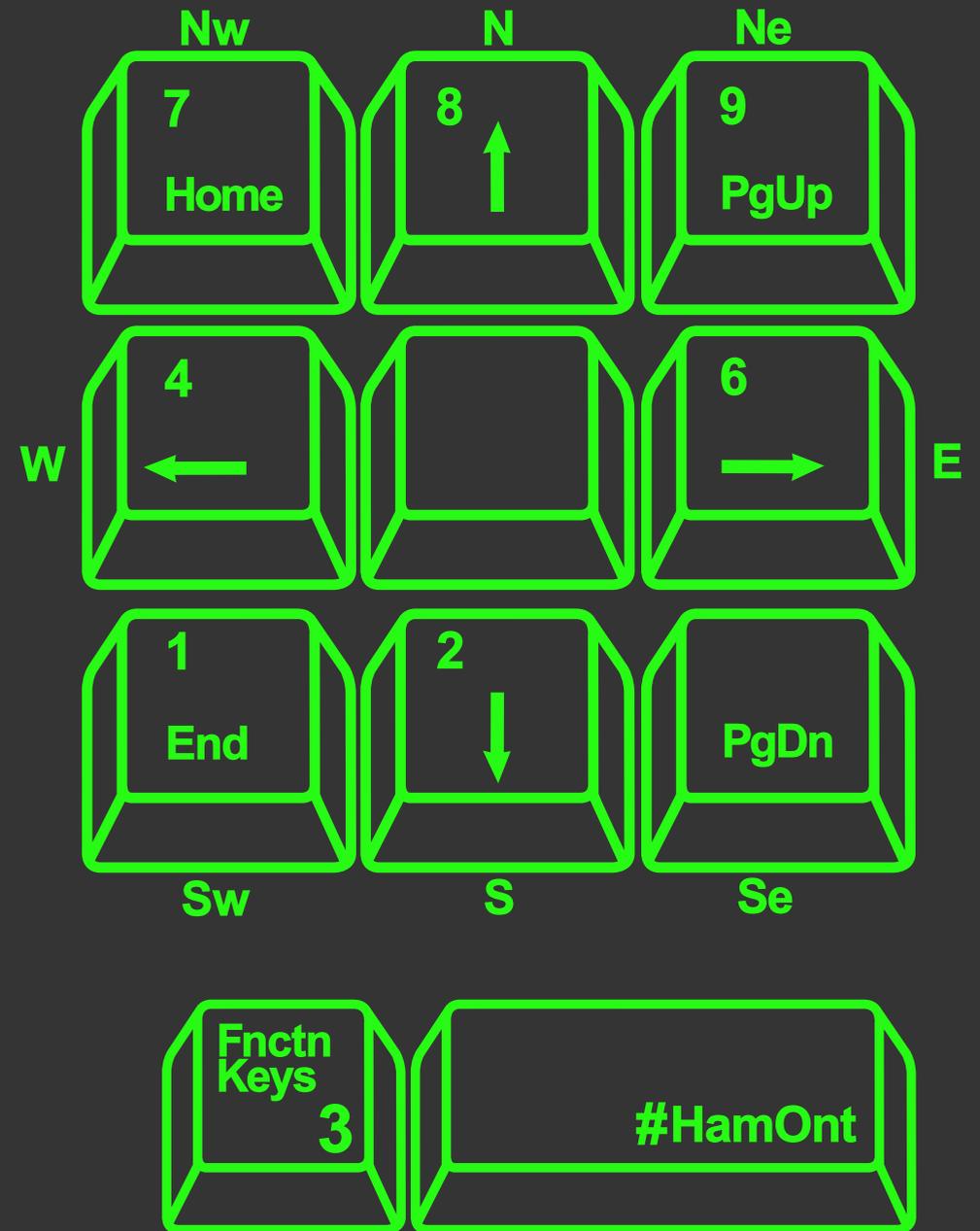


# ABOUT

Function Keys is a 3-day conference organized by Centre[3] For Print and Media Arts that aims to explore contemporary ideas and issues in new technologies and digital culture.

The third edition of Function Keys took place from November 11 to November 13, 2016 in downtown Hamilton, Ontario and includes a series of lecture-style performances, demonstrations, and workshops. For its third year, the goal of Function Keys was to provide a space for artists, hackers, computer programmers, and interested community individuals to come together to discuss and share ideas about emerging trends in new technology.

This year's conference consisted of a top roster of renowned speakers who are visionaries in their fields. Function Keys also hosted performances by artists who pushed the boundaries of traditional stage, instruments, and space in their work. This year's guests represented diverse communities and backgrounds. Coming from a variety of different institutions, all are academics, hackers, DIY makers and/or practicing artists whose perspective are informed by interdisciplinary approaches that investigated the intersections of art, technology, and culture.





## Affect and Empathy in the Work of Kara Stone

By Irene Loughlin

Affect, the emotions and feelings that Deleuze identified, via "the capacity to move and be moved," are central to Kara Stone's work. By asserting the place of emotion in both intellectual, technological, and creative contexts, Stone seeks to break down the primacy of dualistic thinking as a process that separates the body and mind in Western culture. Higher thought has long been reinforced as rational, impartial, and separate from emotion. Often unrecognized as a sexist discourse that reinforces white, cis gendered male dominance, Stone deploys a reconsideration of how mental illness is constructed that offers a kind of fissure within this ideological space. Her video games create an experience of "affective play," while reframing both the virtual and real spaces of thinking and feeling that can exist outside of this dominant narrative.

By confronting mental illness as a pathologized space (after Ann Cvetkovich) and by situating various mental states within the popular framework of her video games, Stone questions normativity and redefines gaming as a traditionally male and ablest space. Indeed, gaming authorship and participation, which is dominated by (and generally centered around) the desires of young, white, and heteronormative males, often makes engagement feel unsafe for female users and programmers. Interestingly, studies often situate these largely male game users as negatively affected by their participation, suffering from an array of symptoms, including social disengagement, mood disorders, and disorientation. Marxist analysis of the popularity of video games re-veals a carefully orchestrated experience by an industry that exploits the contemporary need for distraction from loneliness - an industry that incites pleasure, fear, and excitement in the user as a capitalist project. Stone questions the usefulness of emotive stimuli for persons already negotiating heightened experiences of these emotional realms. Emotional and somatic responses in video games are limited and regulated by gameplay, as are the physiological changes in the participant. Undesirable emotions, such as the inability to navigate panic and fear, can lead to

negative consequences, such as "choking," in the gaming environment. Alternately, emotional and coordination control, which Stone rightly identifies as indicators of an ablest ideology, are supremely rewarded in the gaming environment. Stone challenges these popular directives of video games and asserts that games can also encompass sensuous, expansive environments that highlight interactive, collaborative, emotive, and tactile interactions.

Stone's first video game, MedicationMeditation, conveys a strangely calming effect that is partially rooted in the tactility and identification aspects of the game. Upon opening this application (downloaded from iTunes and viewed on smartphone or iPad), the viewer is greeted by a mirror image of her upper torso. Pixelated cloud directives, such as breathe, talk, pulse, think, take, and affirm, float and "breathe" in a space imbued with comforting audioscapes. Upon clicking on the cloud "Breathe," the audioscape shifts slightly and a torso containing a set of lungs appears. Through pixelated text, the participant is instructed, "Touch to Inhale, Release to Exhale, Take 20 Breaths." The lungs gently expand and contract as the viewer touches the screen and follows the directive according to their needs. Shifting to the "Take" cloud, the participant encounters a clock resting on an anonymous woman's lower back as she lies on a bed and a pill hovers in the foreground. As the arms on a clock spin quickly in the foreground, the gamer waits to initiate the directive, "Take your medication at 10:30." Upon trying to activate the pill at the correct time, a voice conveys a sigh of frustrated boredom when the timing is not exactly correct and the pill refuses to budge. It is difficult to coordinate the timing, and the participant shares in the invisible woman's frustration, thus creating a physiologically empathetic reaction in the participant who experiences, on a small scale, the mundane and often frustrating everyday efforts made as a person living with mental illness.

Using similar strategies, Stone has also created the interactive tarot game, "Techno Tarot." She reimagines each tarot card that offers advice to the user by imparting a mental health perspective in tandem with a particular wisdom in order to answer their queries regarding the past, present, and future. By using tarot, Stone seeks to challenge the hierarchies inherent in the ways of knowing valued by an ablest, masculine culture. With a touch of humour, she explores what people with mental health backgrounds often face - the dichotomy between science and spirituality, when one seeks solutions to the "mysterious" aspects of their mental illness. Stone identifies astrology and tarot as methods of "practicing radical self-acceptance of whatever is going on" in relation

to inexplicable fluctuations in mood and emotions, of which the subject is often called upon to justify in an ablest world. In her later game, Cyclothymia (named after a mental health condition in which moods change constantly and quickly from periods of hypomania to depression)<sup>1</sup>, a handwritten title screen introduces a hand-drawn narrative created through astrological ties to emotional cycles. The game begins from a wide perspective aesthetically: the participant is situated first in constellations and is then taken through various levels, eventually reaching the space where the individual body is housed. The user first navigates through our solar system, continues her journey down to earth, and finds herself entering a room through a window, where she encounters a woman experiencing a variety of emotional states.

Rather than pursue the grand narratives of mental illness often exploited by popular culture, or the transformative or heroic potentialities proffered by medical or psychological treatment, Stone conveys a kind of intimacy and identification between author and participant within her games. She initiates gentle, often soothing interactions using hand-drawn, pixelated macro landscapes and universes, and incorporates small, hand-drawn objects and symbols, such as the internal organs (heart, lungs, etc), thus revealing the complex micro worlds of embodiment situated with-in the heart of the cosmos or the issue at hand. These reveals and activities shared by Stone with the participant become symbolic of the efforts the author herself has made to sustain her-self in a neurotypical world, whereas the interactivity of Stone's games invite and encompass the participant/user with a common or empathetic struggle.

1. "Bipolar Disorder," Canadian Mental Health Association British Columbia Division, 2013, accessed Jan 21, 2017, <https://www.cmha.bc.ca/documents/bipolar-disorder/>.





# Videos

**Kara Stone**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HedFz5UHIQ>

**Danillo McCallum**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQrMRPgYkv8>

**WhiteFeather**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpGp-xEgAvk>

**David Harris Smith**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLWTYdGoqW8>

**Ian Jarvis**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-Wo\\_l-HsdE&t=1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-Wo_l-HsdE&t=1s)

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