UW COMMUNICATION

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The Rhetorical Power of Mathematics in Contemporary Culture

Chat Bots, Algorithms, and the Anthropocene

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About The Talk

Whether in regard to gerrymandering, facial recognition technologies, or racial biases in algorithmic automation, growing recognition of the rhetorical force of mathematical discourse—which is to say, math's increasing influence on the public sphere—has forced researchers throughout the humanities and social sciences to rethink how the two disciplines might be connected. Challenging an academic orthodoxy that positions rhetoric and mathematics as oppositional, an increasingly large cohort of scholars are investigating how mathematization is reshaping public culture in dramatic ways. In this talk, I build on my work in The Evolution of Mathematics, making the case for a new theoretical framework that the I argue is necessary for understanding the ways mathematics is both transforming and expanding the social-material world. In the process I hope to show how close rhetorical analysis of mathematical discourse and practice can reveal new insights into both what mathematics is and how it translates the objects of its gaze.

About DR. G. Mitchell Reyes

My research is focused in two general areas: the first examines the socio-political impact of science and mathematics. Here I am interested in how controversies get resolved in science as well as the ways mathematical discourse—for example, algorithms—influence contemporary culture. My second area of research focuses on memory—specifically, the ways groups of people collectively remember their past. My research in this area examines the politics of public memory, the rhetorical strategies of remembrance, and the social consequences of collective memory practice. In my future research I hope to bring these two areas together in a study of algorithmic and AI memory practice.