Ellen Foster
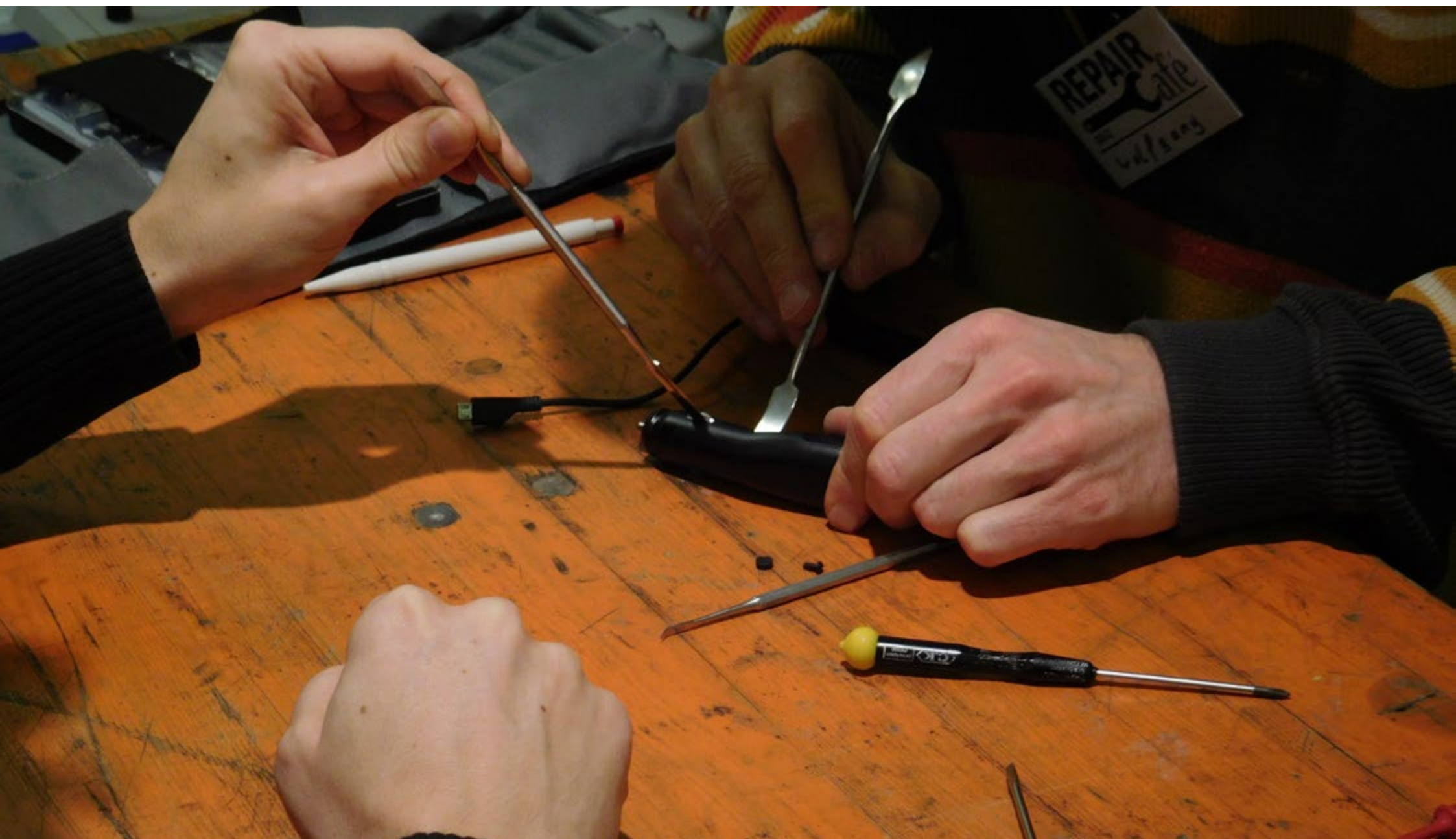# Maker Cultures

Dominant discourse and the possibility of heterogeneous practices

The nascent increase of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) narratives, makerspaces, and fab labs in many major cities world-wide has given the promise of a more democratizing approach to technology development, design, and science-based research. These spaces allow for the open sharing of tools, knowledges, and the building of communities of practice toward prototyping new technologies or modifying existing tech with supposedly inclusionary aims. Not all views of these practices are laudatory, however, with critics pointing to issues of consumerism, a Western-centric focus, an inherent preference for tech elites, and thus a failure to enact actual diversification, revolutions in technology development, and democratization. While also taking a critical stance, this talk proposes that things are neither completely positive nor negative, and that possibilities exist for heterogeneous technology cultures (such as feminist tech; queer tech; indigenous knowledges) apart from dominant technocentric or technocratic discourse.

Ellen K Foster holds her PhD in Science and Technology studies from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) where she was a researcher for an NSF-funded study regarding STEM education and an NEH-funded study on humanistic inquiry through 3D printing technologies. Currently, she is a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Science and Technology Studies (IAS-STS). Her dissertation dealt with the rhetoric and then physical instantiations of inclusion, accessibility, and empowerment within various maker cultures. Her current work examines the politics of education technologies and skill-sharing techniques among DIY enthusiasts via a feminist theoretical lens. She has been an invited speaker at the London School of Economics, Emory University in the United States, and the University of Technology in Eindhoven.