

Technologies of Identity: A Queer Media Archaeology

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Statement of Contributions

Jason Lajoie was the sole author for all chapters, which were written under the supervision of Dr. Marcel O’Gorman.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how queer people use media technology to make and construe their identities through a series of cases extending from the Victorian era to the present day. Each case is driven by three interlocking questions: How have people used technology to make queer identities? How can practices of re-using and repurposing media technology express queer identities? How can the identity of a given technology impact and influence these expressions?

Drawing on key texts from gender studies, the history of sexuality and the philosophy of technology, this dissertation first offers a theory of how queer interactions with media technologies can make identities; which it applies to developments of queer identities from the 1890s up to 2018. My media archaeological framework explores the development of terms like gay, lesbian, and gaymer through media systems and reflects on how these terms have influenced the social, cultural and technological networks in which they developed. Using a methodology that engages with cultural objects by situating them within the specific social and technological contexts of their emergence, I explore the obscenity trials of two notable queer authors, Oscar Wilde and Radclyffe Hall, as well as the rise of gay liberation discourses between the 1940s and 1970s. I pay particular attention to the media involved in each instance to show the importance of the technological context to the development of discourses about being queer and expressing queer identities. Other chapters examine the queer potentialities of Alan Turing's Imitation Game and the pioneering queer magazine *Vice-Versa*, both created between 1947-1950, to show how media can be queered and produce queer meanings. With this potential in mind, I analyze the discourse of the r/Gaymers subreddit from 2017-2018 by situating it within the technocultural context of its social media platform. To explore this theory in a more concrete way, the dissertation concludes by putting research into practice with the creation of a critical speculative

media object that emphasizes the influence of the gendered discourse on the possibilities for creating media. Taken together, these cases suggest how non-normative identities can be constructed, shared and then understood by others to form links, to develop communities, and eventually to lead lives beyond heteronormative demands.

By excavating these media scenes and placing them into correspondence with one another, this dissertation focuses on the role of media technologies in the construction of identity. It shows the consequential role of media technologies in making and sharing identities, and considers how queer identities are informed by the tools used to express them and how the need for queer expression can influence the development of media technologies in response.

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Dedication

For Lucas—catch you on the flipside.

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Introduction

This dissertation explores how queer people use media technology to make and construe their identities. The cases it explores across more than a century show how non-normative identities can be constructed, shared and then understood by others to form links, to develop communities, and eventually to lead lives beyond heteronormative demands.

The idea for this dissertation began after a string of odd and bizarre encounters on Grindr, that social networking platform for gay men — both on the app itself, and with the people I had met in the real world because of my participation on the app. More specifically, the idea came after being stood up on a date. As I reflected on my humiliating non-encounter, at an unfamiliar coffee shop on the other side of the city, I was struck by the capability for these technologies to move us, to organize us in relation to others, and to connect us with others whom we might otherwise never know.

The concept of a profile is integral to these encounters. At a technological level, one's profile is the point of contact that affords communication — a user clicks on a profile to begin a conversation with that person. But profiles can also serve an existential function. Indeed, as I reviewed my profile to better curate its contents and prevent future disappointments, I was struck by how much of my identity could be expressed through a brief multi-media profile combining image and text: from the quantifications of my person — How tall was I? How much did I weigh? — to the existential — who was I and what brought me to the app? Making a profile requires putting into discourse the metaphysical aspects of one's existence. In making profiles, users make their identities legible.

The discourse of the platform also frames how this identity will be assembled and construed. At the time I was using it, Grindr billed itself as an app for gay men. The description

provided in the app store presupposed a stable conception of “gay” and “man”, and all profiles on the app were expected to be variations on that theme. But what did it mean to be gay? Or a man for that matter? What did it mean to be both in the compound: gay man? The more I tried to describe myself on the app, the more I came to realize how much of my identity was grounded on a normative prescription of ‘gay man’ supplied by the app and the cultural history it was embedded within. By trying to translate my real-world identity to the app, I had encountered a rather severe case of ontological and epistemological aphasia. Through this process of making media — that is to say, inscribing marks on an object to convey information — I had been confronted with the conventions I used to express my identity.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler offers what has become a foundational claim of gender studies, that sexual and gendered identities are performative “expressions” (34) rather than inherent ways of being. Thinking about this claim in relation to the interrogative nature of the Grindr profile, I began to consider the ways that performing “gay” and “man” could be negotiated and framed online. Were they the same across all platforms, or might they differ depending on the media technologies involved? What else might be influencing the ways in which I construct, construe and convey my sexuality, my body, my personality, my identity today? Thinking beyond these epistemological questions, I turned to the ontological: what have been the ways technology framed these concepts like “gay” and “man” in the first place? How has technology contributed to the development of these terms?

This dissertation is the result of trying to work through those questions by offering a theory of how queer interactions with media technologies can make identities. It explores a series of cases extending from the present day back in time to the Victorian era. Despite the scope of over a century, each case remains driven by three interlocking questions: How have people used technology to make queer identities? How can practices of re-using and repurposing media

technology express queer identities? How can the identity of a given technology impact and influence these expressions? In all cases, the analysis rests on the assumption that technologies for creating and organizing information contribute to the construction of standardized conventions that determine the types of identities that develop.

As I mentioned above, this putting into discourse also entails submitting these concepts to various systems of signification — to the ways of making meaning communicable on terms set by society, culture, and especially technologies. Previous scholarship has shown how media technologies configure epistemes¹. For media archaeologist Fredrich Kittler, “Man”, as discursive object, is both summoned and supposed by media technologies within a system of media, and the technologies of their production. He calls this system a *discourse network*.² Kittler marks the techno-discursive operations underlying this construction by referring to this Enlightenment subject “So-called Man” — “so-called” because the means of calling, of naming, indeed, of signifying emerged within technologies for articulating discourse through inscription. “So-Called Man” is an historical aberration concomitant with socio-cultural media technical alterations, as a subjectivity whose possibility for being named emerges because of media inscription systems of notation (i.e. discourse networks).

Kittler is here drawing from a Foucauldian analysis whereby discourse produces subjects. Yet, where Foucault argues that discourse emerges because of socio-cultural systems, Kittler

¹ A term I take from Foucault as he describes it in *The Order of Things*.

² In *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, Kittler posits monolithic networks of knowledge production and transmission that emerge within technological systems (and not the socio-cultural systems offered by Foucault’s analysis). Kittler construes subjectivities as emergent properties of technological systems, or, as media theorist Jussi Parikka puts it, “[s]ubjectivities wired to technologies” (Parikka “Friedrich Kittler (1943-2011)”). Kittler takes Foucault’s genealogical method and stresses its limits — Parikka dubs Kittler “a sort of a Foucault of the technical age”, arguing that “it is already clear that humanity could not have invented information machines, but to the contrary, is their subject” (“The World of the Symbolic” 143).

argues that discourse emerges from media technological inscription.³ For Kittler, since media technologies produce discourse, media technologies are constitutive of subjects through technologically structured modes of knowledge production and mobilization. Regardless of which media hermeneutic we pursue, the point I am making is that socialization and technologization operate in tandem to configure the ontologies of identities.

Approaches

The main focus of this dissertation is to explore how media technologies influence the making of queer identities. For my purposes, the term “making” encompasses how these identities are created, propagated and sustained; historically and contemporaneously.

The further back I delved into the history of media and queerness, the more I began to notice that the history of media, and especially the study of so-called ‘old’ media, had a great deal to offer research into contemporary practices of queer identity formation. The works of media theorists excavating the histories of media technologies, including Friedrich Kittler, Lisa Gitelman and Matthew Kirschenbaum, suggested to me how media technologies, like cameras, printing machines and text processors, and the practices of their use, were integral to complex circuits of making queerness and affording queer socialization.

Perhaps the most concrete example of this situation is explored in my fourth chapter, which considers the production of a short-lived clandestine lesbian magazine (the first in North America) published by a secretary, Lisa Ben, at a Los Angeles movie studio in 1947 using a typewriter and carbon copy paper. The form the magazine took — stapled pages collated and typeset by one person in a private office using company materials — makes visible the capacity for media technologies to afford queer and creative reuse and repurpose. The work was typed

³ Geoffrey Winthrop-Young summarises Kittler’s progression from discourse analysis into media studies as a means of “technologiz[ing] and extend[ing] Foucault” (*Kittler and the Media* 59).

because, as a secretary, Ben was expected to use the technology at her job, but with little actual work to do at a struggling studio she could direct her time, labour, skills and access to media materials to type up a personal magazine. Anti-homosexuality imposed restrictions on the production and spread of the material. The magazine was typeset without images in case anyone in the office gave the work a passing glance, and because Ben did not have private access to half-tone printing machines. It was limited to 12 copies because 5 sheets plus the original was the greatest thickness that Ben's mechanical typewriter could achieve. It was carbon copied only because social prohibitions precluded Ben from taking the work to a photocopier. This limitation necessitated its recirculation from hand to hand in the clandestine lesbian bar scene in LA. The creative circulation of queer materials promoted sociality among queer people. My chapter thus explores how the mechanisms of media technologies afforded by her milieu as a secretary determined the form of the message and even shaped its contents.

My media archaeological method is outlined in varying degrees by media theorists and media historians Erkki Huhtamo, Jussi Parikka, and Siegfried Zielinski. In *What is Media Archaeology*, Parikka clarifies that media archaeology offers “a way to investigate the new media cultures through insights from past new media, often with an emphasis on the forgotten, the quirky, the non-obvious apparatuses, practices and inventions” (2). I chose media archaeology because its embrace of heterogeneous methodologies and terminological multiplicity readily accommodates a queer approach to media studies. In *Deep Time of the Media*, Siegfried-Zielinski offers an approach to performing media archaeology that embraces fluidity in the objects of study and the means of studying them. This perspective, which he defines according to his neologism ‘anarchaeology’, requires a simultaneous making and unmaking of phenomena. Drawing from Zielinski's present work in constructing a ‘variantology’ of media and cultural histories, a deep and often deviant reading against the grain of these histories across domains and time scales, I

have sought to offer a variantology of queer identities by focusing on the practices of using technology to make queer identities. Part of my reason for pursuing the broad scope of more than a century is to avoid the possibility for assuming an essentialist position regarding what it is to be queer, and to equivocate practices of queer making to any one specific media scene.

My approach is drawn in part from Erkki Huhtamo's media archaeological method, which seeks to identify, analyze and trace "the cultural 'logics' that condition" how units of culture propagate through time and space (28)⁴. More precisely, Huhtamo's anarcho-archaeological method studies topoi: the trains of ideas that cohere in successive reproductions of media technological, cultural technical and socio-cultural relays. Topoi are discursive and conceptual motifs in both form and content, shaped by the times and places in which they are produced, and which shape them in a reciprocal turn. Topoi are analogous to Foucault's concept of 'discursive formations', which "mold the meaning(s) of cultural objects" (Huhtamo 28) through rhetorical techniques.

The topoi I have selected for analysis include masculinity, gay, lesbian and gaymer. My intent is not to produce a full account of every instance of these discursive units, but to instead trace particular instances in which these topoi are mobilized through media systems to express queer ways of being. My method is drawn from "Friedrich Kittler's Media Scenes—An Instruction Manual", in which Marcel O'Gorman draws from the work of Kittler to outline an approach to literary criticism that engages with cultural objects by situating them within the specific social and technological contexts of their emergence. The first step is to isolate an event by situating it within their technological milieu. Next, clarify how these developments have been determined by "specific historical, technological or scientific conditions of their technological milieu". The analysis should further demonstrate the interconnectedness of these conditions to

⁴ In a turn of phrase that reminds me of Socrates' belief that ideas "roll around" once written into words (*Republic* V.479d3-10), Huhtamo describes the movement of topoi as "wanderings".

stress their influence on the media scene. Using this methodology, I revisit some well-traversed areas of queer studies, including the obscenity trials of two notable queer authors, Oscar Wilde and Radclyffe Hall, but I pay particular attention to the specific media situations to demonstrate the importance of these contexts to the development of discourses about being queer and expressing queer identities.

Every scene in this dissertation contains multiple and competing topoi, none of which contains a more substantive claim to the truth of queerness but which nonetheless obtains their cultural power through its sustained objectification in media. Given the specialized universalism required to accurately consider topoi, these formations must be examined as integrally related to the technical systems in which they propagate. As Huhtamo and Parikka explain in *Media Archaeology*, “Topoi are discursive ‘engines’ that mediate themes, forms, and fantasies across cultural traditions” (25). To excavate a topos requires uncovering and tracing its cultural and technological currents across multiple strata.⁵ As I understand them, topoi represent the synthesis of mechanical and cultural activities across media technologies, temporalities and materialities. By studying them within their embedded socio-technical contexts, these “historical snapshot[s]” thus function as “a series of nodal points that shed light on informative media scenes, without claiming to illuminate the entire history of media” (O’Gorman). For my purposes, this constellation of nodes outlines my subject and structures my theory without foreclosing the interpretive possibilities these scenes are intended to provoke.

⁵ Just like with Foucault’s discursive formations, the approach to their analysis should be the “systematic description of a discourse-object” (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 140). To study topoi cannot entail wrenching them from the systems in which they circulate. “When a topos emerges,” notes Huhtamo, “it should be treated as a node in a complex network of references and determinants” (33). According to Huhtamo, “Topoi should be analyzed not only internally within a topos tradition but also externally through relation to the cultural contexts within which they appear” (34).

In approaching the history of sexuality without taking the concept of homosexuality as a natural given, I am drawing on previous scholarship from gay and lesbian as well as queer studies that explore the ways sexualities came to be constituted as coherent categories in the nineteenth century. Many historians of sexuality have followed Foucault's *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* by tracing the development of a homo/hetero binarism emerging after the neologism "homosexual" was coined by Karl Kertbeny in 1869 (the word in German is "Homosexualität"). Robert Tobin, for instance, has sought to show how the variety of "peripheral desires", to quote the title of his book, in nineteenth-century Europe were framed by legal, medical and cultural discourses and consolidated into stable concepts like homosexuality and heterosexuality. Robert Beachy's work goes so far as to argue that factors like the codified criminalization of same-sex eroticism and its public opposition in the free press in nineteenth-century Germany led to the invention of the concept of homosexuality itself, which was then adopted by medical and legal discourse throughout Europe. Laurie Marhoefer and Katie Sutton have also contributed to the role that discourse about sexuality in Germany played in the construction of gay, lesbian and trans identities in early twentieth-century Germany.

The focus on Germany in this scholarship, what we might call the German tradition of sexual history, can be attributed to the consequential role that its legal and medical discourse played in the development of sexual categories. Germany was the first country to systematically and scientifically treat the question of sexuality as biomedical and psychological phenomena, rather than an ecclesiastical one, which in turn afforded the qualification of sexuality as an intrinsic identity rather than an activity.⁶ Only when a term like homosexuality develops and

⁶ In addition to the scholarship noted already, see the work of Heike Bauer, particularly *English Literary Sexology: Translations of Inversion 1860-1930* and "Theorizing Female Inversion: Sexology, Discipline and Gender at the Fin de Siècle".

receives widespread adoption does there seem to emerge a coherent capacity to *be homosexual* rather than merely practice what had up till that point been declared sodomy or some other related vice.⁷ For this research, I am interested in what I term the Anglo-American tradition of homosexuality,⁸ which I take to mean the English discourses of sexuality that emerge in the wake of the German invention of homosexuality, particularly their deployment within the late Victorian period in Britain.

Scholars have also considered the methodological and conceptual problems implicit in trying to do queer history. David Halperin suggests in *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* that “the current definitional uncertainty about what homosexuality is, or the uncertainty about what features are constitutive of lesbian or gay male identity, is the result of this long historical process of accumulation, accretion, and overlay” (106). In a move indebted to Foucault’s history of sexuality, Halperin proposes scholarship should embrace these “transhistorical continuities” within a genealogical framework (106), one that accommodates ruptures and discontinuities in

⁷ Scholarship has nonetheless traced the same-sex practices of men and women throughout history. For discussions of same-sex activities and subcultural formation in nineteenth-century England prior to the invention of the term, see H.G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences*; Graham Robb, *Strangers*; and, Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London*. For an extended exploration of how men used print media in the eighteenth and nineteenth century to navigate male-male desire prior to its designation as homosexuality, see George Haggerty, *Men in Love: Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century*; and, Jonathan Ned Katz, *Love Stories: Sex Between Men Before Homosexuality*. Regarding documents produced after the invention of the term, some works that have touched on how the invention of the term “homosexual” influenced writing about sexual identity include Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885*; Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914*; and, George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. For the effect on lesbian identity, see Lillian Faderman *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*.

⁸ A tradition that arguably begins with Mary McIntosh’s “The Homosexual Role”. McIntosh’s radical reconceptualization of the nature of sexuality as a socially constructed phenomenon was taken up by later scholars, namely Randolph Trumbach, “London’s Sodomites: Homosexual Behavior and Western Culture in the 18th Century”, and Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, and “The Construction of Homosexuality”. Trumbach compares conceptualizations of homosexuality between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and claims that the activities these terms denote could not have been reliably practiced before the development and mass circulation of these terms. Weeks also distinguishes between homosexual behaviour, “which is universal”, and homosexual identity as “historically specific--and a comparatively recent phenomenon in Britain” (3). Within queer studies, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* serves as a foundational text exploring this Anglo-American tradition.

discourse. But if contemporary scholarship into the history of homosexuality has sought to trace the development of sexual identities wary of their social and cultural discontinuities, it has done so in ways that nonetheless fix categories using present understandings of sexuality as a framework for analysing the past. Acknowledging this tendency in *Female Masculinity*, Jack Halberstam argues instead for an approach he calls “perverse presentism”: a move indebted to Foucault, which treats the history of the past as if it were the present, rather than “a history of the past in terms of the present” (qtd in Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* 53). As I explore in chapters 1, 3 and 4, unequal access to knowledge meant that participation within the discourses of sexuality were unequally distributed among queer people. While new language developed towards the end of the nineteenth century, it does not mean these terms suddenly meant the same thing to everyone all at once. Thus, my project applies a perverse presentist approach that explores how these new vocabularies of sexuality and sexual identity were spread through media and could influence discourses—and to do so without fixing these terms as widely agreed upon labels.

Definitions

When dealing with so wide a span of time, and with subjects that are slippery enough in the present, some clarifications are needed. Firstly, I use “queer” in the sense provided by queer theory. Steven Seidman, for instance, a sociologist who has written extensively on sexuality, describes queer as “living on the edge of gender and sexual divisions, refusing to take comfort in the embrace of any unitary, seamless identity” (92). Queer scholars Bonnie Ruberg and Adrienne Shaw, drawing on the work of Judith Butler and Jack Halberstam, offer that “Queerness, as [sic] its heart, can be defined as the desire to live life otherwise, by questioning and living outside of normative boundaries” (x). This queer subjectivity can also inform LGBTQ culture. In *How to Be*

Gay, historian and queer cultural studies scholar David Halperin argues that gay culture develops from a queer subjectivity that “expresses itself through a peculiar, dissident way of relating to cultural objects (movies, songs, clothes, books, works of art) and cultural forms in general (art and architecture, opera and musical theater, pop and disco, style and fashion, emotion and language)” (12) that can lead to “new works ... produced by queer people and that reflect on queer experience” as well as “mainstream works ... that queer people have selectively appropriated and reused for anti-heteronormative purposes” (421).

I use *queer* in this sense — of a persistently mutable meaning that extends beyond heterocentrism — conscious of the complexity this adds to describing my research. More than a matter of labels, my use of queer represents a matter of approach. Rather than settling the question of what it means to be gay or lesbian, my aim is instead to ask how such terms came to be in the first place by tracing their origins and development within interconnected systems of discourse and technology. I admit upfront that this approach can lead to some awkward sentences, and perhaps even some confusion, but my intent is to work against fixing queerness in terms like *gay* and *lesbian*.

My use of *queer* is motivated by my exploration of identities that existed prior to the emergence of the term *gay*. Labeling their identities as gay after the fact would be to misrepresent and distort their identities. Although formulations of sexual identities in the Victorian era might seem at odds with how queer expressions of sex and gender are understood today, these expressions were nonetheless notable in their period for the ways they transgressed social and cultural prescriptions. Approached in a queer way, these identities have much to offer contemporary queer studies seeking to understand the practices of queer identity construction in any era. If these identities do not fall under the contemporary rubric of what constitutes queer today, it is because the bounds of normativity have shifted so drastically since their time.

Furthermore, I treat these identities as queer rather than gay to work against an essentializing mindset that goes something like this: people who lived before the emergence of terms like gay were merely engaging in behaviors that today should be taken as synonymous for contemporary identity archetypes like gay. I approach these terms as discursive repositories of polyvalent meanings. I use *queer* to provoke reflection on the ways that terms frame our understandings of bodies, behaviours and desires. If queer is always to be found on the horizon of possibilities, then those contiguities which point to the spaces of queerness today are not those of yesterday. Some will likely disagree with my choice of terms, but I felt this represented the most appropriate means of respecting the contributions made by previous generations towards expanding the horizon of queer possibilities in their socio-cultural milieux.

I even extend this theoretical approach to present day instantiations like gay and gaymer, where I continue to think queerly about what it means to be an identity in order to challenge the presumptive clarity that terms like gay are intended to afford. Indeed, this approach is shown to be necessary to approach the concept of gaymer identity in chapter 5, since the early meanings of this neologism differ radically from its contemporary deployments on social media platforms. To retrace and even recover the incipient possibilities of queer making, I treat these instances as queer identities, as non-normative identities that sought to live otherwise, and who did so by making media that challenged and abraded conventional ways of being.

Before I extend any further along these lines, I want to point out that I do not treat sexual identity as universal, natural and immutable but rather an unfolding of societal, sexual concepts described by law and social practice. For instance, noted historian and social constructivist Jeffrey Weeks argues against prevailing assumptions of sexuality as “an unproblematic natural given”, and describes it instead as “an historical unity which has been shaped and determined by a multiplicity of forces, and which has undergone complex historical transformations” (*Sex* ix).

Nor do I do approach identity terms like gay and lesbian as immutable concepts, but instead as socially and technologically mediated apparatuses for channeling queerness. According to Weeks, these identity terms “are not just new labels [...] they point to a changing reality” in society (3). The formulation of every identity label is a social and cultural negotiation, and indexes the specific milieu of its formation.⁹

My inquiry into queerness as a way of making identities is not intended to essentialize or equivocate either queerness or gayness. As I explore in each of my cases, terminology is always labile and polymorphous, especially when it comes to sexuality. The history, provenance and usage of terms are non-linear, unstable, often overlapping and recurring, as well geographically and temporally situated by media.

I make this move cautious of what Stephen Seidman calls minoritizing practices. In “Queer Pedagogy/Queer-ing Sociology”, for instance, Seidman calls these minoritizing practices misrepresentative and exclusionary¹⁰, while positing a group identity where none might exist. Perhaps most problematically, “[m]inoritizing frameworks perpetuate a sexual and social regime which organizes all sexualized bodies, identities, and behaviors in terms of a hetero/homo grid” (174). Seidman’s objection further points to the ways in which sexual identities have been historically construed. I have sought as best I can to not essentialize ‘homosexuality’, ‘gay’ or ‘men’ in ways that tokenize and exclude already marginalized people.

⁹ The same can be said of homosexuality, which has never been a stable category across any time and culture. In the preface to the second edition of Jeffrey Weeks’ *Coming Out*, for instance, Weeks writes that “attitudes towards, and concepts of, homosexuality are always culturally specific, and are shaped by complex historical forces” (x).

¹⁰ As Seidman explains, “[Minoritizing] perspectives focus on the making of homosexual desire into an identity and community, regardless of whether it is assumed that homosexuality is a universal or more local characteristic of humanity. Central to the minoritizing perspective is the moment in which homoerotic desire becomes the basis for a sexual identity of a social minority. Minoritizing approaches frame homosexuality in terms of the model of an ethnic identity and group” (173). See also critiques of minoritizing made the year previously in “Identity and Politics in a ‘Postmodern’ Gay Culture: Some Historical and Conceptual Notes.” Pp. 105-142 in Michael Warner, ed., *Fear of a Queer Planet*. Minneapolis. University of Minnesota Press.

In the work that follows, I use constructs like ‘homosexuality’, ‘gay’, and ‘men’. However, I do not treat them as monolithic ideas. This dissertation adopts the social constructionist approach to homosexuality: that attraction towards and desire for a given sex is determined by the socially constructed qualifiers of what constitutes a sex — homosexuality is a social construct that develops within a conceptual framework comprised of legal, juridical and social discourse.

As social constructivists of homosexuality like Kenneth Plummer point out, “specific ways of experiencing sexual attraction and gender behaviour are bound up with specific historical and cultural milieux” (*Making* 12). Though I want to account for dominant epistemic constructions of gender and sexuality for each media scene analyzed in this project, I am not interested in perpetuating dichotomies like hetero/homo or man/woman, even as I try to account for the effect these dichotomies have produced. In other words, while I deny the truth value of these binaries, I am trying to work within epistemological systems that have been structured around these binaries as truths — like man/woman, gay/straight, masculine/feminine, human/non-human — because of the unavoidable influence these dichotomies have had in structuring identity work.

What I want to achieve with this dissertation, moreover, is an increased focus on the role of media technologies in the construction of identity. Among scholarly discussions of sexual identities, media technologies remain the oft elided components of a complex historical and cultural infrastructure, referenced obliquely if at all, and usually as a means to an end.¹¹ In

¹¹ Jeffrey Weeks, for instance, claims that five conditions are necessary for the emergence of politicized sexual identities, but does not mention media technologies and their use as being among them. The five are: “the existence of large numbers in the same situation; geographical concentration; identifiable targets of opposition; sudden events or changes in social position; and an intellectual leadership with readily understood goals.” (*Sexuality and Its Discontents* p. 191). Elsewhere he argues that “[a]n historical study of homosexuality over the past two centuries or so must therefore have as its focus three closely related questions: the social conditions for the emergence of the category of homosexuality and its construction as the unification of disparate experiences, the relation of this categorization to other socio-sexual categorizations, and the relationship of this categorization to those defined, not simply ‘described’ or labelled but created by it, in particular historical circumstances” (81). Technology and media are overlooked entirely.

contemporary queer studies within the domains of anthropology, sociology and communication studies, the focus tends towards the development of LGBT culture and sexual identity through contemporary social media starting from the late 1990s onward.¹² This dissertation, however, encompasses pre-Internet and pre-digital technologies to consider the consequential role of media technologies in making and sharing identities, and to unpack how queer identities are informed by the tools used to express them and vice-versa.

Chapter breakdowns

This dissertation is comprised of three parts that first offers a theory of making queer identities, then applies this theory to historical developments of queer identities, and concludes by putting research into practice to provoke queer approaches to identity making.

The first three chapters offer explanations for how media technologies inform the making of queer identities. They do so by developing a theory for how identities can be constructed, expressed and mediated by tools and the practices surrounding their use. This dissertation applies these theories to instances of queer identity development from 1890 to the present. Despite the broad timeline, I have aimed for media and technological-specificity in each scene to prevent generalizations. My philosophical exploration of media making and media technologies in chapters 1 and 3 suggests how certain principles can nonetheless scale beyond their respective media scenes, a point which I take up in the second half of the dissertation.

Chapter 1 explores the role played by media in developing the concept of homosexuality into an identity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It does so by putting the publication of these discourses into perspective with the media technologies of late twentieth

¹² Exemplary work by Sharif Mowlabocus (*Gaydar Culture*), Andrew Cooper (*Changing Gay Male Identities*), John Edward Campbell (*Getting it on Online*), Christopher Pullen (*Gay Identity: New Storytelling and the Media*) and Elija Cassidy (*Gay Men, Identity and Social Media*), to name only a few, focus on the convergence of social activities with cultural practices on digital platforms.

century print culture — mechanical printing presses and hot metal typesetting. By studying the discourse surrounding homosexuality contained within print materials like books, pamphlets, poems and letters, this chapter accounts for how the developing figure of the male homosexual served as a focal point for communicating and defining a socially legible form of queer desire, and how male homosexuality could then be used to build an identity organized around queerness. My point in describing these events is to consider their effect in codifying queer representation in the ensuing decades, which I emphasize in the conclusion of the chapter by turning to how sexological discourse based on published writings on male homosexuality shaped discursive constructions of female homosexuality.

With this overture completed, and before looking at another overarching case, I interrogate my theory of making identity through engagements with media technology by turning to the works of someone whom I treat as a queer theorist *avant-la-lettre*, Alan Turing. More specifically, I read his 1950 paper “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” as an important contribution to media archaeology, social constructionism and game studies, as a way to think through how media can accrete as an identity through the play of signs. More specifically, this chapter focuses on the conditions of Turing’s imaginary imitation game as a way of thinking through how we can make identities, especially queer ones, through media. Because the conditions of the test involve identities exchanged through media—through typewritten scraps of paper which are interpreted by an interrogator who then assigns subjectivities like man, woman, human and machine—this chapter argues that the test provides an onto-epistemological model for thinking through how we can make identities through mediated inscriptions of language. Drawing on theories of game studies, and more specifically queer game studies, I also theorize The

Universal Turing machine as a speculative technology that queers, disrupts and destabilizes through the procedural rhetoric¹³ of the Imitation Game.

Chapter 3 builds on the themes from the last two chapters, and extends the argument for the consequential relationship of technology in making gay identities by reviewing the history of gay liberation efforts from the perspective of its techno-cultural development. Drawing from philosophies of technology, this chapter argues that the use of media technologies to frame queer identities has contributed to fixing ways of construing queerness. That gay identity has become so thoroughly actualized in media representation is a concern I take up in chapters 4 and 5.

Taken together, these first three chapters describe how the emergence of discursive constructions of sexual identities (including queer, homosexual, lesbian, and gay) correspond to successive innovations in media and communications technology. While one of the primary aims in the first half of this dissertation is to explore how society arrived at contemporary formulations of gay identity, my point is not to trace a teleology that posits “gay” as an inevitability. Rather, proceeding variantologically, these chapters explore how queer identities (predominantly related to same-sex desire) have been constructed and coordinated through technology across time and space in the West, with “gay” as one notable accretion of queer making.¹⁴

In chapter four I explore the effects of making gay identities through media technology in greater depth by considering the deployment of discourse in the pages of *Vice-Versa*. By analysing several essays in the magazine, this chapter considers how its discussions of queerness are shaped by prior mediated discourses of sexology. Further, as mentioned above, this chapter

¹³ A term I take from Ian Bogost’s *Unit Operations*.

¹⁴ This is not to say that people without access to media technology did not form identities. Rather, their identities operated outside the historical trajectory I am sketching here. This provides enormous liberty for thinking through the possibilities of identity formation and requires us to recognize that what we think we know about gay identity is determined by the media records that survive.

emphasises the theoretical relationship between media technology and identity making in greater detail by focusing on how the media situation of a single secretary, and especially the technical capacities of a single typewriter, afforded and constrained queer media making with the creation of a queer magazine in 1947.

In chapter 5, these theoretical considerations are explored in a contemporary setting on a social media platform — Reddit. More specifically, this chapter researches the media shared among a sub-Reddit community with over 60,000 members organized around the intersections between gay and game culture. Using both content and discourse analysis approaches, I analyze the materials created and shared by redditors on the subreddit r/gaymers, an online group organized around the sharing of material related to queer culture and games. I discuss the role of the Reddit platform in shaping the identity of information shared within the subreddit. This chapter presents the findings of my study and attends to how the media technological system of Reddit influences constructions of gaymer identity on the subreddit. Extending my discussion of media technologies to social media platforms, this chapter argues that while coordinating the ways people share information among social networks, platforms also determine the information that is shared. Given the chapters which precede it that have explored how media can serve to fix discourse about identities, this chapter offers a recent case study about the ramifications of using media technology to share identities.

Taken together, these chapters are intended to show the fundamental role of media technologies in making identities. The focus remains largely on gay identities, tracking the various ways concepts about gayness and identity have been communicated using technology, how a term like gay identity has been inscribed and encoded in a variety of media formats in the past and present. To do so, these chapters interrogate the material and technological identity of media technology within specific moments to think critically about how inscription devices like

typewriters, carbon paper, and even digital interfaces afford and constrain meanings of queerness and identities. Media technologies are not neutral conveyors of meaning, they too are implicated within epistemologies.

Though this may all seem like an argument for a strong technological determinism, I am instead arguing that we can take an active role in how our identities are created, propagated and sustained through critical engagements with media technologies. The final chapter is intended as an intervention in these processes outlined in the previous chapters. Chapter 6 focuses on a research-creation piece that explores the interplay between queerness, gender and technology in a practical way through the building of a critical object using Arduino microcontrollers. The object itself was inspired by an offhand reference made in a book from 1900, *Ideal Physical Culture*, in which a professional strongman ambiguously described a novel ‘muscle developer’ he had invented. Though it might not have even existed, the machine's socio-cultural function suggests a great deal about the development of physical culture and masculinity at the turn of the century. Putting archival research and theories of gender and sexuality into the practice of critical making, this chapter investigates the rhetorical techniques of muscle-building and technological-making that have worked to make masculinity in the West. The object itself aims to queer normative technological systems and socio-cultural paradigms by which we are all technically gendered—be it pen, typewriter, book or magazine.

The final turn to critical making may seem out of place when considering the entire dissertation, however this evocative multi-media object-to-think-with¹⁵ serves two functions: it provides concrete ways to think through the role of techniques and technologies in making identities, and it offers a provocative technology and media theory for others to engage with a

¹⁵ An amalgamation of terms borrowed from Sherry Turkle's *Evocative Objects*.

theory of identity making in a more concrete manner. My belief is that articulating the impact of technologies on identities affords productive ways of intervening in technoculture—perhaps even queering it.

The term ‘queer’ itself suggests something of the makerliness associated with identity formation. In “The Shape of Queer”, for instance, Shane Phelan explains that queer names “an unstable identity process”, one that is “not intentionally claimed but nonetheless carried out through interactions” (60). As Annamarie Jagose explains, “queer is always an identity under construction, a site of permanent becoming” (131). Indeed, each of my chapters explore precisely this destabilizing of secure identity categories to establish new ones through engagements with media technologies — to make queer inscriptions and queer media. That said, the cases I examine in my dissertation should not be taken as exemplars of what constitutes queer making or gay identity, but rather construed as sites that can reveal how one’s social, cultural and technological milieux afford access to resources coordinated by class, race, gender and developments in the technical production of media that constitutes the expression of identity.

Limitations

Given the scope of history I seek to cover in this study, some limitations are necessary to mention.

Chapters 1 and 3, 4 and 5 reflect on the ways in which mediated identities have been used to situate understandings of sexuality and queerness over the past century. These chapters are limited to people, texts and media that commanded some degree of cultural authority, both within their own period and after. Though intended to manage the scope of the project, this focus introduces some unavoidable limitations. First, the focus on print culture in the late Victorian era is largely focused on discourses coordinated by white, European men describing narrow

representations of homosexuality. This limitation should not be taken to mean that I consider these identities as somehow truer, more tangible or more queer than others. Though I have tried as best I can to offer various perspectives from other queer writers in the past, future archival research would add much needed nuance.

Moreover, my aim is not to provide an epistemology for queer identities. Instead, I have attempted to offer a variantological account for how queer interactions with media technologies can deposit identities that come to be construed as categories like “gay”. My aim is to ask how the various socially traded meanings of these conceptually slippery terms have contributed to ways of making, reading and sharing queer identities. Rather than stabilize these terms then, this research provokes reflection on how the histories of technocultures have contributed to making queer identities. Indeed, the aim is to dismantle the historically supplied stability of these terms by exploring how privileged access to media technologies contribute to the discourses of queerness, gayness and other non-normative identities. Studying media technology in conjunction with identity formation can help scholars to put into perspective the ways that race and class contribute towards setting the normative scripts (both homo- and hetero-) that comprise these identities.

My hope is that future studies will place this speculative media archaeology in service of an intersectional, historical queer media studies to raise further scrutiny about the role played by access to technology in making queer identities. Future research could extend this approach to situating identity within systems of media technologies towards the making of other non-normative identities. Further work could account for how access to technology privileged by race and class has influenced and continues to influence constructions of gender, sexuality and identity. Significant work remains to be done that considers how conceptions of queerness have been used to construe identities by those with marginalized participation in technocultures.

The point with this study has not been to speak *for* all identities in all cultures, but to nonetheless speak *about* how access to technology contributes to making identities in a technoculture. We might further explore development of other sexual identities that took place beyond these spaces, but that remains beyond the scope of this research.

Read in this way, this dissertation offers an analysis of the process by which white and western media practices produced knowledge about queer difference. Chapters 1, 3 and 6 especially review the means by which the domains of sexual difference were framed through privileged access to discourse and technologies governing its deployment. The aim, it must be clarified, is not to affirm the validity of such knowledge, but rather to excavate the depths of its complicity with media technologies. Examining how terminology around queerness was set through media technology allows us to better understand the factors involved in its conceptual developments. This research is intended to establish how the margins were set for making future identities. As I discuss throughout my dissertation, and especially in my last two chapters, the procedures and products of these historically predicated modes of knowledge production, which contribute to the epistemologies of bodies, genders and sexualities, continue to influence queer identities.

Chapter 1

A Provisional Variantology of Queer Media: 1896-1928

This chapter excavates the influence of media technologies on discourses about queer identities at two historical periods. It explores how the socio-economic and socio-cultural practices of mass printing cohered discourses around sexual practices and behaviours, starting from the point sketched by Foucault in the second volume of the *History of Sexuality, The Use of Pleasure*, in which he isolates the invention of the homosexual as a set of printed discursive conventions set in the nineteenth century.¹ Foucault argues that texts in the nineteenth century taxonomized social behaviours to form a description of sexuality fixed around the polarities of masculinity and femininity. In Foucault's formulation of the invention of homosexuality, a nineteenth century figure of 'Man' occupies the central node in social and discursive networks of signifiers, whose significations are prescribed by texts. If the system of discourses established in the late nineteenth century for programming sexual subjects produced the homosexual, as Foucault argues, technological developments of that system created a networked space through which the homosexual might *reproduce* the self. Situating this claim within the media

¹ See for instance Foucault's provocative assertion that

[i]n nineteenth-century texts there is a stereotypical portrait of the homosexual or invert: not only his mannerisms, his bearing, the way he gets dolled up, his coquetry, but also his facial expressions, his anatomy, the feminine morphology of his whole body, are regularly included in this disparaging description. The image alludes both to the theme of role reversal and to the principle of a natural stigma attached to this offense against nature. It was as if "nature herself had become an accessory to sexual mendacity." One could doubtless trace the long history of this image (to which actual behaviors may have corresponded, through a complex play of inductions and attitudes of defiance). In the deeply negative intensity of this stereotype, one might read the age old difficulty, for our societies, of integrating these two phenomena—different phenomena at that—of the inversion of sexual roles and intercourse between individuals of the same sex. Now this image, with the repulsive aura that surrounds it, has come down through the centuries. (18)

technological scene of the late Victorian era, this chapter argues that the means of making media inscription play formative roles in framing identity types.

Thinking about the “stereotypical portrait” of the homosexual that has “come down through the centuries” (Foucault 18), the questions I explore in this chapter are the following: How does a concept obtain its significance as such? In more practical terms, how was the homosexual figure made identifiable? How might the development of such concepts contribute to the foundation of a way of being queer? How does the portrait serve to channel the spectre of its representations? I then turn to the ways in which these printed discourses were used by authors to construe and express their queer desires. Taken together, the instances explored in this chapter show how the discursive stereotyping of homosexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century afforded a means to cohere complex conceptualizations of queerness that depended on their reception *through media inscription*.

Queer Inscription

The relationship between discourse and the formation of sexual identities was theorised by scholars in the early 1970s, who noticed that legislation of homosexual identity led to an increase in homosexual identification compared to other, less restrictive societies.² This claim was further developed independently by Jeffrey Weeks and Michel Foucault in the late 1970s, and later adopted by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, who argued that pogroms against homosexuality and the legislation of homosociality in fact contributed to a consolidation of homosexual identity, whereby “persecutions tended themselves to solidify the homosexual culture they were aimed at eradicating” (Sedgwick 84).

² see Wainwright Churchill in *Homosexual Behaviour Among Males* and C. A. Tripp *Homosexual Matrix*

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, homosexual pathology offered a discursive focal point for construing sexual identity. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault famously argues that the use of discourse at the start of the nineteenth century produced a social class of taxonomically identifiable people, such that by the close of the century, “the homosexual was now a species” (43). A species indeed: named, dissected and dispersed through media — through the rapid publication of newsprint, the ubiquitous application of legal injunctions and medical prohibitions. The figure of the homosexual became a discursive construct in an intertextual system of significations to communicate desire: for sex, for companionship, even for sustained relations with those of the same sex and gender.

In *Forgetting Foucault*, David Halperin points out that Foucault’s claim was not that queer identities did not exist prior to the medicalization of homosexuality, but that there was a distinct shift in the regulatory discourses that produced sexual categories because of medicalized knowledge about sexual practices previously labeled as deviant and sinful. Further, as Janice M. Irvine points out in her overview of the development of the idea of a gay culture since the Victorian era, “medical discourse did not create categories of sexuality out of whole cloth, but was partially responding to the nascent social organization of groups of people who were beginning to coalesce and [sic] identity around their sexual interests and behaviors” (222). Jeffrey Weeks argues, for instance, that it was not until the late 19th century that homosexuality emerged as an identity rather than a behaviour³. Before that time, societies focused on circumscribing the practice of sodomy. While the 1533 Act of Henry VIII “first brought sodomy within the scope of statute law, superseding ecclesiastical law, adopted the same criterion as the Church,” Weeks points out that “all acts of sodomy were equally condemned as being ‘against nature’ regardless

³ See *Coming Out* part 1, especially chapter 1, “From Sin to Crime” pp 11-22.

of participants” (*Sex* 12). The law was directed against acts, not a particular type of person. Homosexuality was a “potential in all sinful creatures” rather than an identity (*Sex* 12). In a related emphasis of this crucial discursive disjuncture that began to frame sexuality as a personality rather than a behavior, Arthur N. Gilbert offers what he deems a crucial conceptual distinction emerging between sodomy and homosexuality: “The sodomite had been someone who sinned by performing a deviant social act”, while “[t]he homosexual was not a sinner in the old religious sense but someone with an identifiable lifestyle revolving around the choice of sexual partners of the same sex” (61). Thus, while sexual behaviours could be practiced prior to their naming, their coherence as identities that can be adopted or proscribed requires the communication of discourse. In sum, sexual identity emerges from systems of media.

Summarizing the possibilities for same-sex desire to be expressed in Victorian print culture, H. G. Cocks claims, “There were, then, two forms of knowledge and speech about same-sex desire: that of the street and the criminal sodomite, and that of the press and the law” (9). Surely there were more: the juridical discourse, legislated by the charges laid against the sexual activities and indexing a broader legal paradigm; the medical institutions, sexologists, neurologists and psychiatrists, each part of a larger institutional complex committed to publishing knowledge that did not always align with its legal application; the press, offering their coded accusations and diminutive expositions of aberrant sexuality; the clandestine queer writing communities in London; and, finally, each person’s own autobiographical explanation for their sexuality seeking to account for these countless public and private perennations on homosexuality.

Offering a theoretical reading of the development of homosexuality, Lee Edelman argues that the sign of ‘homosexuality’ has been constitutive of sexual identity. Like social constructivism, Edelman is concerned with how homosexuality is a conditioned and constructed phenomenon, the categories of which are reproduced by institutional pressures on discourse.

Unlike social constructivism, he approaches this conditioning from the position of literary rather than social theory. Edelman reads literary texts to determine how the sign of ‘homosexuality’ has been influential and perhaps even determinative in the cultural construction of sexual identity. For instance, Edelman relays how practices of inscription and recognition occur in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the portrait serving as a visual representation that affords Dorian the means to decipher his sexual identity.⁴

Edelman explores the rhetorical construction of sexual difference using a theoretical neologism he calls *homographesis*. Homographesis is the making legible of the unspeakable, unnameable, unmentionable vices delimited and denied by legal and theological discourse; “homographesis refers to the act whereby homosexuality is put into writing under the aegis of writing itself” (12). The procedure of *homographesis* refers to both the writing of sexual identity, the “inscription of ‘the homosexual’ within a tropology that produces him [sic] in a determining relation to inscription itself” (9), and the resistance to that tropology through writing.⁵ In Edelman’s theorization, the homograph serves as the absence that signifies, and thereby supplies the basis to make and share difference. Since it is a construct, the meanings of a homograph are arbitrary, but as a construct, it nonetheless holds and conveys meaning.

Writing imbues meaning to the homograph. In Edelman’s reading, the homosexual, so far as it can be named, is a textual object. Deconstructing ‘homosexuality’ in this way reveals that its sign contains no fixed meaning, no essential qualities, only those imbued by language.

⁴ In an inversion of this logic, certain passages from *Dorian Gray* (and other works by Wilde) were redeployed by magistrates during the trials to mark Wilde’s homosexuality—in some sense suggesting that it was in writing *Dorian* that Wilde came to cohere his sexuality.

⁵ As Edelman explains of this neologism, it “literally incorporates within its structure—and figuratively incorporates by referring back to the body—the notion of ‘graphesis’” (9), that is, the notion of writing that actualizes independence in the process of being written. He explains that his encounter with the idea of ‘graphesis’ came first from Marie-Rose Logan’s article in *Yale French Studies*, where “Logan defines ‘graphesis’ as ‘the nodal point of the articulation of a text’ that ‘de-limits the locus where the question of writing is raised’ and ‘de-scribes the action of writing as it actualizes itself in the text independently of the notion of intentionality’” (9).

Homosexuality, in addition to being socially constructed, is textually constructed and thereby determined by the media of its transmission.

Putting *differance* into writing of difference impels a simultaneous recognition of the arbitrary and conventional nature of what the homograph signifies. If meaning was intuitive in the sign, it would not need to be transferred in graphical units — would not even need transmission. If meaning was inherent to the sign, both would be immune to transformation, but since communication is never a one-to-one transmission of information, is unavoidably messy owing to the noise introduced by society, culture and media themselves, differences accumulate in the tracks of linguistic and verbal units in their sustained transmission.

Edelman's concept obtains a further explanatory power to frame the making of identities when put into focus with Foucault's concept of reverse discourse: both concepts isolate the capacity for discourse to reverse the operations of power. In Foucault's conception, the taxonomic procedure of the eighteenth and nineteenth century afforded discursive purchase to the taxonomized to demand the legitimacy of their schemas.⁶ Homographesis points to ways these demands might have taken shape through discourse. As Foucault explains the nature of discourse: "Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy" (*History vol. 1* 102). Foucault's approach to determining the nature of discourse was to interrogate its systemic and epistemic functions, to consider what knowledge and power a given discourse produces in a system and how they could be reversed to make new systems of knowledge.

⁶ *History of Sexuality, vol 1* p. 101

If, as Foucault has argued, the homosexual was made a species with the progression of confessional practice, it was a species more acutely aware than most of its difference, which could be repurposed as the foundation for its distinction. Judith Butler explains how discourse itself provides a platform for making identities:

The forming, crafting, bearing, circulation, signification of that sexed body will not be a set of actions performed in compliance with the law; on the contrary, they will be a set of actions mobilized by the law, the citational accumulation and dissimulation of the law that produces material effects, the lived necessity of those effects as well as the lived contestation of that necessity. (Butler, *Bodies* xxi)

The capacity to reverse therefore resides in those with the power to wield the instruments of discourse: the tools of media inscription, the means of making and transmitting marks as texts. Psychiatry and sexology may have given birth to the homosexual subject, to paraphrase Foucault, but it was because such findings were printed, disseminated, read and negotiated by individuals through modes of inscription that homosexuality could take on an identity.

In the next section I explore this claim within the context of the media-constructed queerness of Oscar Wilde.

Wilde Matters

This section considers how the media coverage of the Oscar Wilde trials contributed to the development of discourses about queer identities in the late 1890s. To do so, I build upon Ed Cohen's claim in *Talk on the Wilde Side* that the newspaper coverage of the scandals produced Wilde as the embodiment of the emerging of the homosexual trope. My point in returning to this site is not to rehearse the circumstances of the trial, but to investigate the consequential role that discourses about Wilde's identity had in developing an archetype of gay identity. I must emphasize here that I am not positioning Wilde as the quintessential queer person, instead I am describing how media technologies in that era supplied that impression to better consider the effect this had on discourses about queer sexual identities in the decades that followed.

Indeed, a great deal of emphasis has been placed upon the identity and activities of Oscar Wilde as constitutive of a Victorian queer identity. Alan Sinfield goes so far as to claim “the image of the queer emerged around and through the figure of Wilde” (74).⁷ Sinfield further explains how the textual construction of homosexuality concentrated on the figure of Wilde:

For it is not that our idea of ‘the homosexual’ was hiding beneath other phrases, or lurking unspecified in the silence, like a statue under a sheet, fully formed but waiting to be unveiled; it was in the process of becoming constituted. The concept was *emerging* around and through instances like Fanny and Stella, and Wilde. (8)

Given Sinfield’s suggestion, we might expect to find a discourse of queerness in the historical records that would map the formulations of queerness as we know it today. And yet, after examination of the newspaper coverage of the Wilde trial, Ed Cohen offers the remarkable discovery that “while the journalistic accounts endlessly circled around the very titillating sexual accusations made against Wilde, first indirectly by the Marquis of Queensberry’s barrister, and then very directly by the Crown’s prosecution, *at no point did the newspapers describe or even explicitly refer to the sexual charges made against Wilde*” (original emphasis, Cohen 4).⁸ The same act of silence can be found in the earliest legal injunctions against same-sex activity, which relied on the ambiguous categorization of sodomitical activity to localize and thereby locate deviant behavior.

⁷ After Sinfield’s work, other scholars have explored the inscrutable visibility that Wilde presented as his trials. See Linda Dowling’s *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*, and Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885*.

⁸ The omission is not to be mistaken as conspiratorial effort. Cocks makes it clear that journalism had shifted since the first half of the nineteenth century out of a dual effort to avoid inspiring illicit activities, to maintain the decorum of public life, and so as not to perpetuate scandal. In the matter of Queensberry’s inciting note, for instance, *The Times* reported that it was a “defamatory libel” uttering “epithets of the foulest nature” (*The Times* (London, England), Monday, Mar 04, 1895; pg. 14; Issue 34515.). “At MARLBOROUGH-STREET, on Saturday, the MARQUIS.” *Times* [London, England] 4 Mar. 1895: 14. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 17 Mar. 2018. A poem of intimate longing Wilde had expressed for Lord Alfred Douglas, it was contended by Sir Edward Clarke, barrister for Mr Wilde, “had no relation whatever to the hateful and repulsive suggestions incorporated in the plea in this case” (*The Times* (London, England), Thursday, Apr 04, 1895; pg. 7; Issue 34542.) “Central Criminal Court, April 3.” *Times* [London, England] 4 Apr. 1895: 7. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 17 Mar. 2018. When the facts of the case came to be known involving Wilde and Taylor, the reportage claimed simply “that there were very serious charges against two men name Oscar Wilde and Alfred Taylor” (“This morning the April sessions for the jurisdiction.” *Times* [London, England] 23 Apr. 1895: 4. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 17 Mar. 2018.).

The omission in the press of these specific details was no accident. In the 1850s, Sir Robert Peel “forbore to mention sodomy in Parliament, ‘the crime *inter Christianos non nominandum*’ (the crime not to be named among Christians)” (Weeks, *Sex* 14). While continuing to remain unnamed, the marks of its erasure sounded its presence, like sonar imaging the outline of a figure unassailable to our other senses that could then become a space for queer being. Owing to this enforced silence, Cohen contends that the press relied on a persistent reservoir of cultural meanings attributed and associated to sodomitical practice to assemble and cohere a burgeoning portrait of ‘indecent’ activities between men.⁹

But what then to make of this seeming cascade of paradoxes? On the one hand, the public was incensed by some knowledge about the nature of the crimes, which even Wilde himself famously refused to speak aloud, while on the other, never once saw these details in print, which even in its euphemistic form was enough to provoke political outcry. How did queerness come to be known if nobody could be certain what exactly they were speaking about? Indeed, John Douglas only accused Wilde of “*posing* as a sodomite [sic]” (emphasis mine). Was the act of truly *being one* unthinkable?

The textual representation of Douglas’s written rebuke suggests the role of homographesis in formulating a homosexual identity. The *Evening Standard’s* reportage of the note, for instance, reproduces the note while omitting the remark: “Oscar Wilde posing as -----” (qtd in Cohen 145). Reviewing the transcription of this note in the newspaper coverage, Ed Cohen remarks that in the absence of the signifier, “Wilde’s name alone serves as the site of meaning here so that it is

⁹ A similar code of silence was upheld regarding masturbation. David Stevenson contends that “there was widespread agreement that it was best not to speak in specific terms about more arcane sexual offenses [like masturbation] unless there was good reason for breaking silence” (224). The fear was rooted in what Foucault describes as the perverse implantation, for as Stevenson continues, “it was feared that wider discussion, even if directed toward denouncing or punishing banned practices, would prove counterproductive. Publicity might arouse to experimentation those whose imaginations or inclinations had not previously led them to realize the existence of such activities” (224).

invested with the trace of something that has been suppressed” (145). Rather, I argue, the erasure was itself a mark significant of queer potential. The erasure supplies the mark that underscores the ellipted signifier of queer being. By describing Wilde’s charges as “the gravest of all offences” (*The Times*, qtd in Cohen 147), without ever explicitly referring to what precisely this offence might be, the text afforded speculation about the queer possibilities this offence represented. As Cocks explains, “[r]egulatory practices like the law were themselves held to be responsible for bringing same-sex desire to public attention, and perhaps even advertising its appeal” (7).

Hints of this capacity for erasure to afford homographesis can be found in the distressed response of bourgeois gentlemen to the textual reproduction of Wilde’s activities.¹⁰ In May of 1895, with Wilde’s second trial having just concluded, Christopher Sclater Millard (who was later to serve as Wilde’s biographer), sent a letter to the *Reynold’s Newspaper* in London lambasting the popular press for their vituperative denunciations of both Wilde and his unmentionable activities. While Millard’s opprobrium seems directed at the legislation which prosecuted Wilde, the rest of his letter admonishes the literary persecution of Wilde in the press and the public sphere — execrations that were produced and disseminated through print, including newspapers and pamphlets.¹¹ “Prosecuting a man on such a charge as this does not tend to diminish this form of immorality; it rather increases it tenfold” (qtd in Hyde 384). George

¹⁰ In a letter to *The Star* sent the month before Millard’s, Lord Alfred Douglas (whose connection to the Wilde affair goes without speaking, as one imagines Wilde might have opined), similarly incensed by Wilde’s treatment, also directed his censure towards the press before admonishing the law itself: “I submit that Mr. Oscar Wilde has been tried by the newspapers before he has been tried by a jury, that his case has been almost hopelessly prejudiced in the eyes of the public from whom the jury who must try his case will be drawn, and that he is practically delivered [sic] over to the fury of a cowardly and brutal mob” (qtd in Hyde 64).

¹¹ See for example Hyde, *The Trial of Oscar Wilde*: “Pamphlets attacking him and containing the more salacious portions of the evidence given at Bow Street Police Court were hawked for sale in the streets of the metropolis” (69).

Ives's enigmatic prose-poem encomium of Oscar Wilde's identity, published in *Book of Chains* two years after Wilde's conviction, beautifully captures this homographic potential:

I saw a strange plant from a Southern clime alone upon an English field growing
... and just then a common churl came be, to whom nothing was beautiful, and he
smote the Eastern plant... And the brute said, Now indeed this is stamped out, and
this vile weed shall grow no more. But the fool had scattered the seed, and the
wind took it up its wings and spread it over miles of land; and so that flower was
multiplied. (91)

Wherefore the need to maintain silence in print — the wind by which this seed of a queer possibility was spread.

With the discourse surrounding Wilde's trials, scholars argue, homosexuality came to be identified as a persuasion and a lifestyle rather than exclusively a sinful proclivity. It became a mode of being that one would wish to pursue beyond furtive sodomitical practices. Within the proceedings of the final trial itself, Linda Dowling argues that "Wilde's peroration on male love signals a moment of cultural discontinuity or rupture", whereby Wilde expanded same-sex activity beyond the legal and scriptural condemnation of buggery or sodomy to encompass a profuse and historically mediated interiority of personal identity (3). Dollimore explains that as a result of Wilde's trials, "[s]ociety now regarded homosexuality as rooted in a person's identity; this sin might pervade all aspects of an individual's being, and its expression might become correspondingly the more insidious and subversive" (635).¹² More importantly, the newspaper coverage, according to Cohen, "effectively (re)produced the possibility for designating Wilde as

¹² All of Wilde's writings, and particularly *Importance of Being Earnest*, *Dorian Gray* and *De Profundis*, have received intense scrutiny for any clues they might suggest as to the literary character of Wilde's 'dissidence'. See for instance Oliver Buckton *Secret Selves: Confession and Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Autobiography*, Ed Cohen, "Writing Gone Wilde: Homoerotic Desire in the Closet of Representation" and *Talk on the Wilde Side: Toward a Geneology of Discourse on Male Sexualities*; Christopher Craft, "Alias Bunbury: Desire and Termination in The Importance of Being Earnest"; and Michael Doyle, "Willean Ethics of Existence" in *Homosexual Askesis: Representations of Self-Fashioning in the Writings of Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, and John Addington Symonds*.

a kind of sexual actor without explicitly referring to his sexual acts, and thereby crystallized a new constellation of sexual meanings predicated upon ‘personality’ and not practices” (131).

The queer and homosexual subculture excavated by the Wilde trials meant discussions of homosexuality could begin to extend to encompass more than the desire for intimate contact with a member of the same sex. It was no longer buggery but pathological perversion. But of what? No one dared publicly express the perversity in authorized print or in speech. In absence of a coherent concept, Cohen concludes that “the newspaper accounts effectively constituted Wilde’s body as the meaning of the crime” (207); Wilde served as “metonym for the ‘crime’” (209), a ‘hieroglyph’ inscribed in print that “foregrounded the emergence of a mode of understanding sexual acts that had only become possible in the ten years since the Criminal Law Amendment Act had been passed” (207).

The textual figure of Oscar Wilde was therefore a polyvalent homograph comprised of multiple, competing and often contradictory discourses conveyed in a range of media materials about homosexuality, homosociality and queerness. According to Jeffrey Weeks, Wilde’s three trials in 1895 functioned as a “labelling process” that “created a public image for the homosexual” (*Sex* 20). Havelock Ellis’ opinion of the impact of the trials on the development of the homosexual male was that it “appears to have generally contributed to give definiteness and self-consciousness to the manifestations of homosexuality and have aroused inverts to take up a definite stand” (qtd in Weeks, *Sex* 22).¹³

Through a succession of characterizations, “the image of the queer cohered at the moment when the leisured, effeminate, aesthetic dandy was discovered in same-sex practices,

¹³ Ellis offers a similar remark in *Sexual Inversion*, noting that “the celebrity of Oscar Wilde and the universal publicity given to the facts of the case by the newspapers may have brought conviction of their perversion to many inverts who were before only vaguely conscious of their abnormality” (63)

underwritten by money, with lower-class boys” (Sinfield 121). With Wilde's trials, the “leisure-class man” became the model of “the sodomite” in popular discourse, and “the homosexual” topos in sexological thinking. “The Wildean model produced an image even more specific than that: the queer — dandified, aesthetic, effeminate” (122). However, the homosexual and the queer were not discovered in Wilde's image, as Sinfield and Cohen suggest, but rather *invented in Wilde's homograph*.

Wilde-as-homograph permitted the making and sharing of a homosexual tendency in writing — a nascent “morphology”¹⁴ then fomenting in the medical vocabulary and disseminating into the public consciousness of Victorian London. Multiple discourses, multiple media and multi-media convergences led to multiple outcomes: Wilde was a multi-media object scanned for homosexual traces and qualifications of a homosexual subjectivity. As I explore in chapter three, making the concept of sexual otherness into a sexualized Other afforded a strategy for liberation, while the conditions of production determined each inscription’s connotative and denotative range.

Wilde was not the sole site of homographic potential, however. Historical records abound with letters, diary entries and pamphlets that record homographic interactions. John Addington Symonds, for instance, frames the impetus for his *Problem in Modern Ethics*, published in 1896, as a need to overcome the toxic discourse framing homosexuality. The text itself attempts to fashion a new language freed from (unsoiled by) the sodomitical discourse of prior centuries. As Symonds makes clear,

Those who read these lines will hardly doubt what passion it is that I am hinting at. *Quod semper ubique et ab omnibus*—surely it deserves a name. Yet I can hardly find a name that will not seem to soil this paper. The accomplished languages of Europe in the nineteenth century supply no term for this persistent

¹⁴ A term I borrow from Foucault, see *History of Sexuality volume 1* p. 18

feature of human psychology, without importing some implication of disgust, disgrace, vituperation. (3)¹⁵

Symonds believes such a potential could be found in the discourse of science, which “has recently — within the last twenty years in fact — invented a convenient phrase, which does not prejudice the matter under consideration” (3). The phrase: “inverted sexual instinct” (3), which he divulges in Latin “that it is always, everywhere and by all” — an essential quality of humanity, present if unnamed.¹⁶

Christopher Craft situates Symonds’ work within a larger complex of English writers that includes Havelock Ellis, who, at the turn of the twentieth century “produced a sustained private and public discourse about the variability of sexual desire, with a culturally typical androcentric emphasis upon male homoerotic love that had earlier received anxiogenic representation in Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* and Whitman’s ‘Calamus’ poems” (30-1).¹⁷ More to my point is Craft’s assertion that such instances “represent the English and trans-European need to formulate a new taxonomy for same-sex relations — a new way, that is, to begin speaking the unspeakable” (31) — of crafting the unspoken through media in ways that worked against the hegemonic discourse aligned with access to mass printing technologies.

Two years before Symonds, his colleague Edward Carpenter wrote four pamphlets dealing with sexuality, gender, and “homogenic love”—which he alternatively referred to as Uranism, adopting “a quasi-Darwinist stance to explore the Uranist as the evolution of a new type of social and sexual being” (Bredbeck 172). Carpenter later expanded these pamphlets into

¹⁵ Continuing to seek a scientific language to describe himself, in 1896 Symonds co-authored the German edition of *Sexual Inversion* with Havelock Ellis, which was published in English the following year.

¹⁶ For more on Symonds diaries, see Clinton Machann “The Construction of Masculinity in Victorian Autobiography” in *Nineteenth-Century Prose*; and “The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds and Victorian Autobiography”.

¹⁷ See Chapter 1, “Alias Sodomy”, of Craft’s *Another Kind of Love* for an extended exploration of texts produced during this period, and how worked to remap the course of scientific and medical discourse about homosexuality.

books, funding their publication himself: *Love's Coming of Age* in 1896, and *The Intermediate Sex* in 1908. Carpenter's works circulated among other homophilic writers. In 1900, exiled in Paris, Oscar Wilde penned a letter to his friend George Ives, writing in a script that was almost illegible even to Ives, expressing aspirations for homosexual acceptance among mainstream society and then thanking him for sending along a certain book from Carpenter, *Civilization Its Cause and Cure and Other Essays*, finding the work "most suggestive". "Yes, I have no doubt we shall win—but the road is long, and red with monstrous martyrdom," Wilde wrote, adding that "nothing but the repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act would do any good. That is the essential. It is not so much public opinion as public officials that need educating." As this letter indicates, the Labouchere Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1885 was another site of homographic potential, one that spurred Ellis and Symonds to collaborate on the publication of *Sexual Inversion*, "to create an understanding of the prevalence and 'normality' of homosexuality and thus ultimately to engender a climate of opinion in which it would be possible to abolish the iniquitous law" (Grosskurth 174).

Wilde's homograph produced by printed coverage of the trials was therefore only a part of the homographesis occurring at this time, which even included Wilde's own work. Antonio Sanna argues, for instance, that Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Robert Louis Stevens' *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* were part of a literary attempt to reclaim the conversation surrounding homosexuality in the Victorian era that had been entirely dominated by the discourse of psychiatry and medicine.¹⁸ Sanna puts these texts into context within a larger heteronormative

¹⁸ A great deal of scholarship has appeared in the years since Eve Sedgwick's foundational *Between Men*, exploring the homosexual thematics of Victorian literature. See, among others: Christopher Craft, *Another Kind of Love: Male Homosexual Desire in English Discourse, 1850-1920*; Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*; Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*; *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, edited by Richard Dellamora; and Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism*.

system by explaining that “[t]he turn of the century witnessed the explosion of homosexual discourse from both apologists and accusers, from the scientific and medical milieus as well as from the literary one” (22).

Silence functions as a literary tendency in these works, Sanna argues, “almost revealing an implicit queer rhetorical strategy intended to counter the late-Victorian medical discourses legitimated by (and legitimating) a male and hetero-dominated legislation” (37). Sedgwick famously declared this code of silence the “epistemology of the closet”, a hegemonically imposed and self-consciously enforced ignorance about the character of intense male bonds, whereby “[c]losetedness’ itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence” (3). The rules of the closet were nonetheless repeatedly and consistently violated by the same male-entitled upper classes, in print rather than speech. The contributors of *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, for instance, suggest that a distinctly homosexual culture emerged among the Victorian Aesthetes in the 1890s, however short lived. “Male poets and writers of nonfiction prose during the Victorian period use the discursive space afforded within a number of aesthetic genres to begin to imagine embodied, intimate, at time sexualized ties between men,” Dellamora explains (9). Silence about the particular nature of homosexuality nonetheless worked as discourse, sounding out the contours of a queer way of being.

But such affirmative discourses were rare. Even among affluent men, compassionate perspectives of homosexuality were rarely published out of fear. Phyllis Grosskurth recounts the enormous difficulty Ellis and Symonds had in securing even limited publication for their book, *Sexual Inversion*, always rejected out of fear “that it could not be confined to specialists and might contaminate the wider public”, beginning with the very compositors of the book (180). The coverage of the Wilde trials complicated the publication of the book, since publishers feared any

association with the scandal (Grosskurth 180), and Ellis also felt the timing of the book's publication—in the month of Wilde's release from prison — to be a mistake (Grosskurth 184).

The exigencies of accessing printing technologies limited the publication of affirmative discourses to affluent white bourgeois writers, and even then, only with extreme difficulty, prejudice and risk to their reputation. Carpenter's pamphlet on "homogenic love" was published in 1894 in private circulation only—and the discovery of its publication in 1895 in the wake of the Wilde trials led his first publisher, T. Fisher Unwin, to abandon Carpenter's early books "under the circumstances" (Unwin).¹⁹ Symonds published his pamphlets on homosexuality in limited quantities: *A Problem in Greek Ethics* was originally limited to an initial anonymous publication of only ten copies. Even after his death, Symond's literary executor, Horatio Brown, diligently preserved his client's respectability by suppressing republications of his homophilic materials (Grosskurth 183-184).

The capacity for tools to frame the dimensions of discourse explains why most scholarship about homosexuality in the nineteenth and twentieth century fixates on textual material created almost exclusively by and for a narrow segment of the population affluent enough to be appropriately literate and technologically savvy with inscription tools. The ways that making media about sexualities contributed to making sexual identities possible requires a deeper investigation of the patriarchal means by which these terms were set: through privileged access to media technologies. In the case of Edward Carpenter, his four pamphlets mentioned above were published by The Manchester Labour Press Society LTD during his tenure as director of the company (Frow & Frow 23). Carpenter also relied on the sizeable inheritance left to him

¹⁹ Carpenter also recounts this event in his biography, *My Days and Dreams*, p. 200.

by his father to purchase his research materials, pay for publishing costs and subsidize his career as a Man of Letters.

Privileges afforded by race, class and gender coordinated the means to make, collect and share inscriptions — which left much of the affirmative discourse about homosexuality to be published among a coterie of affluent white men in Europe at the turn of the century. As an example of previous scholarship that reviews the legacy of discourses on making queer identities, Siobhan B. Somerville's *Queering the Color Line* investigates the discourse of late nineteenth century sexologists, including and especially Havelock Ellis' *Sexual Inversion* to illustrate “the ways in which the development of new sexual categories was mediated by methodologies and conclusions borrowed from previous studies of racial difference” (10). She argues that the representation of Black and queer bodies in these works constructed stereotypes about African American identities and sexualities that continue to influence contemporary discourses of race and sexuality. Indeed, as I explore in my next chapters, a term like gay has been over-determined by its disproportionately Western, white and male writers.

To further unpack how this privileged access to media and media technology controlled the very means of cohering in language and thereby expressing non-normative desires, it is important to review the technocultural scene of the modern printing press: namely, the cost and technical labour required for mass printing. The Linotype Model 1 debuted in 1892 and was an immediate success, selling 6000 units at an immense cost of \$3,150, and was “leased for six-year periods at an annual rental of \$550” (Romano 77), and even then, the terms of purchase were reserved only “to responsible persons operating established printing-plants” according to a 1910 sales brochure (qtd in Romano 85).

Beyond their exclusivity, printing presses were complex material assemblages of cast-iron and metal alloys, requiring several trained operators and a steady surplus of written material

to publish and then sell to regain the substantial cost of the machine. Mass printing in the Victorian era was not a tool for mass expression so much as it was a means to impress upon the masses through the rapid reproduction of movable type. Given these considerations, the rhetorical framing of the trials as “remarkable” and “scandalous” (terms that frequently appeared in the newspaper headlines) were likely directed by the need to sell papers as much as they were to ensure the sanctity of decent English society. Thus, the discursive framings of queer discourse in this era were at least in part driven by the economic exigencies of wielding media technical apparatus.

The importance that this access to media technologies has on making identities cannot be overstated. Through sustained repetition in mediated discourse, terms solidify as a cultural apparatus for communicating queerness. The process to create a line of type on a linotype analogizes standardization of queer expression I've so far been describing. Selecting the symbol (for example, a letter) on the keyboard would cause the free-circulating brass matrix bearing the sign to descend from the magazine feeder at the top of the machine. Signs would continue to be called from the matrices stored in the magazine using the keyboard and brought into a common alignment, symbol by symbol, to form a line. After a line of type was assembled, molten metal was forced across this row, creating a line of raised type — called a slug.²⁰ Hot-metal typesetting mechanized the variability of language into standardized lines. Once the individual pieces were assembled, unit by unit, they could be reproduced *ad infinitum* as a cliché — both as a literal print stereotype and as an over-used expression.

The physical process of producing a standardized line approximates the conceptual developments that produced standardized codifications of gender and sexuality. As Foucault has

²⁰ For a thorough recapitulation of the mechanical procedures of linotype line-casting, see Frank Ramono's comprehensive *History of the Linotype Company*, especially pp 76-85.

shown with his history of sexuality, by the end of the nineteenth century the innumerable complexities of sexuality began to be consolidated into one discursive concept: the homosexual. While Foucault isolates this convergence to the effect of discursive power, we can further consider the emergence of this concept within the rise of mass-printing technology. Hot-metal typesetting machines such as the linotype and monotype brought concepts into common alignment in tandem with the standardized lines of mass print. The duplicative powers of typesetting functioned as a reproductive framework by standardizing the concepts of homosexuality and gender being produced in the late Victorian era by a variety of hegemonic discourses.

Queer conceptions of identity developed by wrenching polymorphous desires into language. By constructing a pathology of abnormality, and enjoining its practitioners to articulate its dimensions, the media technical practice of extracting inversion in the Victorian era exteriorized the interiority of queer experience into discourses. Heike Bauer argues that Krafft-Ebing's book *Psychopathia Sexualis* "offered a forum for the 'perverts' themselves, in which their experiences were recorded, not least for their own use" (24). Beyond the intransigent possibilities of homosexual encounters, the discourse of sexology afforded a schema for affirming a self rooted in one's sexual behaviours — a conceptual means of *being* homosexual.

Remarking on the effect of theories of sexology and psychoanalysis on queer autobiography in the early twentieth century, Georgina Johnston explains how reading the work of sexologists meant that "gays and lesbians could at least recognize characteristics, even if skewed by cultural expectations" (20). Matt Cook has similarly explored the influence of Krafft-Ebing and particularly Ellis' work influenced the writing of Ives' autobiographical diaries. "Working under the influence of the sexologists", Cook shows how Ives "reflects back on himself as his own case study" (199). Ives' diary served as platform for organizing and arranging media materials to

undertake a psychoanalytic analysis of the identity he had documented within the many pages of his diaries. In the introduction to his diaries, which he asked to be published posthumously, Ives explains that he sought to index the categories of his life, personal identity and behaviour for future sexological research. In a curious feedback loop, Ives produces an index based on research from sexologists, who were themselves working from the indices of subjects produced from a complex of discourse and instrumentation to capture and record.

Given what I have been arguing so far, however, I want to take some space to reflect on the means by which these terms were set. Literary representation of male same-sex relations anchored the construal of sexual inversion, supplying a narrow approach to understanding and describing sexuality with extreme repercussions for queer authors approaching later representations of queerness. For Symonds, same-sex love is defined by its approximation of an ideal love he found modeled in Greek literature, which documented “passionate and enthusiastic attachment subsisting between man and youth, recognised by society and protected by opinion, which, though it was not free from sensuality, did not degenerate into mere licentiousness”. Symonds’ conception of same-sex love is clarified exclusively in terms of its association with “manly virtues”. In *Greek Ethics*, Symonds uses the term *paiiderastia*, which for him is modeled explicitly and perhaps exclusively on Achilles love for Patroclus, which he describes as “a powerful and masculine emotion, in which effeminacy had no part, and which by no means excluded the ordinary sexual feelings.” Symonds’ restrictive and phallogentric formulation of homosexuality was privately printed in 1878 with a publication limited to ten copies, which later served as the conclusion of *Sexual Inversion* in 1897.²¹

²¹ (For further discussion of these aspects, and their orientalist influences, see Chapter 4 of Eric Clarke's *Virtuous Vice: Homoeroticism and the Public Sphere* pp 126-147).

To give a sense of how thoroughly entrenched this male-centric discourse extends, consider that as late as 1993, Ed Cohen begins his summary of *Psychopathia Sexualis* by defining Krafft-Ebing's neologism 'homo-sexual' as "the now ubiquitous, quasi-scientific denotation both for sexual intimacies between men and for the men who engage in them" (9). In fact, despite the *Psychopathia Sexualis*' emphasis on masculinity, Krafft-Ebing makes no gendered differentiation in this work when describing homosexuality.²² To be fair to Cohen however, the discursive specification of the term "homosexual" was typically modelled on same-sex relations between men. Sexological writings were focused primarily on questions of masculinity (with Krafft-Ebing's work being no exception).

Before the coverage of the Wilde trials had crystallized in the public discourse the concept of the homosexual, John Addington Symonds' privately printed pamphlet essays, which presented literary and historical precedents for same-sex relations between men, were "instrumental in crystallizing Ellis's approach to "sexual inversion"" (Cohen 217 n1). While preparing the manuscript for *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis asked Symonds for additional cases related to female homosexuality, but Symonds had none to offer because he had not given the phenomenon much thought (Grosskurth 178). Thus, it was literary representation of male same-sex relations that anchored the construal of sexual inversion. Ellis' reading of sexual desire was further predicated on an essentialist determination of masculine and feminine nature that leads to the quixotic assessment that lesbianism is a form of masculine expression in women (a belief which he derives from a sample of six female cases which he obtained from surveying his wife and her friends, see Grosskurth pages 178 and 186-8). This narrow approach to understanding and describing sexuality held extreme repercussions for queer authors approaching representation

²² Similarly, as Heike Bauer has pointed out, "Yvonne Ivory... in her study of the 'fin-de-siecle invert', takes for granted that the invert is male" (*English Literary Sexology*, 9).

of queerness in the present. I attend to this effect in my final section of this chapter by exploring this effect on textual representation of female homosexuality in the early twentieth century.

Sapphic Scansion

Because the discourse was controlled and coordinated by those who could afford to wield these technologies of mass standardized type, the mass publication of discourse standardized heterocentric concepts of homosexuality and gender. As queer historian Rebecca Jennings observes, “The medico-scientific category of the lesbian promulgated in the early 20th century gained greater cultural resonance in the post-war decades, when a proliferation of popular and academic scientific texts constructed the lesbian as promiscuous, predatory and psychopathic” (1914). Jennings and several other scholars of lesbian history have isolated the invention of discourse about lesbian identity specifically to the obscenity trials in the UK and the US that followed the 1928 publication of Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*. Laura Doan describes the trials as “*the* crystallizing moment in the construction of a visible modern English lesbian subculture” (xii, original emphasis). As with the case of the Wilde trials discussed above, it was the coverage of the trials that cohered sexual identities more than the content of the matter under censure. Sonja Ruehl explains that “the trial and surrounding publicity about the book put lesbianism on the map. A battle over competing definitions of lesbianism was engaged and, for the first time, the idea of ‘the lesbian’ as a specific identity and image was given wide public currency” (Ruehl 15). Doan argues that the trial converged the “Modern look” of mannish feminine attire with Hall’s, such that “Hall’s ‘look’ became fixed in the public’s mind as *lesbian*” (124).

But this assessment requires some caveats. The publicity generated by the book’s obscenity trial was largely responsible for popularizing *sexological discussions* of lesbianism. Rather than supplying a coherent exploration of lesbian identity, the coverage congeals a collection of coded

statements made by magistrates against the congenitalist perspective offered by Hall in the book. As Doan observes, in a manner of Ed Cohen's assessment of Oscar Wilde's treatment during his own trials, "the intense publicity, not to mention notoriety, generated by these trials culminated in both cases in the successful grafting of a narrow set of cultural signifiers onto an ostensibly legible homosexual body" (xii). While we can review the coverage of these trials to consider what they offer the discursive formulation of "lesbian" as an identity type, we should be careful to avoid placing Hall as the epicentre of lesbian identity at this period. The word 'lesbian' never appears in the elliptical discussion of queerness in the major newspapers covering the UK or US trials. Rather than describe any specific identity type Hall herself sought to articulate in the book, the coverage describes the book's "obscene" descriptions of "vice", and accounts often rely on reprinting the charges made by the courts against the book. Rather than crystalize any master identity type, the coverage of Hall's book supplies a version of a life organized around queer approaches to sexual desire and gender that was then iterated in a variety of discourses.

Indeed, it was because Hall offered her sexuality in sexological terms that she was able to secure her book's publication. Hall went so far out of her way to adopt sexological theory that she sought the written support from Havelock Ellis himself, describing him as "the greatest living authority on the tragical problem of sexual inversion" (qtd in Baker 203). He initially felt comfortable offering a supportive preface to the book, but later tempered his appreciation in the ensuing obscenity trials.

Hall's appropriation of sexology is emblematic in the ways that the discourse of sexology could serve to establish a life on terms dominated by the ability to make and wield discourse. Michael Baker emphasises that Hall "*wanted* to believe" sexological theories, for "[t]he 'invert' neatly defined her own case, providing a 'scientific' explanation both for her divided, tormented nature and the unhappy circumstances of her upbringing" (217). In *Surpassing the Love of Men*,

Lillian Faderman stresses that for Hall, “[h]er authorities were all Krafft-Ebing disciples such as Havelock Ellis, Iwan Bloch, and Magnus Hirschfeld” (317), further noting that “Hall adheres strictly to the nineteenth-century sexologists’ theories” (320). The stereotypical portrait of inversion presented in *The Well of Loneliness* was certainly important for its author, for “she identified, in fact, with Stephen Gordon, reading back into her own life many of the attributes she had given to her heroine in order to back up her ‘discovery’ of the congenitalist theory” (Newton 249).²³ That the pathology of inversion was designed to delegitimize and thereby deny the very kind of love her book intended to celebrate apparently did not matter for Hall.

Hall repurposing of sexology emphasizes how homographesis afforded the primary means of staging an affirmative discourse in a media scene dominated by anti-homosexuality. Homographesis relies on the productive iterability of *differance*, for homographesis is also “putting into writing — and therefore the putting in the realm of differance—of the sameness, the similitude, or the essentializing metaphors of identity ... that homographesis, in its first sense, is intended to secure” (Edelman 12).

This homographic potential extended to the coverage the book received. In *The Times*, the only significant discussion of the book occurs in a February 1929 article articulating what makes the book obscene:

The mere fact that the book dealt with unnatural offences between women would not in itself make it an obscene libel. It might even have a strong moral influence. But in the present case there was not one word which suggested that anyone with the horrible tendencies described was in the least degree blameworthy. All the characters were presented as attractive people and put forward with admiration. What was even more

²³ Faderman further analyses how Hall’s earlier book, *The Unlit Lamp* (1924), posits a more measured approach to lesbian inclinations than her later “*success de scandale*”. Esther Newton describes *The Unlit Lamp* in similar terms, calling it “a sympathetic analysis of the first generation [of feminists] from the perspective of the second” (284). She further points out that “The ‘real’ Radclyffe Hall lesbian novel, so the argument [against the status accorded *The Well of Loneliness*], the one that ought to have been famous, is her first [*The Unlit Lamp*]” (282).

serious was that certain acts were described in the most alluring terms. (“Novel ‘Loneliness’ is Ruled Obscene”)

Ironically, in its oblique descriptions of Hall’s explicit sexological musings, the description in *The New York Times* affords queerer potentialities for construing same-sex desire than even Hall dared offer. Where Hall offers a perspective of same-sex attraction modeled on a congenitalist theory of female inversion, which viewed inversion as a tragic but ultimately incurable problem and therefore worthy of compassion, the censure describes only the “tendencies” associated with this problem: namely, women loving women. As with the erasure I discussed in the Wilde trials, this paper’s obscuration supplies queer potential, for simply knowing that a book could exist which celebrated “unnatural offences between women” could offer succor to the possibilities for same-sex romance—and without need of the sexological dogma Hall had supplied them in. (I return to this point in chapter 4, reviewing the way that Hall’s work was used in the 1940s to similar effect.)

With the profusion of coded discourse around the subjects of non-normative sex and sexualities, queer identities could obtain their significations in the “unnameable” markings of their symbolic erasure. As with Wilde’s writings and the print coverage of his trials, Hall’s novel and its obscenity trials were scanned by multiple audiences to construe queer identities. Hall’s appeal was to more than just the heteronormative majority: she sought to signal to members of an incipient queer community, the existence of which she felt had been confirmed to her in the sexological writings of Ellis and others. Whether celebrating or excoriating same-sex love, the very presence of discourse could incite others to expression (as I explore further in the case of Lisa Ben in chapter four). Michael Baker collects several contemporaneous accounts of the book’s vituperative reception from other queer English writers like Violet Trefusis, Vita Sackville-West and Romaine Brooks. The former two found the book so terrible in its depiction

of same-sex tendencies and desires that they felt compelled to write their own treatments (Baker 248).

As I have argued in this chapter, and will continue to argue throughout this dissertation, the social, cultural, technical and technological contingencies that govern the putting of iterability and difference into writing perform consequential functions in identity formation. In the case of the lesbian identity type emerging at the end of the 1920s, Johnston contends that “theories of psychoanalysis and sexology exposed the lesbian, bodily, as an identifiable type, and psychologically, as a stereotype. The intersection of representation and theory created a potential for parody and caricature—but also for alternative self-representations” (20). David Ayers similarly assesses the sexologists’ work as offering “sexuality in terms of types” and “to deliver descriptions of these types” (138). The effect, according to Johnson, was that “[s]exology and psychoanalysis gave scientific terms; they gave a relief from invisible isolation” (20), but it is important to note that this consolidation was arranged according to the terms set literally and figuratively by the phallogentric hegemony of print technoculture. I make this distinction to emphasize the role played by media technologies in the construction of these paradigms, particularly access to technologies and the means of making media—those pages and images of sexual difference that afford identity formation.

The terminology of sexology developed at the turn of the twentieth century to categorize queerness was not the sole locus of queer inscription in this era — no matter how strongly discourse compelled queerness to be framed along such terms. To emphasize how access to media influenced the construction of alternative formulations of homosexuality, I close this chapter with a brief look at the unpublished scraps of queer poetry by Harlem poet Angelina Weld Grimké. An unmarried schoolteacher and the biracial daughter of a former slave, Grimké wrote her poetry in the early 1920s in a radically different social and cultural context than any of

the previously mentioned authors. In the case of Violet Trefusis and Vita Sackville-West, both were white English women married to affluent husbands who supported their literary ambitions within an aristocratic clique of female authors, lovers and patrons that included Virginia Woolf and Winnaretta Singer, heir to the Singer sewing machine fortune.

Grimké's poetry suggests possibilities for queer subjectivity to emerge through writing, but outside of the homographic procedure outlined by Edelman earlier in this chapter. Written in the first-person, Grimké's poetry contains such homoerotic refrains as "My sweetheart walks down laughing ways / Mid dancing glancing sunkissed ways / And she is all in white..." and "I should like to creep / Through the long brown grasses / That are your lashes" (qtd in Hull, 140). Yet Grimké's poetic discourse used to express her homosexual—or possibly bisexual—desires is markedly different than those offered by Hall in the same decade. Whereas Hall dwells on the sexual perversion of her characters, in keeping with sexological theories, Grimké dwells on love thwarted or unfulfilled. If Grimké knew about sexology, she did not frame her inclinations in the pathological terms that Hall used to make her sexual identity fit for publication and public consumption. It is more likely that the exclusionary homophilic culture available to Hall was denied Grimké, who thereby escaped the censure of inversion that sexological discourse entailed. Indeed, sexological books discussing non-normative sexuality were careful to mark their intended audience for medical practitioners,²⁴ and as Linda Doan points out, few people would have been familiar with the terms homosexual and invert prior to Hall's obscenity trial in 1929 (xx). Instead, as Gloria T. Hull notes, "[Grimké's] romantic poems, as well as all the other types of Grimké's poetry, draw heavily on the natural world for allusions, figures of speech, and imagery" (141).

²⁴ For instance, the frontispiece to *Bi-Sexual Love: The Homosexual Neurosis* (1922), James S. Van Teslaar's 1922 translation of Dr. William Stekel's *Homosexualitat* pronounces its audience: "For sale only to Members of the Medical Profession". A lapsed Freudian, Stekel pioneered the concept of paraphilia in his works, associating same-sex attraction as a perverse fetish, a symptom of neurotic disorder in the mind.

Grimké's use of writing tools to express her sexual experiences point to the capacities for inscription making to imagine new possibilities of being queer through media. Hull notes that Grimké likely never intended to publish these verses given their contents, and as such the language makes no appeal to the sympathy of a potentially hostile reader. Hull reads in Grimké's private verses "the poet's tremendous need to voice, to vent, to share — if only on paper — what was pulsing within her" (141). Grimké's poetry shows how non-normative identity might develop and secure its legibility beyond the logic of heteronormativity inculcated by sexology. However, since Grimké's queer poems were never published, her affirmative views on same-sex desire were denied the possibility to participate in a queer discourse of her milieu, and which could have driven a queer discourse that operated outside of sexology.

Whether to censure or celebrate, silence or express, these discourses afforded the possibilities for queer identities to develop in ways that were subject to the material constraints of their media scenes. The capacity to make inscriptions, as well as to send and receive these signifying signs, influences what can be written about queerness and how it can be spread. Alice Kuzniar clarifies this relationship when she writes that

[o]n the one hand, in the countless constellations of human relationships that it articulates, literature allows desires to be couched tropologically, obliquely, or, if you like, queerly. It forces one to read for what is not overtly said and encourages listening for innuendo. On the other hand, in its historical contingency, language is also a prison-house that constrains sexuality by limiting ways in which desires can be uttered and hence conceptualized. (22)

This tension produced by naming and thereby taming in some capacity the unnameable nuances of queerness remains the animating problematic of this dissertation. The ability to write around different forms of queerness, as suggested by Wilde's contemporaries (and colleagues) like Carpenter and Symonds, as well as Hall and Grimké later, emphasises the utility of inscription

devices to question their sexuality through writing about its profuse possibilities — to make a tangible and tradeable form of those slippery subjects of desire, ideology and language.

The sum of these distinct discursive perambulations orbiting discrete nodes such as homosexuality, the homosexual, the queer, etc., afforded the discursive position around which an identity might take shape. While normative discourses prohibiting same-sex activity provided a linguistic purchase for the articulation of discourses for expressing same-sex desire, the redeployment of marks and the means to make inscription — including books, photographs, art, etc. — supplied the framework whereby inscriptions could cohere as a queer sensibility. Whereas Doan argues that “For lesbians in particular, the blurring of categories of gender and the greater dissemination of sexual knowledge made possible new paradigms for self-understanding that paved the way for subcultural formation” (xix), I argue for a reversal of this procedure: it was the engagement with discourse describing these categories that both blurred and made paradigms like ‘lesbian’ understandable as a particular identity in the first place.

This chapter has sought to put forth a theory of how queer identities can be made through media technology, arguing that the significance of any term obtains from a cybernetic feedback loop between media and cultural systems that feeds forward into an ontology of queer being. Following the implications of this theory, it has sought to consider how access to these technologies of inscription would have influenced the construction of discourses about queer identities. What remains to be considered is the formative power of text to shape the formation of queer identities, a phenomenon which I attend to in the next chapter by exploring the queer possibilities provoked by the rules of Alan Turing’s Imitation Game.

Chapter 2

Machine Trouble: Alan Turing's Queer Imitation Game

There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.

-Charles Darwin The Origin of the Species

The last chapter presented two media scenes that showed how engagements with media systems contributed to discourse expressing queerness. While I continue to trace the historical construction of queer identities as embedded within technological contexts in my next chapter, this chapter tempers the technological determinism of this perspective by showing the possibilities for queer intervention in a media scene. In this case, the scene is Alan Turing's 1950 paper "Computing Machinery and Intelligence", in which Turing proposes what has come to be referred to as the Turing Test. Turing's engagements with computational technology have been well explored, and I will only touch on them as needed in this chapter to sketch out the media scene of Turing's paper. Indeed, following the centennial anniversary of British mathematician Alan Turing's birth in 2012, a range of scholars weighed in on his puzzling connections to developments in multiple fields. In a range of scholarly works like *The Turing Guide*, *Turing Legacy* and *The Once and Future Turing*, much of the discussion concerns contextualizing and securing Turing's influence in the imbricated histories of mathematics and modern computing. Within the contentious histories of modern computing at least, Turing's accomplishments remain difficult to place. Some scholars claim that he had little or no effect on the outcome of modern

computing.¹ Tom Kilburn, for instance, who built the Manchester Baby and cited his “indebtedness” to Turing in his first report on computer research in 1947, later denied Turing ever had any impact.² The effect of these continued debates on Turing’s legacy has also been to read all of Turing’s work with the aim of securing Turing’s place within the canon of modern computing, alongside his contemporaries like Claude Shannon, Norbert Weiner and Vannevar Bush. I want to propose a different focus that places Turing’s work within the provisional variantology of queer media that I am sketching with this dissertation. While offering another node in this variantology, I focus on this paper specifically because it shows a way that queer engagements with media might accrete as an identity.

As I will show, the instructions described in the paper provoke a mode of reading and writing queerly against a sign’s normative significations. This homographesis affords the potential for queerness to become instantiated as an identity, and as such the Imitation Game is a useful scene to think more deeply about the ways of making identity through making media that form the theoretical heart of this dissertation.

The question of the degree to which Turing’s queerness might belong to the history of computing has been articulated by digital media scholars like Jacob Gaboury. In a blog post for *Rhizome* in 2013, Gaboury formulates the possibility for “A Queer History of Computing” and considers Turing’s foundational role. For Gaboury, Turing’s queerness operates implicitly within Turing’s approaches to mathematics and computing. For instance, Gaboury reads Turing’s infamous impasse with Wittgenstein on formal mathematics as a queer encounter, for “[i]t is in these exceptional spaces outside of formally describable systems – binary code, language,

¹ See Jack Copeland, “Turing’s great invention” in *Turing Guide*: “even today there is still no real consensus on Turing’s place in the history of computing” (p 55), or Campbell-Kelly *Computer, a History*, especially pp. ix and 59-61 who talks about how Turing’s achievements in the history of computing have been overstated.

² See Jack Copeland “Baby” p 205.

mathematics – that we may identify a queerness at work”. To add to this variantology of computer history that prioritizes rather than brackets queerness, I want to shift the focus from Turing’s queerness to explore the queerness that I will show forms the heart of Turing’s game, and to ask what it can reveal about communicating and even making queer identities.

Turing’s Imitation Game

Perhaps no other work of Turing’s has generated more discussion and more confusion than his 1950 paper “Computing Machinery and Intelligence”. Though Max Newman, Alan Turing’s “lifelong mentor” (Dermot Turing 84), with whom he had worked on Manchester ‘Baby’ computer and the mathematical paper “A formal theorem in Church’s types” (1942), cites this paper as the easiest of Turing’s to read, the profusion of discrepant opinions about just what the test means and, indeed, even what it involves has been the subject of contentious analysis since its publication. Depending on who’s asked, the Turing test is about proving machine intelligence, anticipating artificial intelligence, or providing a criterion for thinking.

Turing’s writing about the game is frequently taken out of its historical context to deal exclusively with the foundations of machine intelligence. Diane Proudfoot has devoted a great deal of attention to the reception of the game in multiple circles (which, as stated above, almost always treat it as a test). She summarizes these responses to Turing’s claims for intelligent machines according to three perspectives: that Turing was showing how the appearance of thinking could be imitated with the correct behaviour, that Turing was citing a functional equivalence between human thinking and computer thinking, and that Turing was showing the importance of an observer in determining intelligence³. This last perspective is often overlooked in considerations of the test, in the process erasing its critical function.

³ See Proudfoot “The Turing Test—From Every Angle” pp. 288-90.

Given how often and the degree to which Turing's game is misrepresented (particularly by annual AI competitions like the Loebner prize), an extended recapitulation of Turing's explanation provided in his 1950 paper is perhaps warranted. Turing sets up the imitation game as follows: in three rooms place three people, more specifically "a man (A), a woman (B), and an interrogator (C) who may be of either sex". While conversing in separate rooms by means of teleprinted communication, "the object of the game *for the interrogator* is to determine which of the other two is the man and which is the woman" (emphasis added). I draw attention to Turing's qualification since it suggests the possibility of more than one game at play here, and even the possibility of games within games (a suggestion I attend to later in this chapter). Turing additionally insists that the interrogator should know the players only by labels X and Y, and states that "at the end of the game, [the interrogator] says either 'X is A and Y is B' or 'X is B and Y is A'". Turing's insistence on metalepsis here is another crucial point, which I will return to in more detail later. Excluding this detail treats the conclusion of the game as though the interrogator were to explicitly announce which the human and which the machine. Turing insists on the extended chain of significations of taking one letter as signifying another letter (a play of semantics that I also address later).

All these rules are set out in the first section of his paper, before any mention of a computer. No wonder it gets skipped in the history of computing. However, this first section is an important primer for understanding the context of the imitation game and should not be dismissed. The computer arrives to replace the role of the man in the game, leaving the computer and the female agent to convince the single judge which is the human. As I explore later in this chapter, it is important to consider both the goals of the players and their identities. Omitting these framing conditions, or even bracketing them as separate from Turing's main argument,

hides the way that Turing drew upon normative assumptions as the conditions for passing the test to subvert them with his game. The omission of this first section is like trying to play a game without first setting out the rules, mistaking pieces for the rules governing their interaction — like playing Chess as though it were Checkers *and mistaking it for the same game*. Furthermore, any discussion based on this misapprehension would be akin to mistaking Chess as simply a game about horses, castles and men moving around, while ignoring or being unable to correlate its feudal inspirations and the imperial connotations invoked by each token's moveset.

This misapprehension is pervasive in chief objections to the test, which claim that it is either too easy, too difficult, or that it fails to actually test intelligence.⁴ Surveying the interpretations surrounding the test, Andrew Sloman, for instance, argues that Turing's test ought to be abandoned as a measure of intelligence because more reliable and valid tests are available and because Turing himself never intended the game as the sort of test it has become. Whether the test achieves the goals set for it by later scholars (and not, it should be noted, Turing himself) is a direction I don't intend to pursue any further. Indeed, I think too much of the literature has been caught up in trying to parcel out the utility of Turing's paper as a *test* for measuring intelligence when in fact the idea of a 'Turing Test' is a later designation by critics, and not the original formulation offered by Turing, who introduces his experiment as a game; more specifically, *an imitation game*.⁵ This reframing of the game also includes the way it is described

⁴ See Diane Proudfoot "The Turing Test—From Every Angle" for a thorough recapitulation of these various arguments.

⁵ Even Jack Copeland, who has written a great deal defending Turing's thinking from several spurious objections over the years, conceptualizes the imitation game only ever as a test. Copeland cites it as "the only viable proposal on the table for testing whether a computer is capable of thought" ("Intelligent Machinery" 275). Implicit in Copeland's assertion are two conflation that are frequently made regarding Turing's imitation game. The first is that Turing's game was intended to measure the capacity for thinking, the second is that Turing's game was intended as a test. Writing about the game as a test has been followed in most recapitulations of Turing's paper, and it has led to innumerable objections to arguments Turing himself was careful to emphasize in his paper he had no intention to make.

in the literature. Descriptions of the test often ignore Turing's first section, where Turing defines the rules, and instead skip to where the machine enters the game.⁶

As a result, scientists and mathematicians have read Turing's 1950 paper as his attempt to frame humans and machines as distinct entities, for instance by alleging Turing distinguished human intelligence from machine intelligence. In *Turing's Man*, J. David Bolter suggests that Turing's work both envisioned and helped to inaugurate a contested relationship between man and machine, for "[b]y promising (or threatening) to replace man, the computer is giving us a new definition of man, as an 'information processor,' and of nature, as 'information to be processed'" (13). Bolter reads Turing's imaginary computer as a pseudo-post-human construct whereby man imagines himself reflected in his (and I use male pronouns deliberately here) mechanized automaton.

Turing's own writings make clear he saw humans and machines as productive analogues; particularly by interrogating the sites of their presumed difference and similitude. Turing's unpublished 1948 paper "Intelligent Machinery" suggests how he framed his imitation game as an epistemological critique of categories like intelligence, man and machine:

The extent to which we regard something as behaving in an intelligent manner is determined as much by our own state of mind and training as by the properties of the object under consideration. If we are able to explain and predict its behaviour or if there seems to be little underlying plan, we have little temptation to imagine intelligence. With the same object therefore it is possible that one man would consider it as intelligent and another would not; the second man would have found out the rules of its behaviour. (qtd. in *Essential Turing* 431).⁷

⁶ See recapitulations in *Turing Test: Verbal Behavior as the Hallmark of Intelligence* pp. 1-11, *New Media Reader* pp. 49-50, and *Histories of Computing* pp. 130-134.

⁷ It is somewhat ironic then that P. H. Millar objects to the way the game "forces us to ascribe typical human objectives and human cultural background to the machine, [for] if we are to be serious in contemplating the use of such a term [as intelligence] we should be open-minded enough to allow computing machinery [...] to display their intelligence by means of behaviour which is well-adapted for achieving their own specific aims" (597). Turing's game was a conceptual tool for facilitating precisely this kind of inquiry, and Millar's capacity to frame the objection is the result of sustained playing through the logical framework of the test.

The logic that underpins the imitation game's rhetorical function as a socio-cultural litmus test is further suggested by Turing's belief, offered in his 1951 addendum to his 1950 paper, that "the attempt to make a thinking machine will help us greatly in finding out how we think ourselves" (qtd. in *Turing Test* p. 116). This statement may seem similar to Hodges, but its perspective implies a radical difference. Turing's game provokes radical investigation into the identity of the human, and then extends this existential inquiry by setting the identity of the human in relation to that of the computer. To play Turing's game is to be inculcated in a mindset that disregards the Cartesian belief in an immanent quality innate to mankind that privileges the human as the pinnacle of a natural hierarchy. Turing's game dispels the axiomatic objectivity predicated on subjective Enlightenment rationality.⁸

Turing's game calls attention to the agent called to judge, and thereby invisibly empowered by the dominant conception of human primacy. The subject position that determines the outcome of the game is constructed in the act of play itself, for the self enters the equation as a means of adjudicating the game. To ascribe thinking — the act the interrogator must perform — is to be an agent capable of knowing itself capable of thought.⁹

In this way, Turing objects to a stable ontology of being that posits an interior essence that privileges the human over the machine (and we might go so far to read that anti-essentialism into socio-cultural distinctions as well, particularly regarding sexuality). The conclusion of the

⁸ Andrew Hodges' biography of Alan Turing suggests that Turing may have acquired this peculiar view of language from Wittgenstein's tutelage at Cambridge, where Wittgenstein sought to determine the connection of mathematics to everyday language (153).

⁹ This might seem to present a recursion problem, where the output must serve as the input, where thinking is as thinking does, yet Turing had already suggested the capacity for a meta-step influencing this framework in his 1936 paper when he resuscitated intuition as a crucial heuristic in mathematical thought (and refuting the last of David Hilbert's mathematical axioms). To judge whether one is encountering a thinking entity is as much a game of intuition as it is of imitation. Indeed, as P. H. Millar notes in his assessment of the Turing test in a retrospective for *Mind*, for lack of a better theory for ascribing and measuring intelligence, "we are left with our intuitive approach" (597). Turing frames this encounter as a game and not as a test since intuitions are never predictable, nor ever universal.

game does not decide the subject; it only reveals that the categories constituting the subject are unstable and constituted by hegemonic convention and idiosyncratic intuition rather than intrinsic nature. No interlocutor is ever universal, nor can they be truly impartial, they always stand within their socio-cultural episteme¹⁰.

Rather than read these developments as a retrenchment of the distinction between man and machine, in *How We Became Posthuman* N. Katherine Hayles argues that Turing's game clarifies the fluid ontology of man. She claims that "[t]his construction necessarily makes the subject into a cyborg, for the enacted and represented bodies are brought into conjunction through the technology that connects them" (xiii). In this case, the connecting technology is scraps of textual paper scanned by a human interpreter. Hayles therefore reads Turing's game as a seminal juncture in the development of post-human postulate, for "[h]ere, at the inaugural moment of the computer age, the erasure of embodiment is performed so that 'intelligence' becomes a property of the formal manipulation of symbols rather than enaction in the human lifeworld" (xi). Humans are cyborgs not simply for their incorporation of mechanical material but by their engagement with technological systems to enact identity.

The invocation of cyborg also draws comparison to that primary text of cyborg culture, Donna Haraway's *Manifesto for Cyborgs*. Haraway situates the cyborg as a paradoxical hybrid that challenges, confounds and confuses the natural ontologies established by technological paradigms and in so doing isolates the queerness bound up in technology. Haraway frames the cyborg as a third and plural sex that emerges at the intersections between the human and the machine; as a triadic node in an otherwise binary network of relations. Haraway uses the trope of the cyborg in much the same way that Turing uses the 'queer' (or unsettled) identity of players as

¹⁰ I am thinking here of Ian Bogost's theory of unit operations, which similarly argues in a deterministic fashion that "no simulation can escape some ideological context" (99).

a liberatory reimagination of the human subject. Her manifesto aims to unite the fundamental contradictions between binaries (feminist theory and identity politics, for one, though she presents a comprehensive list of the rest). This Boolean procedure thus forms the basis for a range of new expressions through the sustained iterations of man-machine processes. That this particular performance should be relayed through media inscription, through the “written, or, better still, typed” (Turing 195) scraps of teletyped paper conveyed from agent to interrogator warrants further scanning. Turing’s insistence on the primacy of telegraphic communication suggests a crucial relationship between discourse, media technologies, ontology and epistemology that would need to await Friedrich Kittler for fuller excavation.

Making Identity Through Cultural Inscription Systems

Kittler was among the earliest media theorists to recognize how media technologies configure postures, performances, and identities. For Kittler, Man as subject is both summoned and supposed by media technologies within a system of technological media systems he calls a *discourse network*. Kittler postulates a conjoined subjectivity between Man and machine at the original conception of the human subject, arguing it has always already been a cyborg; the introduction of the formal mechanism known as the computer is only an additional modification to an ontology emerging from matrices of technological use. Technological development in the discourse network of 1800 mobilized knowledge and the means of its production into the Enlightenment perspective of a rational and autonomous subject. Kittler marks the techno-discursive operations underlying this construction by referring to this Enlightenment subject “So-called Man”, an historical aberration concomitant with socio-cultural media technical alterations. “So-called Man” is a subjectivity whose possibility for being named emerges because of media inscription in systems of notation (i.e. *discourse* networks). The coupling of reading and writing attended new configurations in the development of the identity of the author and the capacity of

the author to signify — a movement in sign notation systems from copying to signifying that occurred within an increasing automatization and technologization of scripting. Compared to the scribal capacity to append signs into a structure of meaning (*DN 108*), Kittler contends, for instance, that “the title and name of the author function strictly to unify stacks of paper in the discourse network of 1800” (*DN 120*). Thus, discourse networks configure and delimit the range of identity expressions. Kittler’s reading of Turing’s work circles the radical point offered in Turing’s 1950 paper: that identity is itself a game of expression, signaled by means of imitative signs determined by socio-cultural and media technical conventions.

Consider the case of “Eugene Goostman”, the simulacra of a 13-year old Ukrainian boy who in 2014 successfully convinced 33% of judges at the Royal Society in London that it was human during a series of five-minute keyboard conversations. The two researchers responsible, Huma Shah and Kevin Warwick, claimed their chatbot had passed the Turing Test. The claim relied on two erroneous understandings of Turing’s original game: the first was altering the parameters of the game itself by imposing an arbitrary five-minute deadline and expanding the single judge to a panel (Turing suggested five-minutes and insisted on a three-person game).¹¹ The second was in assuming that Turing was offering this framework as a criterion test for machine thinking. Indeed, as circled by many of the criticisms to Shah and Warwick’s claim of having “passed the test”, rather than prove any supremacy of machine thinking over human thinking, “Eugene Goostman” demonstrates the capacity for a panel of British judges in 2014 to

¹¹ Regarding the five-minute deadline, Sloman points out that Turing offered that additional mode of the game to postulate a theoretical prediction about the increasing efficacy of computational power. As Turing puts in his paper, “I believe that in about fifty years’ time it will be possible, to programme computers, with a storage capacity of about 10^9 , to make them play the imitation game so well that an average interrogator will not have more than 70 per cent chance of making the right identification after five minutes of questioning.” This statement by Turing has been misread as the primary aim of Turing’s game.

be tricked into thinking they were speaking to a Ukrainian boy with admittedly imperfect command of the English language in a series of five-minute teletype conversations.¹²

If Shah and Warwick's achievement with "Eugene Goostman" relates to Turing's game in any significant way, then, it's in demonstrating the capacity for socio-cultural determinants to be signified through language. "Eugene Goostman" demonstrates how identities are constructed through signs that frame our understanding of beings in ways that are independent of their biology. Put another way, Turing's game clarifies how identity matters, which is to say, how identities are materially made, and made to matter through their tactical deployment within interlaced indices of social and cultural programs.

A similar logic of identity construction through performance can be traced in Judith Butler's account of the construction of gender, whereby the reiterated performances of gender "as we know it" produce "a set of corporeal styles, which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes which exist in a binary relation to one another" ("Performative Acts" 407). In her ground-breaking work *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues: 1) that gender is a social construct and not, as it was supposed, an inherent essential trait; 2) that gender is constructed and perpetuated by sustained socio-cultural expressions, and; 3) these performances are determined by a socio-cultural script.

Butler's perspective aligns with Kittler's in that both underscore how routinization and reiteration reify epistemic structures.¹³ For Kittler, World War II was never a war between men, it was pure recursive mechanization. More broadly, war is a recursive mobilization of technology

¹² Andrew Sloman inadvertently hits upon this point while dismissing the utility of the test as a criterion for machine intelligence since, as he notes, the quality of the test is limited to the capabilities of the interrogator, who would have a substantially different understanding of computer intelligence in the year 2000 than in 1950 (4).

¹³ To wit, the widespread conflation of Turing's game with a test of essential characteristics inadvertently typifies the readiness with which society adopts rules as indices of inherent qualities.

autonomous of social factors. There are no bodies in Kittler's wars. The only casualty is the possibility for autonomy, which is revealed as the product of increasingly sophisticated games of technological development; of national war machines advancing technology beyond human limitations through routinization, serialization, and automation. Thus, Kittler alleges that Turing's entrance into World War II rendered the affair a "war of typewriters". Kittler extends this mechanization of automation to the mechanization of national subjects.

In their respective ways, Kittler, Butler and even Turing emphasize how the social contract is shaped by one's episteme, and more particularly by the media technical registers governing its expression. Ian Bogost similarly argues how games are imbricated by a set of values which can be said to constitute the system that propagates these values, whereby "the relationship or feedback loop between the simulation game and its player are bound up with a set of values; no simulation can escape some ideological context" (99). In *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*, Bogost would define the ways in which game systems signify these ideologies through rules as "procedural rhetoric". Play occurs within programmed notation systems that recursively program the permissible operations of play. Programming coheres units within a system to constitute meaningful activity shaped by the systems in which they emerge; or as Bogost puts it, "unit-operational rules form the entire basis of the resulting gameplay" (*Unit Operations* 99). In this perspective, systems tease out play and shape its forms.

Gender and Machine as Socio-Cultural Determinants

For those scholars who have contended with the first section of Turing's 1950 paper¹⁴, Turing's logic has elicited several contradictory interpretations. Andrew Hodges, in his biography of Turing, claims that references to gender in the imitation game "was in fact a red

¹⁴ See, for instance, the *Turing Guide* (2017), which aside from Diane Proudfoot's essay does not mention gender in the imitation game.

herring, and one of the few passages of the paper that was not expressed with perfect lucidity. The whole point of this game was that a successful imitation of a woman's responses by a man would not prove anything. Gender depended on facts which were not reducible to sequences of symbols" (415). Hayles disagrees with this conclusion¹⁵, claiming that "[i]n the paper itself, however, nowhere does Turing suggest that gender is meant as a counterexample; instead, he makes the two cases rhetorically parallel, indicating through symmetry, if nothing else, that the gender and the human/machine examples are meant to prove the same thing" (xiii). Thinking of the parallelism of these cases clarifies identity as a variable that tracks across both. The first case investigates the identity of the human in the context of a socio-cultural construct: gender. The second case investigates identity of the human in relation to a socio-technical construct: the machine.

Turing's game notably involves inscription as its primary means of play, whereby a textual exchange of riddles determines one's capacity to know the identity of the author.¹⁶ One of the questions asked by the interrogator (C), for instance, is "Will X please tell me the length of his or her hair", to which X (man or machine) might reply "My hair is shingled, and the longest strands are about nine inches long". We might be expected to take this answer as X tricking C, when the whole encounter remains enigmatic. In what ways can hair signify gender? In what way does the length correspond with the essential traits of gender that Hodge insists "depended on facts"? What does Turing's synecdochal nine inches of hair signal if not the cultural determinants of gender? By restaging the epistemological boundaries between man and machine

¹⁵ Hayles was also perhaps the first scholar to take seriously the invocation of gender in the test.

¹⁶ Perhaps it is for this reason that Sir Charles Darwin, Turing's boss as National Physical Laboratory, dismissed his 1948 paper as schoolboy work.

as a game of riddles (logical and semantic), Turing emphasises the importance of play and competition as heuristics for assigning ontological properties.

Turing's game reveals the capacity for any communication system to afford homographesis.¹⁷ According to Edelman, homographesis relies on the linguistic slippage of words that appear the same but differ radically in meaning to (de)posit meaning. According to its anti-essentialist and poststructuralist framework, the metaphoric homograph is a mirage, a magic double, illusory and indeterminable, untethered to the normative episteme, a simulacra that need not point to any discursive reality. The synechdochal homograph theorized by homographesis affords productive indeterminacy that affords an articulation of a radical alterity.

The metalepsis demanded by the rules of Turing's game serve to complicate the relationship between sign and signifier. By requiring the interrogator to become adjudicator and say only whether "X is A and Y is B" or vice versa, the binarism of a Turing Universal Machine revels in semiotic substitution, while the logic of the game undermines heteronormative assumptions: where human is Man is a wo|man, where X is A is (hu)Man is "A medium is a medium is a medium" (*Discourse Networks* 229)—homographs all. A is no more A than B is B, for A may be X, as might B, which may also pass for Y, and vice-versa. None are more essentially the sign than the other, only convention assigns these signification — by means of interrogator C interpreting their typewritten discourse and becoming the integrator of these

¹⁷ Indeed, one need only compare the radical divergences in interpretation of Turing's game to Huizinga's explanation of philosophic wisdom:

It is well known to every student of Vedic literature, the Brahmanas especially, that the explanations given there of the origin of things are as inconsistent as they are varied, and as subtle as they are often far-fetched. There is no general system, no discernible rhyme or reason. But, bearing in mind the fundamental play-character of these cosmogonic speculations and the fact that they all derive from the ritual riddle, it will then dawn upon us that their confusion need not rest so much on the hairsplitting habits of priests, each intent on exalting his particular sacrifice above others, or on capricious fancy, as on the circumstance that *the innumerable contradictory interpretations had once been so many different solutions to ritual riddles.* (108, emphasis mine)

semiotic units into signs pre-signified by the arbitrary and conventional rules of Turing's language game. Rather than these significations being involuntary because they are programmed, however, Turing's play with computational logic in his game merely reminds us that signs do not possess any inherent correspondence to the interiority of self. Signs are the beginning of inquiry; not the terminus. Solving X for A and/or B (the goal of Turing's game, you'll recall), brings us no closer to solving the colossal ontological and even epistemological ramifications of such a decision — though this has remained the subject of scholarly inquiry already described above.

Turing's point of radical undecidability emphasizes how any coherent system nonetheless signals multiple meanings. Recall that the win condition of the game is determined by the capacity for a human interlocutor to detect difference: the game to determine what signs can signify, which calls into question the criteria by which the game can even be decided. Hodges, for instance, offers that "This being a philosophical paper, [Turing] produced an argument in favour of adopting the imitation principle as a criterion. This was that there was no way of telling that other *people* were 'thinking' or 'conscious' except by a process of comparison with oneself, and he saw no reason to treat computers any differently" (415). The emphasis on the word 'people' is to be found in Hodges' original, and it is a curious insistence for Hodges to make. Turing would have been all-too familiar with the way stigma inflected one's discursive status as a person and could also be used to exclude one from a people.

Despite what Hodges claims, it seems unlikely then that Turing's criterion should be limited to what normatively constituted a person in Turing's day, which was woefully limited by sexual orientation and even by gender, as well as by race, nationality and class. The win state of Turing's game instead implicitly questions who might possess the authority to adjudicate such an arbitrary informational exchange in determining what counts as thinking. Progress in the

imitation game, as Hayles and Kittler both point out, dismantles the privileged status of so-called man.

As a subject whose expressions would have been continually scanned for compatibility within a dense socio-cultural game of heteronormativity (what Adrienne Rich defines as “compulsory heterosexuality”, the implicit belief that to be anything other than heterosexual is a problem or a failure), Turing must have been aware of the compulsion to pass, if not to practice it himself. Hardly surprising then, that Turing’s game should flip the interrogation on the whole of the human race. In the scope of the imitation game, even the normative man is interrogated by the contingencies of his subjectivity, with the intrinsic meaning of his performance to be interpreted by an extrinsic interrogation of his expressions.

The framework for his game reveals the power invested in the adjudicator to constitute the subject. The eye of the beholder becomes the adjudicator of the “I”. The conceit of this game is that the heuristic used by the judge to arrive at the end state reveals the sociocultural and biological infrastructures underpinning their selection criteria, which implicate them in the encounter. To answer the question “can machines think?”, Turing’s solution was to turn the question back on the interrogator with the rules of the imitation game to show how the ontological status of any identity depends on the epistemological framework of whoever performs the asking.

Turing’s essay is often read as an important instance in the history of modern computing for what it has to say about the relationship between human and computer, but less addressed is the effect of the game to problematize the very identity of *human*. Turing’s game cannot prove that machines can think; his remarks in his 1950 paper emphasize how a binary solution of “yes,

they can”, or “no, they can’t” was never his intent.¹⁸ Turing’s game instead asks players to think about how *we might know if there could even be an answer*. The dense, procedural framework Turing offers to explain his game calls attention to the arbitrary rules placed on the operations themselves. The first phase qualifies the rhetorical framework for the second. Turing’s oft-ignored first section sets out the rules of his game, including the roles of the male and female players as interlocuters who must persuade the interpreter of the reliability of their ontological status, and only afterwards he explains that “We now ask the question ‘what will happen when a machine takes the part of A in this game?’”. In other words, Turing doesn’t just say to pass the test is to prove computers capable of thought. In keeping with the spirit of Turing’s procedural rules, I want to think of these two cases as phases in a single game.

Turing’s emphasis on the sequential logic of playing his game invites another means of reading the imitation game. In *Persuasive Games*, Ian Bogost claims that videogames are an expressive medium because “they represent how real and imagined systems work” and invite interactions through various means, which Bogost analyses within the context of how rhetoric functions in games and can become operationalized by their rule-based systems. Focusing on the procedurality afforded by digital game systems, Bogost claims that this sequential logic of “rule-based representation and interactions [...] open a new domain for persuasion” (ix). I am interested in extending the rhetorical affordances of procedurality as a technique for making and communicating meanings beyond the context of videogames to Turing’s game. Considering the

¹⁸ Indeed, Sloman shows how Turing’s 1950 paper emphasises how the very question of whether machines can think—which has been mistaken as the point of Turing’s game—is predicated on an erroneous dichotomy, and that therefore Turing was wise to abandon the question as being, in Turing’s words, “too meaningless to deserve discussion”. As Sloman explains, owing to innumerable variations in cognitive capacities and abilities, even alleging a continuum of variations in intelligences among species is a mistake. As such, “Neither species nor individual organisms can be arranged in a linear sequence of increasing intelligence” (6). Sloman further points out the futility of binary assumptions and linear orderings of classifications as false dichotomies: “there is no total ordering, only a complex space of combinations of competences” (7).

procedurality of the imitation game, the first phase uses the rhetorical construction of gender to challenge the conceptual nuances of the human construct before the machine enters the game to trouble these categories further.

To better understand how media systems make identities, we should return to the rules Turing himself set out. As a game to be played continuously, without an arbitrary terminus, Turing's point with the game is not, as is often assumed, that if the machine wins, the human loses. This game is not a test predicated on terms of finite exchange; the result of the machine winning is not that humanity is left diminished. The game as a test has been taken to mean that once won, an essential quality of humanity will have been forever lost to the computer, thereby re-adjusting the status of man forever *after*. However, Turing objects to this privileged status of man even *before* the game has been won. Mankind itself must come to recognize and appreciate the Other—not in terms of its capacity to pass as human, but by unmasking the arbitrary character of the categories governing its production.¹⁹ The computer wins not by showing it is analogous to human—as conceivably, passingly, believably, unerringly human — but rather by revealing that the “human” prize was never so fixed to begin with. The human can no longer be construed as the stable, normative epicentre against which all other forms are measured but should be instead recognized as a culturally constructed type stabilized through repeated communicative exchange. The performativity of the machine in Turing's game detonates the essentialist notion of normativity by confronting Man with his simulation²⁰, while the game's

¹⁹ For instance, Bolter reads the outcome of Turing's competition as a radical decentring of the status of man, with computer now placed in a dominant hierarchical position to humanity. If we consider Turing's computer as a playful entity rather than a simulacrum of a Nietzschean *ubermensch* we can rescue Turing's formulation from the anthropocentric moorings fashioned by Bolter in *Turing's Man* towards a critical reappraisal of human ontology.

²⁰ I am here repurposing Kittler's claim that “man coincides with his simulation” in the imitation game (*Gramophone* 17). Kittler argues claims that Turing's game answered Nietzsche's media-determined and media-inflected question, “Are these humans, or perhaps only thinking, writing, and speaking machines” (qtd in Kittler *Gramophone* 17) by revealing the second description to be the correct one.

procedural rhetoric emphasises the socio-cultural and discursive programming by which the identity of Man has been conventionally established. Because of the very existence of this cultural inscription program, what counts as human must irrevocably be reconfigured as itself something other, must *be* “otherwise” forever after.

Queer Play in Turing’s Game

The game’s rhetorical disruption of stable categories invites yet another reading then, drawn from the nascent domain of queer game studies. In *Queer Games Studies*, editors Bonnie Ruberg and Adrienne Shaw remind the reader that queer as a concept challenges and destabilizes boundaries so as to open up potential for new territory, while “[q]ueer game studies opens up possibilities for queer game play that is not about finding the ‘real’ meaning of a game text, but playing between the lines with queer reading tactics” (x). The first phase of the game troubles the epistemological stability of gender identity, and then the second phase troubles the identity of Man. Queer thinking offers a framework from which to explore infrastructures of meaning and to envision, theorize and embody alternatives. Read from a queer game studies perspective, Turing’s work reveals the queer tactics at play in both the imitation game and his explanation of it.²¹

These perspectives further suggest how Turing’s game offers a primary instance of queer game making, a claim that can be better established by turning to early game theorist Roger Caillois. He outlines four main rubrics of games: *agon*, *alea*, *mimesis* and *ilinx*, which translate roughly to rivalry, chance, mimicry and vertigo, respectively. Turing designs a game that

²¹ As Ruberg and Shaw explain in the introduction to *Queer Game Studies*, “queer game studies refers not so much to the specific topic of queerness in games as to the application of a set of critical tools derived from queer theory and queer thinking” (xii) such as “embracing difference and resisting reductive categorization” (xviii). The variety of perspectives in *Queer Game Studies* shows how exploring queerness in games can extend beyond the specific investigation of texts pre-coded as queer, and instead views texts as sites for potential liberatory possibilities by using “queer reading tactics” (x).

interrogates the signs that qualify meaning and difference to a degree of radical undecidability. In framing the rules as he did to encourage chance (*alea*), Turing encourages disorientation (*ilinx*), and offers a game that queers both human and machine through competing tactics of performance (*agon* and *mimesis*) relayed by media technical inscription. Speculating on the ontological status on machines, minds, computation and thinking Turing uses the procedural rhetoric of games to question normative structures and thereby queer otherwise stable categories like gender and the human.

In Turing's Game, players use written signs to imagine and negotiate through a universe of possibilities, where a man may pass as a woman, or a computer may masquerade as human, or any other combination we might imagine. Masks, whether real or symbolic, are crucial to Roger Caillois' theory of games. The act of masking liberates one from traditional social conventions (Caillois 130) and installs the wearer within a new programmatic matrix — if only for the duration of play. Masquerade is central to *mimesis*, a category of gameplay in which the player “imagines that he [sic] is someone else, and he invents an imaginary universe” (44). *Mimesis* is closely related to Caillois' final category of games, *ilinx*, where the player “gratifies the desire to temporarily destroy his [sic] body equilibrium, escape the tyranny of his ordinary perception, and provoke the abdication of conscience” (44). In the “incessant invention” (23) of mimicking, masking, and playing at appearance, “pleasure lies in being or passing for another” (21). In mimicry, “one escape[s] himself and become[s] another” (19). The escape from one sign—as male, female, human, machine—entails adopting its socio-cultural significations. The type-written scraps on which these significations are inscribed in Turing's game turns tricks on discourse. Through this homographesis, the play of signs queers the very epistemological stability a sign is intended to secure.

Hayles refers to Turing's game "as a magic trick" (xiv). Moving laterally from that point, I propose to frame it in terms of sexual tricking. The sexual phrase 'to trick', according to Scott Speirs, "originated in the argot of female prostitutes and migrated into the urban, gay male lexicon near the turn of the twentieth century" (898). Indeed, the term 'trick' shares a commonality with the French argot *triquer*, which has no English equivalent but in French means to "posséder charnellement" (to have physically), according to the French Wiktionary. Prostitutes then could turn tricks, that is, turn 'physical possession' by making themselves the possessed object of physical transaction. Curiously, tricking among gay men involves both being and possessing the male other. One could be a trick or take a trick. Speirs also suggests that the gay connotation of "trick" was "most likely first used by those transvestite male prostitutes who occupied the same milieu" as the French females, "dressing in women's clothing and catering almost exclusively to a straight, or at least nonhomosexual-identified clientele, referred to as trade" (898). Thus, to trick was to play on the concept of physical intimacy, as it was to play with the certainty of the gender with whom one might be physical. In this way, the term likely draws on another term that Speirs identifies, "Old French *trichier*, meaning to 'deceive or 'cheat', as in games of chance — especially cards — or sleight of hand" (898). In some sense then, to trick is to play at a performative expression, of gender, of sexuality, of identity, those "flickering signifiers" which reveal the subject to have already been post-human (Hayles xiv) and always only a subject construed by cultural technical means, assuming the role of "so-called Man" in Friedrich Kittler's media genealogy.

Indeed, Kittler seems to catch Turing's trick too. He interprets the gender passage in Turing's game as Turing's insistence that socio-cultural distinctions like gender are both mechanical and futile because the universal machine at the centre of Turing's operations

universalizes sexuality to the point of “total desexualization” (*Gramophone* 246). Kittler nonetheless takes Turing’s radicalism in a wholly different direction than Hayles. Turing’s passing references to gender nonetheless seem to have tricked Kittler, who infers an antihumanism in Turing’s “abolition of the difference between numbers and operational symbols, data and commands” (247). This anti-humanist conclusion fits Kittler’s assertion that man is an epiphenomenon bound for obsolescence, but it oversteps Turing’s aim of an anti-essentialist dialogue between man and machine. It is Kittler, not Turing, whose writing abolishes identity categories. For Kittler, machines unsex, they “do away with polar sexual difference and its symbols” (*DN* 351).

Kittler erroneously links this deconstructive potential to his assumption that Turing was a self-hating homosexual²², and that Turing’s supposedly irrepressible anti-homosexuality manifested itself as an inconsolable anti-humanism.²³ Whatever suicidal compulsions Turing may have held in life (and B. Jack Copeland has questioned the circumstances surrounding his death²⁴), they certainly did not extend to his job in the way that Kittler alleges.²⁵ In this way, Kittler misses the radical point of Turing’s multi-faceted game. While the increasing accessibility of textual machines decouples the privileged position of Man to machine, it is not that Turing’s universal machines universalize signs, rather, it is that machines fluoresce those

²² “With which the homosexual Turing raised to the level of technology Dionysus’s sentence, ‘Must we not first hate ourselves if we are to love ourselves?’” (*Gramophone* 246)

²³ How else to account for Kittler ineptly formulated interpretation of Gödel’s and Turing’s approaches to Hilbert’s mathematical gauntlet: “Rather than conclude that humans are superior, as did his colleague Gödel, with whom he jointly refuted the Hilbert program (in support of a complete, consistent, and decidable mathematics, that is, a mathematics that could in principle be delegated to machines), Turing was suicidal-in life as well as in his job.” (*Gramophone* 245)

²⁴ See B. Jack Copeland and Jonathan Bowen’s “Life and Work” and Jack Copeland’s “Crime and Punishment”, both in *The Turing Guide*.

²⁵ Indeed, we might wonder how this suicidal impulse aligns with Turing’s work he turned to in his final years, which was to determine the foundational principles of life itself by exploring the computability of biological principles that give rise to life itself—see his work on morphogenesis collected in *The Essential Turing*, ed. B. Jack Copeland.

markers which might be said to constitute meaning. If any person was to be painfully aware of the unavoidable role played by arbitrary socio-cultural effects on the individual, it was Turing. But Kittler does raise an interesting digression about the degree to which a stigmatized identity might have contributed to Turing's work. How could we not wonder the extent to which the stigma of homosexuality would permeate every facet of Turing's life within a homosexually-repressive society? Turing's sexuality may be relevant to review his work because of the social, moral, legal, medical and ecclesiastical prohibitions against homosexuality at that time which would have exerted normative pressures over the ways Turing was expected to act and integrate himself within a fiercely heteronormative society and workplace.²⁶

Perhaps Kittler distorts the effect of Turing's sexuality because he reads Turing's homosexuality from the paradigm of the closet — a concept of shame and repression from which a true subject emerges, notably popularized by that foundational text of queer studies, *The Epistemology of the Closet*, in which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick positions the closet as “the defining structure for gay oppression in this century” (71). The closet remains, however, an ahistorical framework for negotiating gay identities applied retroactively from the 1970s onward and had little bearing on how queer people in the eras preceding it construed their sexual identities. There is a crucial distinction between concealment as performance and concealment as necessitating a repository space to contain the truth the secret hides.²⁷ To put it another way,

²⁶ Hodges relates an instance wherein Turing openly and unabashedly disclosed his homosexuality to a group of colleagues in Hut 8 at Bletchley Park and was shocked to learn of their opprobrium for his sexuality. As Hodges explains, it was “one of the few times that [Turing] had ever sampled the opinions of society at large. The reality, whether he liked it or not, was that most ordinary people would think of his feelings as alien and nauseating” (Hodges 1983:284).

²⁷ For an example of this kind of duality rather than concealment, in 1978, Auberon Waugh opines about Somerset Maugham's secret sexual identity that “the refusal to admit his nature meant that his entire persona as a writer was artificial. [...] [U]nder the dispensation Maugham chose for himself, he could never speak out with his own true voice. It was always someone else's voice” (qtd in Bullough *Homosexuality* 77). Vern Bullough reads this instance according to the capacious capacities of the closet as they were coming to be described in the 1970s.

Turing's computer room in the game is a performative space that conceals the player and causes ontological uncertainty in the process, but it should not be mistaken as Turing's closet.

Before the 1970s, the paradigm among those who possessed same-sex desire was 'masking' (think of it this way: before homosexual traits became bundled up with a mediatised gay identity, there was no overarching sense of a true identity to be consigned anywhere). The social parameters of 'masking' involve a game of play, mimicry and above all performance that connects to the framework of Turing's imitation game.

Turing's 1950 paper is an important instance in queer media then by operationalizing the relationship between subject and identity. His game shows that the contingencies of the human subject are always already culturally determined (Hayles xiii), always byproducts of ready-made technical notation systems (the cornerstone of Kittler's thinking). In tricking, passing and mimicking through prescribed notation systems, the computer player unravels the stability of human ontology, reveals humanity itself as a false unity designated by sex, gender, and culture. Turing's passing imitation computer radically decentres human categories.

In Turing's game, any human can turn tricks, any computer can be a passing human. Turing's extensive framing of the game complicates the ontological stability of what constitutes computerness, humanness, cisness and queerness. Even the capacity for thinking can no longer be held as the exclusive and fundamental property of the human species. The category of man, stabilized by centuries of Western thought since Descartes, would need to be rethought. In reducing the contingencies of epistemic meaning to the level of an imitation game, Turing presents the decoherence of human epistemology at the zenith of the assemblage of the human subject (as Kittler reads it) and the decentring of this human subject (as Hayles reads it). One of

the outcomes implicit in the “procedural rhetoric” (Bogost) of Turing’s game is to emphasize how to think is to be no more human than to be machine.

While it may seem that I am lapsing into a deterministic argument here that would leave little space for the queerness I am trying to excavate from Turing’s Game, I want to stress how even in the case of strictly defined formal rules, deviant (read: playful) behaviours can manifest towards the attainment of meta-lusory goals that exist beyond the conventionally assigned goals of a game’s rules. In *Metagaming*, game studies scholars Stephanie Boluk and Patrick Lemieux argue that subversive acts can emerge from formal rule-based paradigms previously assumed to be totalizing — i.e. the confines of a game. The authors describe metagaming as tactical tools of intervention in complex systems of exchange. For Boluk and Lemieux, metagaming functions as a theory of critical design and a logic of play practices. In their formulation, metagaming refers to strategies of playful resistance within formal rule systems.

At first glance, the rule-set of the imitation game would seem to rule out the possibilities for queer potential, since an agent can only perpetuate actions within a predefined logical system. However, repetitive operations of the kind envisioned by Turing’s learning machine can lead to radically undecidable configurations even if the rules governing their behaviour are limited.

To better frame this notion of variation from finite states, consider the busy beaver game, introduced by mathematician Tibor Radó’s in his 1962 paper “On Non-Computable Functions”. The title is a playful reformulation of Turing’s first major paper in 1936, “On Non-Computable Numbers”, while the Busy Beaver problem itself derives from Radó’s play with the logic of Turing’s universal machines. Radó’s Busy Beaver Game relies on the programmatic logic of Turing universal machines to develop its extreme complexity. Radó’s play is a metagame of the machine rules. Radó’s paper showed that a Turing machine following only a one card logic along

an infinite tape could produce 64 behaviours. Cards in this game represent programming instructions (similar in a way to punch-card programming) that perform read and write operations on the data, with one card assigned to each operation the program will complete. With a two card logic, that number increases to 20,736 possible behaviours, with the total volume of operations growing exponentially with the addition of each card, such that by the time even a four card logic is reached, there are no fewer than 25.6 trillion possible Turing machines. A five card logic, the next order of magnitude, is 24 to the power of 32 possible behaviours. Each of these Turing machines can be measured for the number of steps taken before reaching the halt state, known as $\Sigma(n,m)^{28}$, with at least one Turing machine in the five card state reaching 4096 steps.²⁹

Busy beaver logic is typically used to solve for abstract mathematical problems, and we should be careful to overstate analogues to human behaviour and performances. I nonetheless draw comparison to the busy beaver game to point out that even seemingly simple operations like a machine programmed according to even just a few cards with only binary instructions can produce astounding degrees of complexity within a narrow rule system. Even supposedly shallow matrices predicated on binaries do not always only lead to recursive repetitions.

Similarly simple programmatic logic is also responsible for the propagation of astronomical complexity within cellular automata programs. The most famous of these automata was a program written in 1970 by British mathematician John Conway consisting of four simple transition rules that produced an infinitely thriving digital ecosystem (including universal Turing

²⁸ Instances in which a Turing machine loops forever are disqualified.

²⁹ For more on busy beaver problems and the history of competitions, see Pascal Michel's "The Busy Beaver Competition: A Historical Survey"

machines exhibiting the same behaviours found in permutations of the busy beaver problem).³⁰ Ian Bogost has described cellular automata as “a helpful way to get at the heart of complex representations of the world in terms of relatively simply described rules” (*Unit Operations* 94). For Bogost, Conway’s *Game of Life* offers a recursive model of complexity that informs “the observer’s opinion or knowledge about the real system” through its simulation (*Unit Operations* 98). Systems of units “derive meaning from the interrelations of their components”, whereas systems “regulate meaning for their constituents” (4). Identity work itself is a process of unit operations, whereby the work of identity coheres discrete units into systems of emergent complexity that make identity, and track across socio-cultural matrices.

The role of programmatic logic has been a crucial means of determining salience of human and machine identities through widely publicized chess competitions between computers and machines (like those much-publicized 1997 matches between chess prodigy Garry Kasparov and IBM’s supercomputer “Deep Blue”). In some sense, the game of chess is a strain of the recursive programs that output emergent complexity like Conway’s *Game of Life*, or the Busy Beaver game.

This autopoietic logic underlies Turing’s conception of machine learning. In the final section of his 1950 paper, Turing turns to the question of how to actually build a machine capable of playing his imitation game and proposes the development of a child-programme to mimic the learning capacities of a child’s brain. Turing likens a child’s brain to “a note-book as one buys it from the stationers”. Both the brain and the book are, in Turing’s conception, a “rather little mechanism, and lots of blank sheets” since “Mechanism and writing are from our point of view almost synonymous” (perfectly aligning his philosophy with Kittler’s

³⁰ See Paul Rendell’s recent *Turing Machine Universality of the Game of Life*; Rendell in fact built a universal Turing machine to simulate Conway’s Game of Life.)

Aufschreibesysteme with a single joke).³¹ Through reward and punishment signals, the child-machine might discipline its programming, continually developing its logical mechanism through constant writing activity.³² In the unit operations of his queer theoretical child computer, Turing emphasized the need for both discipline and initiation. As he emphasized in the conclusion to his 1950 paper and at length in his 1948 paper detailing P-Type machines³³, Turing's aim was to instill the capacity for the child machine to amend its program (Turing cheekily gestures to the Constitution of the United States as a parallel), pursuing numerous imperatives laterally.

With the imitation game, Turing offers a similar logic of imitation and performance within a programmatic matrix, in a way that affords the volitional construction of difference. The tactics of the computer mimic's performance reveal how even a choice between a supposed binary of finite states (to answer or to remain silent) offers the capacity to conduct an undecidable array of actions: to execute the program in earnest, to do so parodically, to do so with clandestine intent, etc., any of which may influence the next state of operations as in a recursive chess match. Turing's imitation game clarifies how submission affords subversion in ways that do not foreclose the possibility for agency.

In Turing's game, the agency of the child computer (programmed to grow itself in multiple directions) emerges from continual scanning of its program and growing in ways unexpected by the programmer. Inspiration through imitation. Such "queer growth" is the lateral

³¹ Turing makes it clear in "Intelligent Machinery" (1948) that he viewed human brains as analogous to computer brains. In his summary of the paper, he notes, "The analogy with the human brain is used as a guiding principle. It is pointed out that the potentialities of the human intelligence can only be realised if suitable education is provided." (qtd. in *Essential Turing* 431)

³² Turing nonetheless imparts some retrograde pedagogy, equating the punishment with the "form of a blow".

³³ Turing's P-Type machine was an early theoretical design for an 'unorganized machine' that developed a neural network through sustained training of its initially incomplete program. For more on Turing's connectionism and neural networks, see Copeland and Proudfoot.

exercise of volition within social, cultural and technological systems, spurred by the Kittlerian “command of free will”. I take this first term from Christopher Goetz’s essay in *Queer Game Studies*, which draws on Kathryn Bond Stockton’s theory of “sideways growth” to argue that society should encourage and make space for “queer growth”, which derives from the pursuit of activities that exist outside the normative range of activities. In Goetz’s estimation, encouraging queer growth abrades the privileged status of normative (particularly male) entitlement undergirding Western culture (242). In *The Queer Child*, Kathryn Bond Stockton proposes that the original state of being is queer, and only made cis through successive socio-cultural programming. In Stockton’s estimation, every child is a queer child, playing at different modes of development. Only with increasing social pressure to conform do children take on socio-political identities like heterosexual and homosexual; straight and everything else besides. What normative society calls developmental growth is thus a program of calibrating and operationalizing children according to normative units — Stockton gives examples like “marriage, work, reproduction, and the loss of childishness” (4). The procedural rhetoric of Turing’s game emphasizes how constructing identity, no matter the context of its framing, affords a means for the subject to self-determine.

The point of this chapter has been to advance the theoretical position outlined in the previous chapter stressing the role of media technologies in making queer identities. It has sought to do so by positioning Turing’s game within the branching histories of queer theory, game studies, and especially queer game studies. Central to this argument has been to reconfigure the Turing Test as a heuristic for pursuing new modes of being by embracing the cyborg nature of our discourse networks, and even for generating new lines of inquiry into the very nature of being (as having always already been the cyborg in subtle but pervasive ways).

Turing's logical framing of the game proposes that queer alternatives exist even before the game need be played, and offers new ways of being and becoming "otherwise" within our media scenes. The Turing Machine meanwhile, the agent of discourse postulated by Turing to participate in this game, can be construed as a queer technology that queers the very onto-epistemological operations of the discourse network in which it operates, fluorescing the anthropocentric and normative fallacies at the root of any discourse that affords an identity. This notion of a queer technology will be explored more fully in my final chapter.

Chapter 3

Mass Printing Gay Identities, 1948-1972

Continuing the variantology developed in the first chapter, and putting it into perspective with the queer making articulated through the Turing Game in the second, this chapter explores how the cultural construct ‘gay’ emerges within an explosion of other media and technologies in the mid-twentieth century in the West.¹ The arrival of mass media technologies inculcated a multiplicity of techniques for expressing and articulating an identity based on same-sex desire. Turning to the published writings of gay liberation organizations and considering them from a media theoretical perspective, this chapter considers how the capacity to make marks worked to make gay an identity. This chapter explores the components that combined between the 1940s and 1970s in Western culture to secure gay identity as a discursive type. This chapter begins by splitting gay identity into two units, “gay” and “identity” and excavating their histories in turn before exploring instances of their amalgamation.

As the first chapter discussed, it was by means of externalization that the interiority of homosexual experience could be articulated, inscribed and transmitted, not simply among people, but across generations. Like the chapter before, this chapter is concerned with how tools for making inscription afforded a means to articulate and transmit signs of queer difference and extends this consideration to explore how sustained discourse could supply the means of being “otherwise”. Further, just as the first chapter sought to show how the framework for the

¹ In *A History of Sexuality*, Foucault assigns the birth of the homosexual to a document, “Westphal’s famous article of 1870 on ‘contrary sexual sensations’ (43). In a later lecture he places the emergence of sexuality as a concept to 1844, though nonetheless in a book, Heinrich Kaan’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*, explaining that “With Heinrich Kaan’s book we have then what could be called the date of birth, or in any case the date of the emergence, of sexuality and sexual aberrations in the psychiatric field” (278).

discourses of queer identities were set by access to media technologies, this chapter also situates the discursive making of gay identities in the 1960s and 1970s within their technological scene.

As I show throughout this chapter, the development of the term “gay identity” is meandering, complex and never fully settled. Nor can its discursive developments ever be conclusively settled: its nuances emerge both in response to hegemonic prescriptions and in total isolation from them. The conceptual nuances of its adoption are contingent upon time, place, society, culture and technology — people could come to terms with their sexual identities long before coming to the terms assigned for them, and vice-versa. People could discover the term without foreknowledge of the social, political and cultural nuances of its discursive formation.

While respecting this ambiguity, this chapter nonetheless explores how the development of mass printing technology supplied a linguistic purchase for terms like ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ to frame an epistemology of being queer. It explores how the term “gay identity” cohered as a cultural unit of information through its mediatic exchange, as a topos which propagates through the compounding of media inscriptions. As systems of inscription making, printing technologies framed discursive queer beings, which I explain by tracing the role of mass print in cohering the topos of gay identity. The consolidation of “gay” culture into an identifiable type of person offered a political maneuver for securing legal rights for a group of people who sought to be readily identified by a term alone. Thus, this chapter addresses the role media technology played in signifying “gay” as a cohesive and primary topos of an identity—as a term that could unite diverse axes of sexual, racial, gender-based and political positioning into an identity type—by considering how media technology contributed to the discourse of making an identity type in the first place.

Whence Identity

The question of what it means to possess an identity has been a persistent debate in Western thought. Scholarship that explores the concept of identity isolates its emergence to the twentieth century. Gerald Izenberg's recent and monolithic *Identity* helpfully frames the historical development of identity as a concept. Tracing the development of identity as a discursive construct, Izenberg explains that "John Locke first raised the issue of *personal* identity—the self's continuity or sameness in relation to the ever-changing stream of our sense impressions—in the seventeenth century. But the notion of identity as *substantive self-definition*, self-definition as *something*, which purportedly determines what I believe and do, came into common usage only with the work of Erik Erikson in the 1950s" (Izenberg 1). Using Erikson's meaning of identity as the root concept, Izenberg traces the discourse of identity across psychological, sociological and political thought in the twentieth century. He describes how increased dissemination of the term "identity" in the 1950s in the West took the concept of identity from a technical construct rooted in civic activity towards its application in understanding social actions. From its predominant bureaucratic function,² identity came to represent a myriad complex comprising ontological, psychological, social and historical perspectives.

In my first chapter I explored the work of Ives, Symonds, Carpenter, and Hall to demonstrate the range of earlier discourses about ways of being queer and homosexual, especially in ways that sought to work against the prescriptions defined by hegemonic discourses.

² As he points out:

Its most common use was to identify persons by objective markers that located them along a set of public axes established for bureaucratic purposes in the modern state: name, sex, age, address, occupation, parentage for minors, and physical appearance. Such markers were employed, among many other purposes, to identify crime victims and adjudicate inheritance claims by those purporting to be the persons named in a will. (3)

To better trace the emergence of gay identity as a concept tied to the rise of mass printing technologies, it is important to revisit the ethnographic work of Donald Webster Cory (aka Edward Sagarin). Seeking to isolate the origins of the word “gay”, Cory relates how “the word made its way to England and America [from France], and was used in print in some of the more pornographic literature soon after the First World War” (107). As Cory explains in *The Homosexual In America*, published in 1950:

Needed for years was an ordinary, everyday, matter-of-fact word, that could express the concept of homosexuality without glorification or condemnation... Such a word has long been in existence, and in recent years has grown in popularity. The word is *gay*. (107)

To emphasise just how long it has been around, Cory notes that “Psychoanalysts have informed [him] that their homosexual patients were calling themselves gay in the nineteen-twenties, and certainly by the nineteen-thirties it was the most common word in use among homosexuals themselves” (107). Cory then goes on to explain its manifold meanings:

Life is gay, the party is gay, the bar is gay, the book is gay, the young man is gay—very gay, or, alas! He is not gay! ... Gay! The word serves many purposes. It is like the Z. of Tchaikowsky’s [sic] diaries and letters, a secret code that will always be understood by some, never by others. (108)

Prior to gay liberation, gay functioned as a culturally specific symbol (Cory describes it as a code) that encompassed a plurality of meanings. As Cory observes, the affirmative meaning of the term can be intuited if it resonates with one’s desire to be otherwise. While this understanding is not exclusive to people of a particular disposition (for instance, someone can sympathize with desires they do not themselves hold, and someone can detest their own sexual desires), in an era of rigid anti-homosexuality simply discovering that another person could be sympathetic to one’s same-sex desires was instrumental in improving self-perceptions of those with same-sex desires.

Indeed, Cory further suggests this as a reason for the term's adoption by this discursive community:

Gay is simple and easy to say and free from the usual stigmas. Its usage has thus grown with great rapidity. A few homosexuals object to it, but for lack of a better term they, too, employ it. One of the most desirable purposes it serves is that it facilitates discarding the mark by offering a language free of odium. Thus, among homosexuals, the euphemism brings franker and fuller discussion. (108)

Yet, as I've tried to emphasise in my first chapter, and as I shall explore at the end of this chapter, these discourses were determined by the capacity to wield media technologies. We therefore cannot think of all individuals with same-sex desire as part of the same group, nor should these groups be taken as uniform and monovocal. The affirmative context of the term noted by Cory would have required interaction with this discursive community.

As the first chapter has argued, and as Izenberg inadvertently points out, mass writing about a concept is consequential in developing its meanings. The capacity to make marks affords notable tensions in making identity. Accounting for theories of identity formation in Western culture, Linda Schlossberg hints at its media-saturated onto-epistemology: "At the most basic level, we are subjects constituted by our visions of ourselves and others, and we trust that our ability to see and read carries with it a certain degree of epistemological certainty" (1). Queer inscriptions in media function in tandem with their transmission to secure the knowledge of one's identity. Gay and lesbian scholars have attended to this media-determined ontological position by acknowledging that "to be recognized as gay, queer subjects must perform themselves as such, through bodily self-inscription, speech acts, or public displays of affection" (Schlossberg 3).

More recently, Elizabeth Armstrong argues in *Forging Gay Identities: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco, 1950-1994* that in the 1950s groups of queer individuals organized themselves around discursive formations like 'gay', which became a master identity for cultural and social inclusiveness. Armstrong describes the "political logics" of these groups, the

“background set of assumptions about how society works, the goals of political action, and appropriate strategies to pursue desired ends” (13-4). During the liberation movement, ‘gay’ emerged as a “legitimation strategy” to reclaim the subjectivity denied by the medical and psychiatric controlling discourse.

In the case of culturally prohibited concepts for which no socially validated terms exist, how do meanings emerge? More to the point, how did people express a desire to be queer prior to the development of a term like ‘gay’? I explore this claim more thoroughly in my next chapter by exploring the queer work of Lisa Ben in the 1940s, which grapples precisely with this question of making a queer identity *in coordination with discourse that might name and describe such a concept*.

Writing Marked Identities

To better explain the role of printing technologies in making gay identities, I want to take some time to develop a theory of making identities through media that accounts for the role of the medium in determining meaning. To do so, I begin by theorizing the consequential relationship between epistemology and making marks.

In *A History of Writing*, Steven Roger Fischer offers a definition of writing that distinguishes between making marks and making meaning. The former is more limited, he explains, in that it lacks a conventional relationship to language and functions primarily to transmit ideas. Fischer’s definition of writing focuses on the clarity of the idea being expressed and its association with linguistic meaning. In this theory of writing, pictography and logography are bracketed as “protowriting” or “prewriting” systems (13). Inscription, but not writing. Systems of engraving and notch-making are similarly dismissed in Fischer’s analysis as “simple memory aids whose marks do not relate conventionally to articulate speech” (17). However, this

logocentric bias, in which writing is determined by its “capacity to convey particulars” privileges the conventional relationship of a mark to what is already an arbitrary and conventional sign.

In the case of queer concepts that I have been tracing throughout this dissertation, the signs and their signification do not arrive to individuals as fully formed. Rather than assuming a transcendental essence to the sign or its signifier, I adopt instead a semiotic perspective that is a bit queer: where each mark is an epistemic repository with meanings that are plural, variable and continually appended through socio-cultural interactions and in coordination with their cultural technical deployment. My approach to signs as tools for meaning-making is drawn in part from anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s definition of the sign as “any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception—the conception being the symbol’s ‘meaning’” (91). Perhaps my definition is so wide as to overburden marks with meanings, but as I have sought to show over these last two chapters, all inscriptions encode information regardless of whether they can be conventionally interpreted.

Friedrich Kittler’s theory of Discourse Networks, or *Aufschriebesysteme* (writing system), postulates that the technologies of inscription produce the very structures of discourse: the means of making marks structure what can be known in a culture and how it can be expressed. Kittler takes McLuhan as his starting point, particularly *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* and argues that media technologies extend *into* man. While McLuhan argues that media help us to understand our senses which consequently “altered our relations to one another and to ourselves” (*Understanding Media*), Kittler argues that we didn’t know our senses until media technologies presented them for us in media, ironically, or because as a consequence of trying to override our senses. Nonetheless, both come to the same conclusion isolating media technology as “the forces shaping human perception” (*Gutenberg Galaxy* 195). What these arguments share

is the supposition that there is a consequential relationship between the tools humans use and their epistemologies of human identity.

Almost a century before any of these theories, Ernst Kapp argues in *Elements of a Philosophy of Technology* that the relationship between human and tool fundamentally alters the human by extending its capabilities according to the structures of tools. Kapp bases his philosophy on an anthropocentric ontology of tools as projections of the human. For Kapp, human morphology constitutes tool ontology: the tool emerges as a projection of the human body (or extension, to prefigure McLuhan), which in turn reconfigures human activity around its operation. Media archaeologist Siegfried Zielinski summarises this proto-cybernetic theory by explaining that “[t]he organic is no longer projected into the world external to the human being, but the reverse: the technical-mechanical serves as a template for describing and explaining the living” (263). As Jeffrey West Kirkwood and Leif Weatherby summarize in their introduction to Kapp’s book: “The tools we make, make us” (x). The emergence of the tool provoked a pivotal split in human history, or, more precisely, marks the moment at which the human and history entered existence.³

Tools afford exteriorization; these technical intermediaries include the stylus, the digit, even the material substrate on which symbolic forms are imprinted. In yoking these intermediary mediators to culturally and technologically specific (and specified) techniques, media technologies serve as tools of knowledge production. Through symbolic exteriorization, media technologies excavate, compound, conform and convey knowledge of both the physical and interior worlds of the maker. I am here also drawing on Walter J. Ong’s theory of writing, whereby the visualization of the oral through graphic marks commands a transformative potential

³ At the centre of Kapp’s paradigm is the human hand: its mechanical affordances constituted the preconditions for the historical emergence of the human condition. To put it plainly, the hand gave the human a grip on itself.

to “restructure the human lifeworld” by reworking the cognitive structures of readers (“Orality and Literacy”).

Perhaps one of the earliest explorations of the relationship between tools and thinking can be found in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, which is also one of the most critical of this development. This apparent encomium on love offers some of the earliest media theory. In the dialogue, Socrates recounts a fabled meeting between the god Theuth and the Egyptian King Thamus that offers a cosmological origin of writing. In a Promethean display of beneficence, Theuth tells King Thamus that he will bestow his arts and sciences. When presented with writing, which Theuth declares “a branch of learning that will make the people of Egypt wiser and improve their memories” (*Phaedrus* 274e4), Thamus is skeptical. “If men learn this [writing],” he declares, “it will implant forgetfulness in their souls; they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks” (*Phaedrus* 275e3-6). The moral of the story for Socrates is that writing affords the extension of thought through time by means of a material substrate that supplants wisdom.

Putting this philosophy into its historical context helps to clarify the role of inscription in making media. Only a century prior to Plato, the Greeks had introduced the alphabet, and with it, the invention of what philosopher Peter Sloterdijk calls “autonomously readable text, because for the first time ... it became possible to reconstruct the author’s voice. Otherwise a reader had always been necessary” (*The Digital Wunderkammer* 89). Plato is therefore writing within a new cultural context provoked by the capacity for words to exist independent of a reader, and for the author’s ideas to travel independent of the voice. Like speech, writing affords an externalization of thought; unlike speech however, this externalization can persist independently of the speech organ of the author. Thought is no longer constrained to the voice and the medium of air, but can

traverse through a variety of media substrates. In response to the cultural effects provoked by the integration of a new and disruptive technology, Socrates elsewhere decries media inscription for its capacity to allow signs to “roll around” independent of their origin (*Republic* V.479d3-10). Socrates objects to the unprecedented capacity for interpretation once signs are externalized from their author. In more modern terminology, Socrates disdains variant interpretations, which he argues are provoked by the fundamental identity of any medium. But this variation is the originary site for homographesis to occur. In a cybernetic arrangement, writing and the mechanisms for its transmission lead to new articulations, with these reformulations continually inscribed and transmitted over time and across cultures. Queer media produce the subjectivities of their discursive perambulations.

In a more recent exploration of this ancient discovery, Dennis Baron remarks on the techniques writers adopt in developing their texts to fit them onto the writing surface. While a material affords information transfer as a writing surface, the way a material processes the text that can be inscribed constrains its functionality. Baron relays his experiences running composition workshops with students involving a range of writing surfaces, including clay tablets, noting that the labour involved in producing new writing surfaces intensified the value of existing materials and conditioned writers to fill every corner of the surface. These practices would often result in an idiosyncratic text with information designed for the legibility of a select few, often the author alone.⁴ The materiality of writing surfaces functioned as primordial text processors.

⁴ Drawing from Plato’s lesson in the *Phaedrus*, Baron remarks that “writing served as a reminder rather than an attempt to present new information; scribes were recording words on clay as a mnemonic or memory aid, either for themselves or for readers who were already familiar with the text” (89).

In *Reading Writing Interfaces*, Lori Emerson undertakes a media material archaeology of the interface to make visible the otherwise imperceptible influences of media on the processes of meaning-making. Emerson's variantological approach to media studies clarifies how interfaces frame practices of writing and reading. The means of making and communicating meaning are influenced by the materiality of media technological interfaces. As she succinctly puts it, in a provocative advancement of Kittler and McLuhan's own views, "media determine what can and cannot be said" (105). The ways people can interact with the means of making inscription influences readerly and writerly engagements with what can and cannot *be*.

The relationship between making identities and cultural technical epistemes is perhaps better understood if we refer to the German title of Kittler's *Discourse Networks* 1800/1900: *Aufschreibesysteme*. The word translates literally to 'notation system', which underlines the crucial function of inscription underlying Kittlerian networks which deploy discourse. A discourse network, as Kittler defines it, is "[t]he network of technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store and process relevant data" (*DN* 369). These networks operate through cultural techniques, which are broadly speaking the means of mobilizing and deploying technical skills through technologies which determine the culture they convey (mediate).

In a similar vein, the focus of Foucault's final work was to consider how the self is constituted through socio-cultural practices of knowledge production through cultural technical means. Foucault saw this work as representative of the larger themes of his work, noting that his "objective for more than twenty-five years has been to sketch out a history of the different ways in our culture that humans develop knowledge about themselves" (18). He traces these knowledge productions through various socio-cultural systems, including the sciences of "economics, biology, psychiatry, medicine and penology" (19). He reads these sciences in their

broadest sense as interrogative “truth games” (19) involving specific techniques, one of which he defines as technologies of the self. In a paradigm that sounds like an ancient prefiguration of post-war cybernetics, these technologies directed towards the care of the self “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (18).

These technologies of the self permit and enforce the performance of operations that transform the subject *through inscription*. In a manner that prefigures Kittler’s latter invocation of cultural techniques, Foucault argues that the use of technology for self maintenance “implies certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes” (18). Foucault goes looking for the history of these technologies and finds the technologies of the self within Plato’s writing. Plato established self on a separate plateau from all other things, which serve as tools of defining the self (up to and including the body, which I explore in greater detail in my chapter on physical culture):

Alcibiades tries to find the self in a dialectical movement. When you take care of the body, you don’t take care of the self. The self is not clothing, tools, or possessions. It is to be found in the principle which uses these tools, a principle not of the body but of the soul. (25)

Continuing along this genealogy of practices related to the care of the self, Foucault claims that writing became increasingly prominent in the cultivation of self care. This enhanced relationship with writing altered the relationship once held with one’s self. Writing became the principle technology to know thyself. The delphic inscription “Know Thyself” supplied in Plato’s *Phaedrus* is allegorical in at least two senses: as an injunction to knowledge and a reminder to seek it from notational signs. Writing puts one in contact with oneself; dialectic escapes dialogue,

“real dialectic passed to correspondence” (27). Autopoeisis—the act of self creation—could be achieved through recursive iteration of inscription systems; “Taking care of oneself became linked to constant writing activity” (27). *Aufschriebesystemes* become the earliest workshops for making ourselves cyborgs. In a cybernetic arrangement, writing and the mechanisms for its transmission lead to new articulations and reformulations continually inscribed and transmitted over time and across cultures.

These interactions between tools and thoughts are consequential in the formation of identity. The focus of Foucault’s final work, featured in *Technologies of the Self*, isolates the crucial importance of technology and techniques of their use in the formation and maintenance of the individual. For Foucault, it was social and technical apparatus, not ideology, that structured subjects. Following Foucault’s reading of how articulation of the self through our sustained relationship with technologies, media theorist Thomas Macho proposes a model for how identity develops through engagements with making marks. Macho invokes the concept of cultural techniques, the symbolic processes of making meaning through marking. Cultural techniques are the result of symbolic relations between media and the tools for making marks on them. These modalities emerge from conglomerations of symbolic work that “endows all other activities with their specific meaning; it gives order to the world and enables cultures to develop self-reflexive concepts” (Macho 31). Identity emerges as a cultural technical calibration between symbolic exteriorization and psychographic interiority. Cultural techniques exteriorize the constituents of an identity that they in turn work to shape. “In a certain sense, [cultural techniques] generate the subjects that, retrospectively, come to understand themselves as the preconditions and nodal points of their very operations” (Macho 44). Human cultures emerge out of symbolic concentrations of multiple techniques across multiple media and technologies (31):

the possible recursions of cultural techniques are what generate questions of identity and identification in the first place; they produce recursive relationships, which differ from tautologies in that they require media: screens and mirrors, paper and books, instruments of measurement and calculation, sound and visual storage equipment, computer. (44) Macho aligns these recursive activities to Foucault's theory of technologies of the self, and associates them with "techniques of self-reflection, identity formation and identification" (31).

The ways we apprehend identities are implicated by the tools used to do so; i.e. our sensory organs, those same organs that philosophers of technology argue have been enhanced, altered, even obtained from humanity's sustained relationship with tools. With this perspective in mind, I want to apply this epistemology to track the discursive emergence and development of the concept of gay identity.

Printing Gay Identities

We can see this transformative power at work in the development of discourse surrounding the emergence of gay identity in the 1940s in America. A seminal moment in this trajectory was the publication of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948. Often referred to as The Kinsey Report, it had a significant influence on the communal formation of alternative sexual identities, and the effects of its contents on the formation of queer communities were pronounced. As Douglas Eisner puts the effect of the Report, "it offered proof that homosexuals and bisexuals were not alone and suggested that they were actually part of a group" (516). Janice Irvine similarly argues that the visibility granted homosexuality by the Kinsey Report helped consolidate a collective identity for members of the homophile movement in the 1950s. This awareness was certainly made widespread across America in 1960 after Murray Kempton's article in the *New York Post*, "Elections and the Homosexual", which both summarised the contents of Kinsey's report and explained the political ramifications of its conclusions in Washington, D.C. Kempton's article noted the shifting attitudes of right-wing politicians towards

homosexuals after “some bright young man in Republican headquarters had dipped into the best-selling Kinsey Report,” and recognized that “there must be several million homosexuals of voting age” (qtd in Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, 80). If shrewd political lackeys could make the connection, it’s unlikely that queer people themselves didn’t begin to recognize in the Kinsey report a testament to their own nascent community. As Faderman points out:

Del Martin quoted Kempton’s [1960] article at length in *The Ladder*. People were finally noticing that a homosexual vote could influence elections, she exulted. “Let us do our utmost to make this a powerful factor,” she declared passionately. “We do have a voice in the affairs of the community and the nation. Let us make it a strong voice.” (80)

Kinsey’s book was widely circulated, indeed, “[n]o other books on sex in the twentieth century had received as wide a circulation as the Kinsey reports... Both volumes spent several months high on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and each sold almost a quarter of a million copies” (D’Emilio 34). In terms of scholarly reception, “The male study stimulated more than 200 major symposia among professionals in 1948 and 1949, while more than fifty other books capitalized on the notoriety of the Kinsey reports” (D’Emilio 34).

Yet much of the reaction to Kinsey’s work was based on a misinterpretation of what Kinsey’s report sought to show. The episodes noted above especially reveal a critical misreading of Kinsey’s report. As Dubay points out, “[Kinsey] was careful to point out that his ‘homosexual-heterosexual scale’ represented ranges of sexual behaviors and experiences, *not* sexual orientation as commonly believed” (3). Kinsey’s report even included a passage cautioning readers against precisely the kind of essentialism the report was taken to show, stating that “Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual ... Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into pigeonholes. The living world is a

continuum in each and every one of its aspects” (639).⁵ Further, in a remark that beats even Foucault to his theoretical punchline, Kinsey points out that the ostracism from communities and society that results from such a labelling process is “one of the factors that materially contributes to the development of exclusively homosexual histories” (4). In other words, early histories of queer cultural production emerge from social labels, from a dialectic engagement that attempts to come to terms with terminology itself. A concept like gay identity emerges from different groups of people reading ostensibly the same marks and coming to widely divergent conclusions about their meanings through sustained homographic engagements with a range of legal, political and religious discourses. Putting into writing puts into play the possibility to engage with one’s subjectivity. When made into a signifying mark, this media technical phenomenality of a concept affords its redeployment in multiple contexts towards various ends. Each media inscription remediates the potential queer flip in meaning. The ontology of queer media obtains from the primordial affordance of inscription decried by Socrates — the capacity for an apparently individual sign to signify multiplicity.

The relationship between access to the means of technological communication and the increasing ease facilitated by advancements in technology has been explored by scholars of gay liberation movements, who cite a consequential role of media technology in producing discourse about gay identity. Martin Meeker’s *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communication and Community 1940s-1970s*, explores the development of gay communities in America in the twentieth century, and isolates their emergence as a result of access to and use of communications technologies between the 1940s and 1970s. Meeker’s work is notable for pointing out that massive changes in communications infrastructures allowed gay communities to

⁵ Though, to be fair to those who jumped to variant conclusions, Kinsey buried this caution at the end of more than 600 pages.

emerge and proliferate starting in the 1940s. “The emergence of gay male and lesbian communities in twentieth-century United States,” he writes, “was in very large part the result of massive changes in the way that individuals could connect to knowledge about homosexuality” (1). In making this argument, he emphasises how the development of communication networks like print magazines contributed to the development of discursive communities. For instance, he triangulates the emergence of a homosexual network in the ‘homophile’ magazines *ONE* (Los Angeles, 1952) *Mattachine Review* (San Francisco, 1955) and *The Ladder* (San Francisco, 1956). In Meeker’s analysis, the traditional ontology of community formation is reversed, whereby communities find themselves in discourse before they assemble in person. But this still leaves the question of how the discourse emerged in the first place.

Before an individual might ‘come out’ into the gay world or ‘come out’ to the larger public as a homosexual, in most instances he or she would first become ‘connected to’ the knowledge that same-sex attraction meant something, that it had social ramifications, and that it had a name. (2)

But the trajectory that Meeker offers remains predicated on an essential claim that this dissertation seeks to dismantle. This narrative arc, which Meeker claims as “the quintessential saga of homosexuality” (6), supposes an essential relationship between the sign and its signification—between the nomenclature of gay and the meanings aligned with this term. Given what I have argued above, and by following a perverse presentist approach (Halberstam) affords better insight into how this nomenclature was decided by the contingencies of the term’s inscription. The social, political and technocultural nuances of same-sex desire were determined by the production of culturally legible marks—and not by any transcendental relationship between these signs and their significations.

Thus, rather than excavating some inherent truth of the sign, media serve as tools for making identity by affording the means for discursive communities to form around the mediated

transmission of discourse about identity types. Indeed, as Meeker observes, “[b]efore people who erotically and emotionally preferred the same sex could organize to confront and challenge their antagonists, they have had to coalesce around an identity and gather themselves into collectivities, into communities, into specific places, and around certain ideas” (1). Technologies served to articulate and comprehend same-sex desire, whether among homosexuals, or among heterosexual society to understand, tolerate and eventually celebrate gay culture. The sustained use of technologies which exist to append, affix, ascribe and compend through means of inscription and description affords the amalgamation of concepts through the accumulation of printed discourse. As more technologies emerge that afford media making, there is an increased opportunity for queer writing and queer construction of identities.

The crucial development in the media situation of mass printing technology between the 1950s and the 1960s was the mass adoption of copying machines: namely Xerox and the mimeograph. The rise of commercially available mass printing technology is crucial to understanding the rise of gay liberation. Nascent gay presses depended on the availability and affordability of technology — typewriters, printers, carbon copy and paper — especially since the subject matter required the work to be clandestine.

The expanding control of the means of mechanical reproduction of media objects, concomitant with the democratization of print in America in the 1950s, enhanced access to others and to other signs. More media supplies more variation. Access to printing machines afforded access to communicate en masse. Speed of production reduced delays in replies. With the rise of the mimeograph, the time between composition, publication and distribution fell from months to days. “Direct access to mimeograph machines, letterpress, and inexpensive offset made these publishing ventures possible, putting the means of production in the hands of the poet” (Clay & Phillips 14). Technologies of mass printing afforded a greater plurality of thoughts to be

compounded into new configurations and transmitted. The great queer author Dorothy Allison recounts how the first gay magazine she worked on in the 1960s was published on a mimeograph (Scagliotti). Henry Gerber and Jacob Houser had used the same technology in 1934 to publish their clandestine homophilic newsletter *Chantecleer* in the United States (Johansson 1033).

Looking outside of queer history, John McMillian has argued for the role played by the mimeograph machine in the formation of the New Left Students for Democratic Society (SDS), going so far as to suggest its role was foundational in the formation and reach of the group's message:

[B]y the mid-1960s, SDS was known on the Left as a group that “passed the charisma around.” Its print culture is part of the reason why. Soon, underground newspapers would begin playing a very similar role, affording a basis for community among activists and avantgardists and helping to democratize the youth rebellion. With this in mind, the notion that the New Left was founded not by any individual, nor even by any group of people, but rather by SDS's mimeograph machine, is so rich a metaphor that if it hadn't already been suggested, one would almost feel compelled to invent it. (103)

Scholars have traced the impact of the rise of mass duplication machines on a range of socio-cultural phenomena⁶, and in the remainder of this chapter I want to stress its influence on the emergence of gay identity as a central issue for gay liberation discourse. Previous scholarship exploring gay liberation has argued that conversations within organizations led to affirmative identifications with homosexuality as a political expedient for securing rights (epitomized succinctly by the “gay is good” slogan, adopted in 1968 at the Fourth Annual Meeting of the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations)⁷, but I argue it was the transmission of these conversations in print outside of any single organization that proved more consequential for making gay identities as a concept.

⁶ Including *Smoking Typewriters*, *Straight News*, *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side*, and *Reading, Writing, Interfaces*

⁷ See Dennis Altman *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation*, p 116.

While considering this argument, it is important to consider the social and economic privilege required to wield these revolutionary media technologies. Though considerably cheaper alternatives to a Xerox copying machine, mimeographs were still expensive. In 1950, prices ranged from US\$50 to US\$100, depending on the model (Weber). Even a standard model in 1970 would cost roughly US\$230, or roughly US\$1500 today adjusting for inflation, not including the cost of supplies, roughly 3 cents a copy, and the need for a person to manually feed the machine, and, depending on its sophistication, crank out copies. Coming to know one's gay identity certainly would have been hard work and constrained by one's access to media technologies.

These social and economic factors, which led to unequal distribution of access to media technologies, resulted in a great deal of conflict in gay liberation organizations. The arguments concerned the ways that male homosexuals overwhelmingly controlled the means of producing and communicating discourse, namely access to printing technologies and microphones at gatherings. For instance, many women and people of colour felt that the conversations within the Gay Liberation Front, one of the most vocal gay rights groups in that period, were over-determined by concerns for metropolitan male homosexuals, at the exclusion of women and people of colour. In fact, by 1970 most of its lesbian members would split off to form radical lesbian-feminist groups, including the Radicalesbian Collective, due to what they perceived as a lack of interest on behalf of the GLF in women's issues.

This dissension around the political, social and cultural discussions of gay culture led to a pamphlet war of sorts, with an extensive range of publications exploring what it meant to be homosexual. Take for instance the typewritten and mimeographed manifesto of the short-lived Third World Gay Revolution (TWGR), comprised of Blacks and Latinos who left the Gay Liberation Front in 1970. Beginning with the premise that "together, not alone, we must explore how we view ourselves, and analyze the assumptions behind our self-identity", TWGR pushed

for “the right of self-determination for all Third World and gay people” (364). Though it’s unclear how many copies were mimeographed, it achieved wide circulation. In an anonymous letter published in the June 30, 1971 edition of the Liberation News Service the author claims that he was in possession of a copy in Cuba. Queer historian Marc Stein recounts how the manifesto was used in consciousness raising workshops in 1970.⁸ The TWGR manifesto is among the first to explicitly identify political issues related to queer oppression as the constituents of personal identities. In this queer rhetoric, the woman becomes gay becomes Third World people when united by their oppression under “male chauvinism” (365), “a fascist police force” (366), “imperial capitalism” (366) and “genocidal institutional religions” (367). Their manifesto calls for an intersectional, queer and feminist approach to self-determination through political organization against hegemonic masculinity.⁹

In this regard, the mission of the TWGR stemmed from the prior mimeographed manifesto of the Gay Liberation Front, which described the organization as “a militant coalition of radical and revolutionary men and women committed to fight the oppression of the homosexual as a minority group and to demand the right to the self-determination of our own bodies”. The homograph at the heart of the debate, “the homosexual”, became a discursive site of much political wrangling, determined through concerted engagement with articulating the rhetorical limits of its oppression.

We can further trace the impact of mass printing technology by reviewing how the discourse of gay liberation arrived in Australia in the early 1970s. Indeed, the comparatively late

⁸ Queer historian Marc Stein also describes how gay liberation contingents in the US organized illegal travel to Cuba in 1970 as part of the Venceremos Brigade, which is perhaps how the flyer found its way there.

⁹ *Gay Flames*, a mimeographed weekly of four and eight pages, would offer a similar statement in its third issue, published in 1970, arguing that “a large group of straight white American men in fact maintain supremacy over all women, all black and all other Third World peoples” (qtd in Donne p. 161).

emergence of homosexual publications in Australia is indicative of the crucial role played by media in cohering the concept of gay identities. In *Pink Ink: The Golden Era for Gay and Lesbian Magazines*, Bill Calder traces the emergence of gay and lesbian magazines in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s. Calder puts this development in terms that stress the importance of media technologies: “the tapping of typewriters on a few sheets of paper lifted the veil of secrecy around homosexuality” (xi).¹⁰

However, if we are to take Calder’s essentialist view of the situation, whereby writing machines merely revealed a hidden truth about homosexuality, why does the notion of a gay identity not appear anywhere in the first issue of *Camp Ink*, the first magazine published in Australia that openly expresses an exclusively pro-homosexual theme in 1970?¹¹ Why does the concept only begin to appear in print in the mid to late 1970s?

Dennis Altman’s 1971 *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* is recognized as a particularly influential node for transmitting the developing discourse of gay identity from the United States to Britain and Australia. Indeed, Jeffrey Weeks credits Altman’s book for cohering his experiences of being homosexual into a productive language for political organization (5). As a visiting Fulbright Scholar at Cornell in the late 1960s, Altman engaged with many gay rights organizations. Altman explains in the introduction to the book’s 2012 edition that he “was in the States during the first months of CAMP’s existence, and came back with missionary zeal to spread gay liberation ideals” (xii)—ideals which he explicitly claims he received from pamphlets, magazines and meetings with gay liberation activists, including “The Gay Liberation Packet,” a series published by the *Gay Flames Collective* in New York, the *Gay Flames* magazine itself,

¹⁰ I further explore this relationship between writing tool and queer identity expression in greater detail in the next chapter with the pioneering typewriter Lisa Ben.

¹¹ All issues of *Camp Ink* have been digitized by the National Library of Australia and can be viewed online: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-757144341>

Come Out! (New York) and *Gay Sunshine* (San Francisco). He returned to Australia in 1969, bringing a great deal of these ideas—and print materials—with him.

To be clear, I am not ceding the emergence of gay identity to any one person or piece of media. Rather, I am emphasizing the role of the media scene in making and consolidating discourse about this concept. As the literature describing the rise of homophile publications in the 1970s suggests, and as I have so far sought to argue by exploring philosophies of technology, it was a relationship with tools for making media that allowed identities to cohere around units of social and cultural information.

Weeks further relates that the Stonewall riots were unknown to him and mainstream Britain before he joined the GLF in the 1970s, as it was to most Americans. Instead, the event was communicated to him by “[t]he leaflets and early journals of gay liberation [that] began to seep through to London from the United States, passed from hand to hand or occasionally obtainable in more radical bookshops” (4). This would certainly have been the case for most Americans as well, who would have learned about the event from reading Gay Liberation materials, and especially from reading either Teal Donne’s 1971 *The Gay Militants* or Karla Jay and Allen Young’s bestselling 1972 book *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, which both provide excerpts from a variety of gay liberation publications that were previously printed only in limited and clandestine circulation, and which both begin with Stonewall as their inciting incident. However, neither works were published abroad as it was felt that their queer perspectives were idiosyncratic to North American experiences (see Jay and Young, xlvii).

The effect of these materials becomes even more pronounced if we look at *Camp Ink*’s articles published prior to the publication of Altman’s book. “A Short History of Gay Liberation” published in their December 1971 issue, is illustrative in this regard. Despite its title, the article never uses the word gay to describe people, who are always referred to as homosexuals. While

their culture is gay (and, if Cory's autoethnography is correct, has been so for decades), the people have yet to identify themselves as such. The article circles around this development in its conclusion, which traces the emergence of a union between homosexuality and the social and cultural expressions of a desire to *be* queer:

In the balance it appears that the greatest handicap for the homosexual in his struggle for equality is not that he is so easily coerced or forced into hiding, but that he cannot be readily identified as such from outward appearance and can readily hide or slip back into pretended heterosexual roles. Because he lacks visible identification he can (borrowing a phrase from another Civil Rights movement) too easily 'pass for white'. For the leaders of GLP [Gay Liberation Party] and other homophile militant groups, the problem is therefore not only that of confrontation of established law and prejudice, but also the mobilisation of the numbers which are known to exist. (6)

While this ability to pass would have been limited to cis white subjects, the magazine's assimilationist rhetoric nonetheless points to a growing awareness of a political need for an identifiable identity that could serve to distinguish homosexual people from the heterosexual mainstream.

The reference to "passing" also stresses influence the much-publicized civil rights discourse of racial identity had on the conceptual development of gay identities. According to Karla Jay and Allen Young, summarizing the trajectory of gay liberation movements in the 1970s, "the initial thrust of the post-Stonewall gay liberation movement was shaped by the 1960s counterculture, the black civil rights movement, the New Left, and radical feminism" (xxxiv). They further note how the GLF formed allegiances with the Black Power and Black Panther coalitions as well as feminist and New Left movements. Given their perceived common struggle against hegemonic repression, gay liberation authors frequently adopted terms and militant political attitudes from these other movements. Even slogans drew from the rhetorical power of the civil rights movement, with "gay power" drawn from "Black Power" (Altman 118) and "gay

is good” purposefully imitated “Black is beautiful” (Jay and Young xxxvi). Denis Altman makes the impact of appropriating this rhetoric explicit, since “as the mainstream movement began to develop a model of identity politics based on analogies with ethnic groups, it became attracted to biological ideas about the fixed and immutable nature of sexual attraction” (xii). Prior to this model, Altman contends, “homosexuals wrote about themselves in only very personal terms, usually in heavy tones of guilt and self-hatred” (9). What was needed was a discourse that could be wielded by and for a community to assign its own identities.

With this affirmative discourse, people with homosexual desires could publicly make their difference known. Altman explains that after his sustained participation in the gay liberation movement, he “c[a]me to realize that [his] homosexuality is an integral part of [his] self-identity” (13). Altman finds the early 1970s to be a time of literary experimentation, where “a recent growth in homosexual self-affirmation” led to “homosexuals [now] beginning to examine themselves” as victims, not monsters (9). The concept of homosexuality moved from an ascribed pathological condition to an asserted identity through sustained engagement with mediated productions of the concept. Indeed, what these arguments suggest is the notion that ‘gay identity’ was as much a tool for communication as the media transmitting it.

Pro-homosexual magazines do not begin in Australia until 1969; that is, after the news of the Stonewall riots is reported. Calder suggests that anti-homosexuality in Australian mass media had kept the discussion from taking place in the decades prior to Stonewall. But how is it that, in Calder’s own words, “the first known gay or lesbian identified publications produced in Australia were internal newsletters from 1969” (5)? If they weren’t relying on mass media to publish views on gay identity initially, why does the discussion begin at so specific an instance after Stonewall? Nor was Stonewall the first time homosexual discussions had permeated widely through society: Calder mentions both the 1948 Kinsey report in the US and the 1957 Wolfenden

report in the UK as pivotal media moments. Why then does a sustained mass media discussion of homosexuality occur only after the mimeograph revolution of the 1950s and 1960s? As I have already discussed, the cost of mimeographs precluded their access to the masses, though they nonetheless functioned as a tool to reproduce content towards a critical mass. *Camp Ink*'s initial circulation volume of 500 copies a month would suggest at least the use of a mimeograph. In the "help wanted" section of their first three issues they also announce their need for typists capable of using and/or servicing IBM electric typewriters. The uniformity of letter colour density in the first issue would point to the use of these IBM electric typewriters from the start. These printing technologies are exactly the kinds of machines *Camp Ink*'s creator, John Ware, would have had access to at the New South Wales University library, where he was a student at the time and where he first published the magazine.¹² By the end of the year *Camp Ink*'s print run had increased to 5000 per issue, a volume which, in conjunction with its shift to left-hand justified multi-column design and the introduction of half-tone reproductions of photographs, suggests the use of a phototypesetting machine or a linotype.¹³

This chapter has sought to explore how concepts of identity could organize around mediated discourse about ways of being homosexual. It has sought to explain how gay identity, as a cultural unit of meaning, could emerge amongst a profusion of media that sustain the possibility of communicating and adopting culturally codified ways of being homosexual. The increasing democratization of print media technology had several impacts on discourses about

¹² A small glyph on the back page of the first three issues declares "Printed by Students' Union, University of N.S.W. 663-1911"

¹³ A mimeograph can only copy a finite number, since its capacities for distribution remain bound to the constrictions of analogue print media: even the best stencils would wear down after a few thousand prints (see J.B. Williams *The Electronics Revolution: Inventing the Future*, Springer, pg 173). Lisa Gitelman suggests in *Paper Knowledge* that duplicating machines in the 1930s would not be able to produce more than a few hundred copies before the stencil broke (see her second chapter "The Typescript Book" pp. 53-82). The Linotype Company was slow to adapt to developments in phototypesetting technology, and did not produce their first commercial machine in America until 1968. See Frank Romano's *The History of the Linotype Company*.

homosexuality. The mass production of discourses about gay culture in this time added to the semantic range of the term *gay*, and by the middle of the 1970s gay was used in gay liberation discourse as a discursive matrix for construing one's identity in North America, Britain and Australia. The more these discourses about gay identity were printed, the more the term took on social and cultural meaning as a way of being queer in relation to heteronormative society and culture. As we saw with activist groups that emerged in response to the discursive hegemony of the Gay Liberation Front, the increased communicability of gay identity as a culturally and socially legible way of being homosexual could also consolidate discourse in exclusionary ways. Yet these groups could nonetheless engage with these same mass-printing technologies to print their own queer discourse and form new communities organized around intersectional issues. Every instance afforded an influential attunement of identity expressions and community formations.

Media technologies are therefore critical to the means of making queer experience and queer identities known and shareable. A socio-cultural construct like 'gay man', to stick with the trouble that began this dissertation, can also be construed as the elaborate conglomeration of multiple signals that have been processed through specific techniques of media production, circulation and consumption. While these identities may be determined by their socio-cultural milieu, they are also multidimensional assemblages of mediated signs indelibly influenced by their technical and technological origins, developed in conjunction with the tools that make the acts of information processing possible. The very idea of a gay identity is as much a media technological phenomenon as it is socio-cultural.

Chapter 4

Queer Media Experiments: Writing, Gleaning, and Making the Early Queer Social Media Platform of *Vice-Versa*, 1947-1948

As my last chapter sought to show, the emergence of a topos of gay identity obtains from developments in printing technology that afforded ready access to the means of publishing inscriptions *en masse*. Gay identity was an experiment that took hold because of sustained media representation. The history of ‘gay’ as a concept signifying the capacity for an identity traces its genealogy in media communications embedded within technological cultures. Like the chapter before it, this chapter is concerned with how a concept like ‘gay identity’ emerges in the traces of techocultural developments of the twentieth century. While the previous chapters explored the impact of published works that achieved wide reception, this chapter homes in on one short-lived, clandestine magazine made in 1947 to emphasize how gay identities could take shape along the byways of media channels—mobilized through media technology and the creative repurposing of techniques for making marks in media.

While Lisa Ben’s¹ *Vice-Versa* is recognized by historians and later gay publishers as the first and prototypical gay magazine in America — the “gayest magazine”, according to Ben’s subtitle for it — this chapter attends to its role in the history of queer media practices by exploring the use of typewritten media to make and ascribe queer identity the year before the Kinsey Report made homosexuality widely known in North America. I focus on the early lesbian discourse network that *Vice-Versa* represented, and argue that it was an early forum for a latent gay community socializing in print. This chapter explores the material and technical factors of

¹ Lisa Ben clarified in later interviews that she would prefer to be discussed by her pen name, Lisa Ben, which is a naming convention I have continued here.

Vice-Versa's production and considers what they suggest about queer media practices within Ben's socio-cultural milieu. The magazine, in both form and content, asks us to rethink the history of queerness in media.²

Creative repurposing of medium and message

Vice-Versa contained only 9 issues and 139 pages, from June 1947 to February 1948. As Ben explained to Eric Marcus in 1989, she "made five copies at a time with carbon paper, and typed it through twice and ended up with ten copies" (8). The scale of *Vice-Versa* was small, in part due to time and cost, and especially because of security concerns³. The work needed to be produced and distributed in a clandestine manner; its production relied on the repurposing of office supplies and labour, and its unambiguously homophilic content was against the law. Ben personally distributed the magazine in the Los Angeles area to fellow lesbians, and she encouraged further distribution by asking her readers to pass copies on to the next reader. Ben's magazine continually solicited contributions from these fellow 'gay gals'. Ben then collated and typeset into the magazine each month.

Vice-Versa's production was limited by Ben's socio-economic access to textual technology, as well as by her pretense of access. Ben's employment as a typist in the mid-1940s for RKO, a then struggling movie studio in Burbank, California that had produced films such as *Citizen Kane* (1940) and *King Kong* (1933), gave her access to the professional grade print technology

² Lisa Ben's short-lived magazine, *Vice-Versa*, is increasingly finding a place in gay and lesbian history. Long forgotten before Eric Marcus recovered it as the opening segment of his book *Making Gay History*, and then often relegated to the status of a footnote as an isolated precedent to the liberation efforts of the 1950s to the 1970s, or dismissed because of its limited publication and influence, the magazine has received increasing scholarly attention. Roger Streitmatter offers an extended discussion of its production in *Unspeakable* (1996); Lillian Faderman focuses on the contingencies of its distribution in *Gay LA* (2006); and most recently Kate Litterer analyses its rhetorical constructions of lesbian sexuality (2018). Streitmatter provides a useful account of Ben's life and activities surrounding the publication of the magazine culled from numerous interviews with Ben. He recounts how Ben escaped from her parents' Northern Californian apricot ranch to Los Angeles after a six-month secretarial course, how she worked diligently as a secretary at RKO, and how she came to create "the first lesbian magazine".

³ See also chapter 7 of Lillian Faderman's *The Gay Revolution* for accounts faced by the publishing team of ONE Magazine in 1953.

necessary to begin writing and publishing her own lesbian-identified magazine in 1947. By a unique confluence of factors, Ben was granted unrestricted access to a typewriter, supplies, and the injunction to type. Ben explained the circumstances permitting her activities in an interview with Streitmatter:

My boss said, “I don't have a heck of a lot of work for you to do, but if you don't look busy, people won't think I'm important. So I don't want you to knit or read a book. I want you always working at the typewriter. I don't care what you type, as long as you're typing something.” (qtd in Streitmatter 80)

Ben's orders from her boss, a low-level executive at RKO, to make herself (and him, by extension) look busy, offered pretence to the pretext of work, but not without some constraints. Forbidden from engaging in female-coded activities like knitting or reading a book, Ben was expected to pursue a socially sanctioned form of female labour.

This injunction to be always be typing set limits on the kinds of technologies she could access to make her magazine. She could type, but not use photo-typesetting equipment or any equipment for reproducing visual arts. And this limitation extended to the content she solicited from others: no visual arts. Technological access and social suppression constrained what media the magazine could include.

Access to specific media technologies also determined the social dynamics of the magazine in a more pivotal way. *Vice-Versa's* small publication size was limited by the number of carbon copy sheets that could fit into the typewriter carriage. Based on the material constraint of 6 copies per run, and a comparative analysis of typefaces from likely typewriter candidates in the period, I suspect Ben used a 1946 Royal KMM manual model.⁴ The uneven density of the ink

⁴ Typeface analysis I've conducted using submitted typefaces from Typewriterdatabase.com and various eBay auctions show that during the second world war Royal made slight modifications to the typeface for their 1942 and 1943 models, with no further models produced until 1946, when the typeface reverted to their 1941 standard, until 1947, when Royal seems to have changed its typeface back to its 1942 standard. Ben certainly was not using a 1947 Royal typewriter. Furthermore, Ben's remarks to Streitmatter that her instrument was “a big, commercial typewriter” (80) lead me to favour the possibility that it was the KMM.

and the spacing of the words suggest she didn't use an electric typewriter. (IBM Electric Model 04, which debuted in 1946, introduced proportional spacing, while Ben's magazine is manually spaced.) However, an electric typewriter may have provided more precise mechanical force to drive each key she pressed through more even more layers of carbon copy paper while delivering crisp lettering on successive copies that would otherwise have been unreadable on a mechanical typewriter.⁵ IBM's electric typewriters were expensive⁶, and would have been beyond the economic means of a secretary, especially one with access to a "big, commercial typewriter"⁷, and Royal (RKO's preferred typewriter distributor) did not produce an electric model until 1950⁸ (that is, after *Vice-Versa*).

Ben insists there were no private machines for copying available in 1947 (Marcus 8; Streitmatter 80), but that is not entirely accurate. There were copiers, for example the mimeograph, but Ben's interview remarks suggest she may not have had ready access to them, either because she was not trained, or because it would have been suspicious for a secretary to be using them. The content itself necessitated prudence and caution in the choice of material, for as Ben herself remarked, "of course, I couldn't go to a printer" (Marcus 8).⁹

The limited capacity for publication of *Vice-Versa* encouraged gay socialization in sharing it. If she'd had more copies she might have been less inclined to demand their re-

⁵ A 1948 advertisement for the Underwood All Electric Typewriter touts that the machine produces "many carbons! Not only original letters, but carbon copies are sharp and clear. You can make as many as you need...at a light finger touch." (From the author's personal collection.) Since I have not conducted the experiment myself, this may be merely an advertising ploy.

⁶ According to Bliven, electric typewriters were at least \$100 more than mechanical models.

⁷ Ben qtd in Streitmatter 80.

⁸ See Beeching 159.

⁹ Ben offers a similar anecdote to Rodger Streitmatter, though she changes the number of copies from 10 to 12 (unless she meant to say 10 copies and 2 originals in both instances):

"I put in an original plus five sheets of carbon paper. That made a total of six copies from each typing. It was a big, commercial typewriter. So when I typed the pages through twice, I had my twelve copies. That's all I could manage. There were no duplicating machines in those days, and, of course, I couldn't go to a printer" (80)

circulation in print and in person after their initial distribution. As Ben explained in an interview with Eric Marcus, “I would say to the girls as I passed out the magazine, ‘When you get through with this, don’t throw it away. Pass it on to another gay gal.’ In that way *Vice Versa* would pass from friend to friend” (8). From a social standpoint, passing the magazine onto another ‘gay gal’ meant knowing one, meant trusting her enough with the secret of one’s innermost sexual orientation, or could perhaps be used to gauge sexual inclinations.¹⁰ From a technological standpoint, passing the magazine on was to some degree predicated upon the ability for the typewriter to press carbon on enough pages.

Streitmatter’s interviews with Ben reveal that the magazine itself served as a social lubricant for her:

I wasn’t very comfortable in the bars. But when I had something to hand out and when I tried to talk girls into writing for my magazine, I no longer had any trouble going up to new people. This was the spur. (qtd in Streitmatter 80)

While the magazine gave Ben “a means of enlarging her social circle” (80), it also points to a consequential and concomitant part of the gay social scene developing in this period through media.

Writing Gay

The negotiation of self identity — as a lesbian, as a woman, as a secretary, as a queer maker — through textual communication — a newsletter, a magazine, a journal — was a possibility that Ben sought to extend to others in the community, and expressed as much in the pages of the magazine in the June 1947 issue: “This is your magazine. VICE VERSA is meant to

¹⁰ Elisabeth Jay Friedman, in “Lesbians in (cyber)space: the politics of the internet in Latin American on- and off-line communities” relates a similar development amongst lesbian groups in Latin America:

It is hard for women to procure information about lesbianism, let alone attend meetings, given the lack of resources groups have to communicate about their existence and efforts. Most rely on word of mouth to publicize issues and events. Some groups have published a newsletter or journal in order to share information and political, literary and artistic work, but the publications have had limited circulation. In the 1980s, for example, the handmade Peruvian bulletin, *Al Margen* (On the Margin) was passed out in discotheques and in a few women’s centers.... (794-5)

be a medium through which we may express our thoughts, our emotions, our opinions” (1). Her shifts in pronouns from ‘your’ to ‘we’ to ‘our’ are allegorical of the emerging mass social consciousness that was developing around queer identities in this era, as it reveals an awareness of the role played by textual communication in communal production. Through the pages of *Vice-Versa*, the one might become the many through the sharing of content rooted in queer identity.

Vice-Versa offers a useful case study for tracing the discursive formations of an identity group in the process of discovering itself through media. Kate Litterer’s recent article considers precisely this question, investigating “how Ben positions herself as an author and lesbian, how she engages with the subject of medical and social classification of sexual inversion, and how she connects with her lesbian audience” (205). Litterer focuses on rhetorical constructions in Ben’s magazine of lesbian sexuality and what these constructions suggest about the possibility for positive discursive constructions of lesbianism in the 1940s. My focus in this chapter concerns the role of media in formulating and conveying these constructions.

In her opening remarks to Eric Marcus, Ben explains that she only discovered the word lesbian in her 20s, after moving to Los Angeles:

It was a while before I knew other gay gals and learned from them what gay meant. As a matter of fact, I didn’t even know the word lesbian. I knew how I felt, but I didn’t know how to go about finding someone else who was like me, and there was no way to find out in those days. (6)

The contents of the magazine can thereby be read as her attempt to mobilize meanings of these words for herself and others.¹¹ The topics in her articles shows how Ben sought to read queerly into the media around her to better understand the range of meanings encompassed by these unfamiliar terms. She makes clear in “Here to Stay”, for instance, that *Vice-Versa* offers a means

¹¹ As I stressed in the introduction to my dissertation, this sequence is also one of the reasons why I am hesitant to describe her identity as explicitly lesbian in the time that she is writing *Vice-Versa*.

to cultivate queer interpretive strategies. For Ben, seeing pejoratives for gay in print on mainstream bookstands impelled a grander hope for increased representation in more recent technological innovations, the cinema and beyond. In a sense, *Vice-Versa* was a cultural technical means of installing queer visibility in her community; to recognize gay, lesbian and queerness in media and, more importantly, to write and read these subjects into the socio-cultural matrix of media production.

In the pages of *Vice-Versa*, Ben constructs a gay group in opposition to a greater public, from which she expects homosexuals will use media to achieve visibility. Take for instance Ben's infamous "Here to Stay" essay from the fourth issue (vol 1.4), September 1947, which begins:

Whether the unsympathetic majority approves or not, it looks as though the third sex is here to stay. With the advancement of psychiatry and related subjects, the world is becoming more and more aware that there are those in our midst who feel no attraction for the opposite sex.¹²

In a single essay, on a single page no less, Ben outlines a homosexual subculture of fashion, entertainment, literature and even articulates a cultural desire for mass media representation, a subliminal dream of homosexual emancipation these materials foster and sustain. Ben's continual refrains for visibility through media representation suggests the role of media consumption in construing queer identities. Ben references two lesbian novels, *Diana* and *The Well of Loneliness*, and interprets them as testaments to the legitimacy of her difference. These and other published materials serve as part of a grander hope expressed throughout *Vice-Versa* that the prevalence of queerness in society and culture, and especially access to queer materials, would ensure integration with the mainstream. She explains her dream of a queerer future of media representation: "I believe that the time will come when, say, Stephen Gordon will step unrestrained from the pages of Radclyffe Hall's admirable novel, *The Well of Loneliness*, onto

¹² JD Doyle's Queer Music Heritage website includes scanned copies of every issue of *Vice-Versa*.

the silver screen. And once precedent has been broken by one such motion picture, others will be sure to follow. Perhaps even *Vice Versa* might be the forerunner of better magazines dedicated to the third sex”. Her consistent hope of this emulatory effect achieved through media consumption reveals that even before the gay rights movements, queer people were eager for representation of their sexual identities, and eagerly searching for any likeness they might find in media past and present.¹³

The essay noted above is also emblematic of Ben’s overarching goal with the magazine, which was to compile and thereby clarify the components of her queer identity. The elements Ben incorporates within queerness are expansive to say the least. Queerness is a tendency rooted in attraction to the opposite sex as it is the expression of performative gender conventions (she includes “male and female impersonators” in her list of gay people). Queerness is an inclination that is to be sensed in others (an incipient discussion of ‘gaydar’). Queerness is expressed through the display of gender-coded material possessions. She remarks, for instance, on “mannishly attired women”, and feminine dressed men, and even just men in “bright colored shirts, chain bracelets, loud socks, and ornate sandals”, which she claims “indicate far more than mere friendliness”¹⁴. All these signs are constitutive of a “gay atmosphere” that she hopes will continue to suffuse the quotidian heteronormative culture.¹⁵

¹³ George Ives’s scrapbooks, collated every day for a period of over 40 years, evince a similar process — and he was to be labeled an eccentric for his efforts; that is, for doing exactly what we do today: media collection and collation. Similarly, much scholarship on gay identity in the Victorian era has focused on John Addington Symonds’ memoirs. Paul Hammond’s description of Symonds’ literary efforts through his memoirs points to the kinds of queer gleaning central to Ben and her social network conducted through the magazine: “All his life Symonds sought clues in other men’s works which might give him some guidance in the confused, often guilty, frequently unsatisfying indirections of his sexual life” (166).

¹⁴ A confirmation of the associations between capitalist society and the emergence of gay identity stressed by D’Emilio, Weeks, Faderman and Foucault.

¹⁵ Esther Newton recognizes a similar focus on tailored appearance among second-generation feminists of whom Hall was a part (see esp. pp. 562-3 in “Mythic Mannish Lesbian”)

Ben offers them as traits indicative of a sexual difference worth seeking out to celebrate and *cultivate* through media channels. The combination of materials and terms points to a sustained conflation Ben makes throughout *Vice-Versa*. In “Here to Stay”, with a Derridean free-play of signs, Ben deploys these terms interchangeably and without concern for their provenance, suggesting the magazine’s function as a technology for construing identity.¹⁶ As far as Ben is concerned, the third sex is the invert is the lesbian is the homosexual other is queer. Though she read censorious remarks about her sexual orientation in books, Ben “wasn’t going to change because some book said [she] was a certain way” (qtd in Cain, 14) An essay like “Here To Stay” proudly repurposes the etiology of inversion to affirm a gay social identity in print. Sexological terms intended to observe and classify became tools for Ben to frame and participate in such queerness.

Ben’s repurposing of what had been intended to be censorious discourses emphasizes how repurposing the language of sexology offered her a discursive purchase for articulating an identity organized around queerness. The invert and the third sex, terms drawn from Karl Ulrichs and Havelock Ellis (though likely drawn from *The Well of Loneliness*, which sought to popularize sexology and which had only recently received a mass distribution in a pulp paperback format), become discursive positions from which to legitimate her queer desire (which she extends to a more general queer group) and to better trace its instances in media. In other words, to celebrate homosexual identity in 1947, Ben uses Hall’s prose descriptions of lesbian sexuality from 1927, which Hall drew from medical and sexological classifications of lesbian sexuality from the 1880s

¹⁶ By way of an extended digression that points to the use of making media in construing identity, Michael Baker lays further stress on the impact of sexological thinking for Hall, who “reconstructed her biography to fit the ‘third sex’ theory” (248). She even went so far as to have her baby portrait altered to make her appear more boyish in appearance to fit her belief that she was a ‘congenital invert’ (see Baker *Our Three Selves*, especially pp. 18-9). Hall’s literary process was a mode of scholarship akin to Garvey’s textual gleaning. Faderman describes how Radclyffe Hall set about writing *The Well of Loneliness* by “compil[ing] a set of notes based on ‘the latest and revised editions of the works of the highest authorities on sexual inversion, exclusive of the psychoanalysts’” (317)

and 1890s. Ben deploys this sexological terminology as a base from which to design a queer-friendly future of acceptance and inclusion.¹⁷

To the extent that a text like *Well of Loneliness* was appropriated by queer people to communicate same-sex desire — from Hall to Ben to the Daughters of Bilitis — the making of texts afforded a set of identity tools for signalling and construing queer difference. *Vice-Versa* was a more immediate social identity technology than a published novel, and though it lacked large-scale visibility it was nonetheless a product of queer and creative repurposing of prior technologies and a portent of future technological innovations in queer media technology: collaborative, playful, memetic and transmedial.

The capacity for signs to be repurposed for alternative significations is a crucial element in the transmission of queer signals, which for centuries generations of queer cryptographers have relied upon schemes of cultural encryption to securely transmit sexual orientation, or, in the case of Lisa Ben and other queer writers, to broadcast queerness in the blind. Even the Daughters of Bilitis settled on their name because “[i]t sounded like a straight women’s organization — like the ultraconservative Daughters of the American Revolution or like the female auxiliary to the Shriners, called the Daughters of the Nile” (Faderman 77). More importantly, the intertextuality

¹⁷ Esther Newton, in “The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman”, traces a similar tendency in Hall’s work, suggesting that lesbian’s in second-generation feminism were satisfied to use and adopt the terminology presented to them by sexologists, noting that “Hall and many other feminists like her embraced, sometimes with ambivalence, the image of the mannish lesbian and the discourse of the sexologists about inversion primarily because they desperately wanted to break out of the asexual model of romantic friendship” (560). Indeed, one need perhaps look no further than the frontispiece to the original 1929 edition, which features an appreciation by none other than Havelock Ellis. Ben similarly adopts these terms in the 1940s, and as an oblate of these lexical representations, Ben’s words mold queer difference to the stereotype offered in the printed word. It would be another generation of writers before this remediation of sexuality would be abandoned in favour of queerer expressions of difference.

lended protection, for “if some smart aleck recognized ‘Bilitis’ from Pierre Louÿs’s poems, the women could always say they were a poetry club” (Faderman 77).¹⁸

The homographic nature of media inscription is paramount to the emergence of gay consciousness. That is, the capacity for one sign to simultaneously signal multiple significations allows gay to be transmitted in what Derrida would call the ‘supplement’—signifying marks with a productively indeterminable meaning. This palimpsestic revision of sexual inversion through the transmission of signs from Ellis to Hall to Ben results in a wholly original formulation of queerness and sexuality by the time it reaches the pages of *Vice-Versa*. Since Ben is receiving the sexological dogma at a degree removed from the original sources through the fiction of Hall, she is free to read sexual inversion as she will. Like a game of decades-long telephone, sexologists and medical practitioners offered the stream of signs and signifiers from which Ben could construct a lesbian identity. Moreover, Ben does not place any clear distinction between gay, lesbian and queer. The result of this conflation is a productively queer confusion of meanings that flips sexual dissidence to a validation of sexual difference, and offers a melange of dispositions which Ben continually yearns for more queer people to adopt and adapt to their own needs.

The result of Ben’s writing is what Foucault would call a reverse discourse, whereby “homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified” (*A History of Sexuality* 101). When difference could be expressed as other than dissidence through media technical apparatus, the homosexual began to speak for itself,

¹⁸ Even earlier, and far more secret in their efforts was Order of Chaeronea, an early precursor to gay rights organizations, founded sometime in the mid-1890s by George Ives. Weeks relates the extreme secrecy undertaken by the group to evade discovery and prosecution, including how all communications began from the starting base of 338 B.C., the year of the historic battle at Chaeronea fought by the Theban “Sacred Band” of male lovers, and further explaining how “Communications between members of the order were deliberately obscured in other ways. Ives and [Laurence] Houseman [1865-1959] wrote to each other as ‘One to Another’, and used a form of numbers to identify their fellow members” (*Sex* 122).

to take on its own existence external to the heteronormative discourse networks. This “tactical polyvalence of discourse” required precisely that the discourse itself could be transmitted. Pages passed from hand-to-hand approximate the birth of new conditions of thinking about homosexuality outside the normative episteme (the rules and discourses that govern expression of ideas). These pages in turn conditioned the construction of a queer homosexual identity.

Ben incorporates deviancy into an affirmative paradigm of sexual otherness that muddles gender, sexuality and identity. Ben’s point in “Here to Stay” is not to insist on a strict separation between lesbian and gay, homosexual men and homosexual women, or to consider how theories of inversion might help to isolate and abstract these variables further. Rather, she insists on a queer multiplicity, cognisant that in numbers can be found strength — particularly when those members come to see and think of themselves as members of a definite group (which she describes queer people as on the first page in the first issue of her magazine). Throughout *Vice-Versa*’s publication she offers her magazine to her readers as a means and a method for practicing queer linguistic play, to glean from her own pages and write what they may.

Gleaning Gay

This desire to speak on behalf of and come to know the community perhaps explains *Vice-Versa*’s unequivocal approach to signalling queerness, starting with its unabashed declaration on its very cover page: “The Gayest Magazine in America”¹⁹. Other publications intended for circulation might offer homoerotic images, but always encoded to invite multiple readings that would offer plausible deniability if seized by censors. At ten copies, with no plans for mass circulation, Ben does not appear to have been preoccupied with censorship laws. Moreover, Ben’s anecdotes about her circulation of the material suggests she may have been unaware

¹⁹ This subtitle does not appear until the second issue.

initially of the illegality of the material she had produced, and certainly about the illegality of its distribution. See for instance her interview with Eric Marcus, in which she recounts how she originally distributed the magazine at her local lesbian bar²⁰, until the bartender warned her that if the place was raided she would certainly be arrested for possession of those materials. One also gets the sense that the bar's owners were especially worried about the fate of their bar were its predominantly female patrons to be arrested with written material on their persons that was unequivocally gay.²¹

By remaking and repurposing media, even materials intended to censure could be decrypted according to a queer logic of remediation. A print headline intended to censure those arrested in a bar raid might be read as a signal of queer presence²², as people meeting to explore their sexuality together, as people existing whose sexuality deviated from the norm. Martin Meeker argues the effect of *Life* magazine's 1964 exposé on homosexuality actually contributed to an enculturation of the very signs of queer difference the article sought to pathologize. Through media representation, pathology of inversion became a homology of homosexuality; etiology supplied the mediatised materials by which to articulate a sustained identity. From the eighteenth well into the twentieth century, the threat of exposure in the popular press was a pervasive and disruptive practice.²³

²⁰ This would have been either *The Lakeshore* near Westlake Park or *If Club*, located at 8th street and Vermont Avenue, which according to Faderman were the only two lesbian bars in LA during the 1940s (89).

²¹ As a digression, this anecdote suggests a broader clandestine queer sociality taking place in clear contravention of established laws. These deviant practices are what lead me to disagree with D'Emilio's insistence on historical records as metrics for determining human behaviours. In several of his works, D'Emilio points to legal statutes to explain what behaviours individuals were or were not performing. For good or ill, people rarely consult legal codes before acting on their desires, nor do their activities align coherently with legal language.

²² One of the respondents in *Between the Acts: Lives of Homosexual Men 1885-1967* reports how he would use the public censures in the paper to determine who in his town was homosexual, calling the men up after their release from prison to invite them over to his house for sex (18-20).

²³ See Richard Dellamora, "Homosexual Scandal and Compulsory Heterosexuality in the 1890s," in *Reading Fin de Siècle Fictions*, ed. Lyn Pyckett, Trevor Fisher, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of Late Victorian Britain* and Ed Cohen *Talk on the Wilde Side*. Ben herself recounts to Eric Marcus her experiences in a bar raid.

In a queer flip, a queering of queer crimes, the litany of offenses to society offered a candid confession of homosexual capabilities. And there was plenty of material to draw upon. As sociologists Simon and Gagnon noted in their 1967 article, “The homosexual, like most significantly labeled persons (whether the label be positive or negative), has *all* of his [sic] acts interpreted through the framework of his homosexuality” (177). Having already been obsessively scanned for any trace of deviancy or derivation, and having allowed one’s “sexual object choice to dominate and control our imagery of him and have let this aspect of his total life experience appear to determine all his products, concerns, and activities” (179), homosexuals have a sustained history with the use of technology as a means of conveying, scanning and interpreting codes, and *Vice-Versa*, as both media object and mediated messages reminds us as much.

Considering these practices, Michel de Certeau’s notion of poaching comes to mind, as does Henry Jenkins’ reformulation of ‘textual poaching’, which dismisses Certeau’s insistence on readers “despoiling” the text in their enjoyment of it, and considers how new media develops from reworking prior forms. I prefer Garvey’s term ‘gleaner’, which early twentieth scrapbookers used to describe their practices (Garvey 208). Garvey’s “gleaning” echoes Jenkins’ concept and reframes de Certeau’s bourgeois male practices of textual raiding with feminine and egalitarian relationships with texts and their refashioning. Gleaners are information gatherers who cohabitate with the author and the text, participate in “create[ing] multiple meanings and readings from the text” (208). As Kittler notes, “Media facilitate all possible manipulations” (*Gramophone* 49), since any input signal can be controlled into any other data output given the right media technology and technique. Ben expressed her work as “a gesture of love...a way of dividing myself into little bits and pieces and saying ‘Here you are, take me! I love you all!’” (qtd in Cain, 14).

Studying scrapbook making in the nineteenth-century, Ellen Gruber Garvey relates how scrapbooking practices during this period allowed for innovative means of participation in the production and circulation of print culture. Scrapbooking offered a means of idiosyncratic participation in material culture predicated on a hierarchical relationship to the means of production of literary texts.²⁴ The scrapbookers whom Garvey studies could not produce their own books, so they refashioned old books into new configurations. As Garvey puts it, “The maker of the scrapbook carved an individual creation suited to individual interests out of mass-distributed material” (219). The plurality of media forms speaks to the development of media cultures in this era as well as suggesting the role of access in one’s ability to transmit information.

Ben’s magazine also represents gleaning of a more abstract sort. Where Garvey relates how her early gleaners clipped pages from print materials, Ben clipped concepts from them. When possible, Ben even drew from admonitions of homosexuality in the popular media, writing counternarratives and opinions (Streitmatter 85). Indeed, it is with the appellation ‘the third sex’ that Ben assumes her defiant stance. Many instances in the magazine Ben’s language can be read as an attempt to use media to understand her identity as a queer person, as a lesbian, as a social actor, as subject of psychiatric and medical discourse.

Vice-Versa is also a novel take on this scrapbooking procedure since she solicited materials from her readers so that she could collate and type-set them into what Garvey would term an “idiosyncratic catalogue” (209) to better glean her identity. In the process of making and

²⁴ See Garvey “Scissoring and Scrapbooks: Nineteenth-Century Reading, Remaking and Recirculating” in *New Media 1740-1915* and Garvey *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance*. For an extended exploration of various scrapbooks in American culture from the early twentieth century, including a discussion of their role in consolidating personal identity, see Jessica Helfland *Scrapbooks: An American History*.

recirculating her pages, she also offered a means for others to glean a sense of a communal identity. The carbon copied pages of Ben's magazine were a means for her to collate and cohere salience about her identity as a gay woman, gleaning from media scraps and passages, which she also sourced from other women, and we can only speculate on how other women made use of Lisa Ben's magazine in their own processes of gleaning.

Making Gay

Ben's practices of production relied on her prior experience as a secretary at a war dog training centre in California during World War II (Litterer 206). She would have also been trained on IBM typewriters.²⁵ During her training, Ben would have participated in the same clandestine media scanning and textual gleaning as the Bletchley Park Wrens (though undoubtedly not to the same degree of secrecy). Rather than a discrete phenomenon, Ben's technical assemblage of the magazine at RKO seems a continuation of her wartime training as a typist.

The extended sequence of clandestine "misuse" of labour and office supplies at Ben's workplace plays upon de Certeau's concept of *la perruque*, or 'the wig', whereby "the worker's own work [is] disguised as work for his [sic] employer" (25). In Ben's case the trick is all the more ironic since the work was purely performative: to produce the appearance of work, but not to actually work on something productive. Thus, with *Vice-Versa* Ben even plays a trick on idleness. The title *Vice-Versa* suggests a metaleptic reverse play on a queer tactic: tricking even her boss who had asked her to trick others by using the typewriter to make him look productive by extension. It was a reversal of heteronormativity by celebrating sexual activity construed as a vice; a reversal of patriarchal work environments that rendered women as passive receptacles of

²⁵ Beeching explains that "IBM offered its entire facilities to the American Government for the war effort", including the supply of typewriters (124).

male voices; a reversal of technological infrastructures, creatively repurposing the surplus subsidiaries of cinema production: textual machines.

The magazine was a product of a peculiar panopticism that enjoined Ben to work at a certain type of media (since as a woman she was expected to serve as a typist rather than say, a camera woman—a term that never existed in Hollywood culture)²⁶ but without restrictions about its content. Matthew Kirschenbaum’s social and media archaeological research into the work performed by female typists during the introduction of digital word processors suggest that such clandestine repurposing of office labour was perhaps commonplace, and a concomitant result of bureaucratic inefficiencies. Placed into a matrix of production and enjoined to produce using the tools of the system, but without sufficient material to process, these female typists took to processing and outputting their own information.²⁷

De Certeau’s concept of *la perruque* was provoked by the ways that the mass industrial techniques of production had led to profound restructuring of social groups and their capacities for technical activities. “These ‘ways of operating’ are similar to ‘instructions for use,’ and they create a certain play in the machine through a stratification of different and interfering kinds of functioning” (30). De Certeau stops short of clarifying the profound repercussions of these technical activities when media transmit their tricks, but he nonetheless affirms that the accumulation of such tactics would be nothing less than a revolution in culture. Curiously

²⁶ See Darren Wershler’s *The Iron Whim*, especially pp 80-110 for an extended exploration of the gendered construction of typists in the industrialisation of the typewriter. See also Matthew Kirschenbaum’s *Track Changes* chapter 7.

²⁷ Kirschenbaum relays the testimony of Marina Endicott, who first learned how to operate an IBM Displaywriter in a Canadian government office. Similar to Ben, Endicott was instructed to always be using her machine—“we had to maintain the fiction that the administration of government requires constant effort” (153)—but with little to do beyond her training she began to write letters to herself and eventually “started writing stories to amuse herself” (154). Kirschenbaum relates how another secretary, Terry McMillan, who would go on to become an acclaimed writer, who used the processing efficiency of her word processor after hours to expedite the production and transmission of “thousands of promotional letters to bookstores, reading groups, and review outlets, especially those with a record of supporting black writers” (154)

enough, de Certeau relies on the same language as McLuhan to clarify this relationship between techniques and their technical expansion through successive technological developments: “The operational models of popular culture cannot be confined to the past, the countryside, or primitive peoples” (27). Though their language is today problematic, both authors confront in distinct ways the profound ways that cultural techniques, when extended to mass scales, leave space for creativity in “ways of operating” (which for de Certeau is a kind of literary style).

For de Certeau a single practice like *la perruque* is a diversion. Though widespread, though quotidian, a practice like *la perruque* does not constitute a culture. Nonetheless, through the accumulation of these cultural techniques other groups ‘insinuate into’ the system of mainstream culture (30). Thus, tactics are social practices that cohere new cultures and rewrite old ones. Through these tactics, the individual may ‘superimpose’ the self and carve out a niche to “find *ways of using* the constraining order of the place or of the language” (30). Ben’s tactics however, her tricking and gleaning, produced an aesthetics of experience that enabled her to situate her place in mainstream culture, and to envision a subculture existing otherwise from the mainstream.

Vice-Versa frequently suggests the emancipatory effect of mediated representation. Ben’s remarks in the magazine note how a medium can suture together a community divided by physical properties like time and distance as much as by social stigma. In her magazine passed hand-to-hand, community is established around the sharing of queer material — a creative work either found or made.²⁸ She emphasizes how readers can participate in the magazine by submitting content (one presumes, in person?). In every issue, Ben implores her readers to

²⁸ The early foundation of *Physique Pictorial* (beginning in LA County in 1951, just a few miles from where Ben was distributing her own *Vice-Versa*) follows the same logic of physical sharing to maintain clandestine distribution and group formation.

contribute creative print material rooted in queerness²⁹. At the start of the second issue she asks for readers to take up their own writing tools and submit reviews and synopses of queer media they have seen which others might not have access to:

You may have seen a rare or unusual film which others may never be able to view because of time or distance involved. If you've seen such a film, don't keep it to yourself. Tell others about it through the medium of VICE VERSA. (1)

She phrases her desire to see traces of what she recognizes of her difference in the content of another medium in a manner that anticipates the language of remediation. Ben impels her readers to become active conduits transmitting queer material; to forge, link by link, the queer network she envisions. Ben's language persistently figures her publication as a medium for communicating queerness and as a focal point to organize a print community that anticipates the attributes of modern social media platforms.³⁰

Seeking to build a literary community, Ben's introspection into the function of her magazine vacillates between its use as monadic, dyadic and mass media, not as media for the masses, but as a media that amasses. In her preface to the first issue, she apologizes for the potential monotony of the content, imploring the reader to consider "that the entire publication was originated and compiled by one person". Yet, in the very next paragraph, she insists "This is your magazine" (underline in original), thereby imploring a communal engagement with an otherwise private practice. *Vice-Versa* amasses passages of queerness in media to retransmit queer media for her readers. In "Here to Stay" especially, Ben anticipates the opportunity to worship representation in the church of electric light — the cinema — with sacred book in hand

²⁹ Seeking to inspire contributions in her second issue, Ben prompts for homoerotic verse: "remember that sweet little girl you met? Maybe she'd do as a subject around which to weave a lovely verse" (1).

³⁰ For instance, Clare Bermingham reads the *Ladder* as "the textual transcript of a community in process, recording discursive impulses and affective urges, documenting the becoming political" (44).

(for she only anticipates film adaptations of queer novels). Her magazine evinces the desire to commune with the queer masses in the matrix of a burgeoning queer mass media.

Ben's conspicuous consumption of media, and her desire to collate media traces of homosexuality together in the pages of what she hoped would become a communal archive, anticipates developments in clerical duties as analogue media ceded to the digital. More than information retrieval, Ben's magazine represents an early forerunner in information design. In *Vice-Versa* can be found traces of a queer hypermedia archive, where users submit and store their cultural data, with the knowledge that it would become information for Ben to share and thereby for others to retrieve. Recall Ben's declaration on the first page in the first issue: "VICE VERSA is meant to be a medium through which we may express our thoughts, our emotions, our opinions" (1). Perhaps Ben was self-consciously channeling Vannevar Bush's "As We May Think" article, published only two years before in *Atlantic Monthly* and later reprinted in *Life* where Bush offered his speculative designs for the memex.

Often read as a precursor to the internet, Bush's designs for the memex were more idiosyncratic than the networked pages of the internet. "A memex is a device in which an individual stores all his books, records, and communications, and which is mechanized so that it may be consulted with exceeding speed and flexibility," Bush explained, adding "It is an enlarged intimate supplement to his memory" (45). The memex was a technology for indexing data to provide users with information.³¹ It was a storage mechanism for media information storage, retrieval, and, most substantially, for sharing those data.

³¹ In the abridged version for *Life* in September of that same year (1945), the article was appended with speculative design images of the memex, including notations for "a mechanism which automatically photographs longhand notes, pictures and letters, then files them in the desk for future reference" (44).

Bush's aim with the memex was to create a repository of data from which knowledge might be constructed in the personal collation of material. A repentant architect of the Manhattan project, Bush offered the memex as a crucial counterpoint to militaristic applications of that era's technological development, especially since his articles for the memex cap the Allied's nuclear assaults on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The memex offered an imaginary media for amassing knowledge and driving human progress in a democratic organisation of knowledge. User-dictated data linkages, or "information trails" as Bush referred to them, were to be persistently modifiable so that the trail might grow with the volume of material or change direction as determined by the individual operator. Bush was also responding to a concern that impending infoglut propitiated by the rise in bureaucratic efficiencies would hinder future military war efforts. The impetus for the memex was thus an attempt to develop a complex of cultural techniques and technological solution to afford the higher ups the ability to manage the increasing volume of data produced by their computers and typewriters (I use the ambiguous terminology deliberately). The memex offered an imaginary interface for honing the babble of data processors.

Ben's magazine and the efforts she undertook to produce it (gleaning scraps of queer representation in various media, collecting and collating contributions from others in her lesbian community) approximates the speculative potential of the personal memex for collecting, distributing and *making* meaningful data—in the case of *Vice-Versa*, a printed artifact of Los Angeles lesbian culture circa 1947. She performed the function of memex and even mimeograph. As an especially strange irony, the year before Ben began *Vice-Versa*, Chester Carlson signed with Haloid Company to produce his Xerox copier — the first machine capable of copying a pre-existing document using photoelectricity and without the use of chemicals, though the machine would not debut until 1959. The process is named after the Greek term xerography, or 'dry writing', not unlike the retyping of handwritten letters Ben performed. Lisa Ben represents an

analogue word processor, which also puts her within the venerable tradition of female computers.³²

Through tactical engagement with the discourse network of mechanical type, Ben's creative repurposing of medium and message amasses a gay subject within a queerly produced cultural repository. She collects and appends units of cultural information into meaningfully productive constituents of queerness. As one of Ben's correspondents explains in the fourth issue of *Vice-Versa*, "All of us around here are being seen with VICE VERSA on our knees, looking very pensive, and suddenly making brief comments like: 'You don't even need to read the books or see the plays—it's all right here!' Well really, if one didn't know what the author meant to put across, they could find out from you" (12).³³ In the reading group of women scanners, gleaning lesbian traits from pop cultural media products, led by Ben's media technical gaydar, gay subjectivity emerges as an epiphenomenon of cultural information processing through media technology. Queer media from a lesbian medium.

While we might question the degree to which Ben's ideas represent a queer perspective, her approach to making reveals the ways being queer can influence practices of making. Her work shows that queer extends beyond content and queers the very practices of making. In the discourse network of 1900, to continue on from Kittler's formulation, the stylus democratized the capacity to inscribe signs onto an easily transmissible substrate (paper), while the typewriter and

³² For more on this development of women as computers, see Marie Hicks' *Programmed Inequality: How Britain Discarded Women Technologists and Lost Its Edge in Computing*, Janet Abbate's *Recoding Gender: Women's Changing Participation in Computing* and Nathan Ensmenger's *Computer Boys Take Over: Computers, Programmers, and the Politics of Technical Expertise*.

³³ One might even wonder whether this anonymous contributor was Ben herself, which would certainly emphasize the associations between the function of the memex and Ben's magazine as analogous apparatus for human memory. Indeed, without a central analogue repository, Ben would serve as the biological memex, as both repository and node in a clandestine queer network. This technical apparatus was socio-culturally configured and configurable, and, like any memory technology, its dependence would have profound repercussions on the development and structure of whatever culture it held.

other textual machines extended the reachability by affording increasing automaticity and means of duplication. In the discourse network of 1900, writing became a technology of committing the self to signs, arranging and organizing its meanings — of inscribing the interiority of one’s personal experience of being and essence, and of commitment to the technical exteriorization of one’s essential nature in a sign of difference — lesbian, gay, queer, third sex, etc. The emergence of gay identity relied on tools of inscription, and access to such tools, as well as the capacity to share and organize such materials into a semblance of a cultural structure. But before the emergence of culture, the mere existence of such media, even cursory traces, offered a sense of the scope of the network, and the capacity for a community to even be organized around a qualifiable point of difference.

Transmission also enjoined transmitters to interpret and intuit the intended reader of the work. In the second issue, for instance, she enjoins readers “Puh-leeze, let’s keep it ‘just between us girls!’”. The command impels numerous responses from readers. In the injunction to share, both content and the pages containing content, these materials engendered identifications of queer sexual identities. In asking that they be shared between “us girls”, both terms offer a suggestive capacity for gay social grouping through linguistic play. “Us girls” signals both obviously gendered and clandestinely coded lesbians. *The Ladder*, *Vice-Versa*’s unofficial successor, thus relied on a pre-existing network of lesbian readers who already saw themselves as gendered and sexual subjects who could be carried up the social ladder through sustained recognition as such. I say successor since Lisa Ben wrote for both. It was for the pages of *The Ladder* that she first invented the name Lisa Ben, an anagram for Lesbian, when her first pen name, Ima Spinster, was rejected by the publishers. Her playful and defiant trick offers a playful metonym for the coded concealment gay publications at the time practiced.

Conclusion

Despite a record setting box-office for RKO in 1946, a series of complications, including a devastating antitrust lawsuit, interference from the House Un-American Activities Committee and a weak year for attendance in movie theatres following a post-war boom meant that by 1948 the studio employing Lisa Ben was struggling financially(Lasky 202-5). At the start of May, Howard Hughes would purchase the company, radically altering the company's internal operations.³⁴ The record of events here involving Lisa Ben's publishing activities becomes uncertain. After the studio terminated her employment, "she found work at other movie studios" though "usually in a secretarial pool... By then she knew she'd been engaged in risky business" (Faderman 108). Streitmatter points out that "[i]n her new job, she had neither a private office nor free time. She could not type the magazine at home, as she had no typewriter" (82). Regardless of where she worked, the communal work environment of secretarial pools effectively terminated the privacy Ben had enjoyed in the months prior with her private office.³⁵ She had the technical means and the personal motive, but not the social licence.

In February 1948 Ben published her last issue without fanfare, or indeed any indication of its finality. The closest suggestion comes in Ben's parting words offered to a contributor. Ben wishes the contributor could have discovered the magazine sooner, since "VICE VERSA could indeed have profited therefrom" (14). Perhaps Ben had intended to return to the magazine at some other time, but the physical constraints of its publication, and the conditions of its production proved problematic. Or, perhaps not. There are some discrepancies in this timeline.

The last monthly issue of *Vice-Versa* was early February, yet the company was not sold until later

³⁴ Within five years the company would cease production. In 1953, stung by a series of lawsuits, broken contracts, and missed production schedules, Howard Hughes sold the studio to the General Tire and Rubber Company for \$25 million, which later resold the studio to Desilu studios for television production in 1957.

³⁵ In a later interview Ben cited a lack of privacy as the reason for the paper's demise, see Paul D. Cain *Leading the Parade: Conversations with America's Most Influential Lesbians and Gay Men* p. 15.

that May; there are at least two months unaccounted for. Perhaps it was the increasing scarcity of comments and contributions, which Ben reveals in her last issue would have been incentive to continue, that led her to feel the magazine was no longer reaching even the limited audience she had intended.

“‘Tis a pity,” wrote the magazine’s last contributor, “indeed, that you can’t get into print and enlarge your circulation, as I can’t help thinking of the many people who’d enjoy such a magazine, but it’s to your credit that you continue against such a slight chance of ever receiving much credit” (13). Might we find pieces of Ben’s magazine in the scrapbooks of other women of the period, awaiting rediscovery in some other overlooked source? Such textual gleaning would reveal a great deal about the practices and attitudes of gay people and their engagement with material culture in this period. The contributor closes her letter by offering a contribution of material, a review of a book that includes a lesbian character, explaining in her letter that the magazine “appear[s] to be in need of [contributions]” (13). Ben’s response is also suggestive of the magazine’s dwindling participation: “Comments such as yours, which come all too seldom nowadays, are just the incentive needed for the continuance of our little magazine, particularly when such letters are accompanied by an excellent literary contribution” (13). One gets the sense that by this point Ben was already tiring of the effort to produce the magazine, and the slow response it had garnered up to that point. Stuck between the need for wider circulation, but an inability to commit greater time and risk to its distribution, to maintain the trick, Ben was undoubtedly at an impasse with the magazine, predicated on the unusual characteristics of its production: typed, not printed; individual, not collective; clandestine, not public; free, not paid.

Lisa Ben had likely achieved what she had wanted with *Vice-Versa*, which was to find her own social group where she could be open about her sexuality.³⁶ After having done so, she turned her attention to other creative outlets, writing and performing gay-themed songs and found in them a more productive and creative means of construing herself within a rapidly expanding queer culture. More than the gayest magazine in America then, *Vice-Versa* was an identity technology for one woman to understand what it meant to be gay in America, using the pages she collated, typed and assembled, and the affordances of the magazine format (a compendium of materials expounding on a central theme), to cohere a sense of identity salience in her new space that others might contribute to and benefit from.

The factors which contributed to the cessation of *Vice-Versa* reveal a great deal about the nature of queer making pre-liberation. Social repression and legal suppression of queer materials exerted a profound influence on the types of materials that could be made. The act of making was also precarious, since it depended on access to tools and even some degree of capability to use them. The role of gender, class and race thus contributed to which queer people would have access to which tools. These pressures left the process of making largely idiosyncratic, dependent on individual desire to make queer material for a personal purpose. This personal reader was also taken to be the implied reader, as many of these queer materials (*Vice-Versa* especially) could only communicate queerness in the blind, without a broader sense of a larger queer community and only an incipient sense that a larger community did in fact exist (with media traces of queerness, or references to queer persons helping to confirm these suspicions).

The materials made were thus accretive, as they built on prior systems of social, cultural and technological knowledge. The gay identity of Lisa Ben's magazine was not a radical

³⁶ See her opening remarks about the creation of the magazine she gave to Eric Marcus in *Making Gay History*.

departure from pre-existing socio-cultural regimes of knowledge that produced discourse about homosexuality. Rather, the content is thoroughly imbricated within its historical episteme. Recall that Lisa Ben was a secretary in a movie studio with almost unfettered access to a typewriter, technical training from wartime experience in how to type, a voracious consumer of popular media including books, magazines and film, which she was scanning for traces of queerness, as well as an active gay social life; these factors are represented by the form and content of *Vice-Versa*. The magazine was a cumulative assemblage of cultural production about homosexuality and techniques for making cultural products.

Vice-Versa was nonetheless a uniquely idiosyncratic product of a uniquely idiosyncratic process; like many other clandestine queer materials, it remains indelibly marked by the subjective hand of its owner. There is therefore an integral link between the act of making and the made product in early queer material that suggests a need to differentiate between pre-consumerist queer culture and post-consumerist gay culture, when even sports equipment brands like Nike make products for ‘gay’ consumers and Fortune 500 companies are eager for representation in North American pride parades. The nature of the magazine’s distribution is typical of many early queer materials in that it was itinerant; passed around from hand-to-hand, and often discarded or lost over time. As such, these materials were also ephemeral, in some cases, like the magazine, produced to be disposable — or easily passed from hand-to-hand, and destroyed by hand if needed.

Given its limited visibility and ephemeral transmission, the magazine could easily be written off as an epiphenomenon of queer culture. It is perhaps no surprise that most scholarship on gay rights and gay liberation begins with printed magazines in the 1950s, with *Vice-Versa* given cursory mention, if any. After all, no documentation exists to show the extent of its effect

on queer culture in the decades that followed.³⁷ *Vice-Versa* nonetheless prefigures the work of full-fledged gay organizations, such as the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB)³⁸. Originally a social organization which formed in 1955, DOB began publication of a monthly magazine, *The Ladder*, to inform lesbian women and the public about lesbianism that ran until 1972 when the organization assumed a more overt political function.³⁹ Considerably better funded than *Vice-Versa*, *The Ladder* benefited from the efforts of Shirley Willer⁴⁰, who had assumed the role of national president of DOB in 1966 and whose wealthy, anonymous patron paid handsomely to produce *The Ladder* on a mass scale with professional typesetting techniques (Bullough 203).

In the case of *The Ladder*, a lesbian publication printed in LA in the 1950s, the improvements of printing technology were felt by readers to lend legitimacy to the organization (Bermingham 13). I suspect the legitimacy extended to the identity type itself. As Salvatore Licata noted, “[Ben] and some of her readers gained confidence and identity through *Vice Versa* and went on to become active in the homophile organizations of the fifties” (63). Ben explained to Streitmatter her reasons for creating the magazine, “To every newspaper I ever read, we were the unspeakables” (7). While no one would have mistaken Ben’s work for a newspaper, its professionalism nonetheless would have lent credibility to its claims that “the third sex was here

³⁷ For instance, Laud Humphreys remarks that “the old *Vice Versa* friendship circle [...] provided early editors and staff members for *One Magazine*” (*Out of the Closets* 57)—presumably mistaking *One Magazine* for *The Ladder*.

³⁸ Lillian Faderman, in *The Gay Revolution*, recounts how the name for the organization was itself an intertextual reference:

“Nancy,” the biggest reader among them, though she worked in a factory, whipped out a book. It was a translation of collected works by the French author Pierre Louÿs, and it included a cycle of 143 poems called “Songs of Bilitis.” In 1894, when Louÿs first issued those poems, he’d claimed they’d been found by an archeologist on the walls of a tomb in Cyprus, and that he, Louÿs, was merely their translator. They were written, he said, by a Greek courtesan, a contemporary of Sappho who, like the poet of Lesbos, had had romantic and sexual relations with both men and women. Louÿs’s forgery was revealed almost immediately, but the titillating poems had anyway been popular in his day, and from time to time, they were brought back into print. (77)

³⁹ Clare Bermingham explores this more fully in her dissertation, *Feeling Queer Together: Identity, Community, and the Work of Affect in the Pre-Stonewall Lesbian Magazine, The Ladder*

⁴⁰ Willer had been given a copy of *The Well of Loneliness* by her mother after Willer confessed her homosexuality.

to stay”. After all, the material production of that statement in so skilled a printed fashion required both a professionally skilled typist and a professional-grade typewriter.

Despite the technical differences of both *Vice-Versa* and *The Ladder*, the magazine format served as a platform for encouraging sociality and fomenting discussions about gay topics. By sharing content, these magazines afforded the sharing of identities. They underscore how cultural techniques afford a generative formula constitutive of gay identity. These queer experimentations through media and media technologies to make a coherent identity convey how ‘gay identity’ is a media technical phenomenon. Like *Vice-Versa*, *The Ladder*’s primary mode of circulation was amongst its readership rather than direct mail advertising, passed hand-to-hand and mailed privately amongst members across America (Schiller). Both relied on an intimate, proximal network for transmission, and would no doubt have accentuated intimacy in the privacy of sharing secret (and illegal) materials. Social and cultural suppression of lesbian material provoked the creative repurposing of carbon copied paper. Lisa Ben’s *Vice-Versa* conveys in embryo a queer epistemology of cultural production, one predicated on subjective feeling, intuiting, and producing. An early word processor and a bricoleur, Ben was essentially a media experimenter using media and media technologies to develop her lesbian identity, with RKO her transient workshop

Chapter 5

Making Gaymer Identities on Reddit in 2018

Thus far, this dissertation has sought to adumbrate the ways queer identities obtain through interactions between individuals and technology. To further explore how this relationship develops in a contemporary media scene, this chapter turns to a contemporary formulation of queer identities and offers a case study of the ‘Gaymers’ subreddit (r/gaymers) on the social media platform and link aggregator site Reddit.com. By unpacking the affordances of the Reddit platform in 2018 (when the study was conducted), this chapter explores how the affordances of the site can influence the expression of queer identities.

My aim with this chapter is to explore the formation of gaymer identity on the subreddit by situating this topos within its technological environment. To do so, I investigate the technological affordances of Reddit and consider how its interface shapes the discourse appearing on r/gaymers by regulating practices of making, sharing and accessing media. I explore the r/gaymers subreddit as my next media scene as a large-scale contrast to the *Vice-Versa* magazine explored in the previous chapter. Whereas Ben collated media materials into a queer text for circulation, the r/gaymers subreddit affords every member the capacity to create and share multi-media objects instantaneously worldwide to other subreddit members. While we might assume this decentralized approach would supply a more diverse range of identity expressions, my analysis shows formulations of gaymerness on the subreddit organize around a small set of signifiers. Indeed, my study found the types of content on the site belies the diversity of gaymer identity suggested by previous studies that I discuss below.

Since the subreddit described itself on its sidebar as a “community for LGBT and ally redditors” (see appendix A), I originally anticipated this chapter would supply a more queer and diverse range of queer identity expressions that could expand the scope of this dissertation beyond the male-dominated focus of the earlier chapters. However, upon analysing my findings, I realized this would be impossible. While the content aligns with the subreddit’s stated aim of serving as a “community for LGBT and ally redditors”, members largely do so in ways oriented towards the celebration of homonormative conceptions of what it means to be a gay man: white, muscular and masculine-presenting. The predominant issue this chapter addresses is the disjuncture between the description of the subreddit and the content posted to it.

There are several reasons that make r/gaymers a potent site for understanding gaymer identity. My research indicated that the gaymer subreddit was the primary result on google for queries using the term “gaymer” (see “Appendix B: Gaymer as a Search Term”), making it the predominant site for large scale discussions of gaymerness. The scale of Reddit also makes it a valuable site for accessing discourse. r/gaymers began in 2011 and as of December 2017 included approximately 60,000 members, ranking 1,595 out of 1.2 million as of May 2018 (redditmetrics.com)⁴¹. The subreddit draws a large volume of visitors, receiving an average of 150 visitors on the subreddit at any given time⁴². Since the r/gaymers subreddit is moderated, the discursive instances of gay themes are not slurs or epithets, which might otherwise skew the computer-assisted discourse analysis I performed.

It is probably obvious by now that the format of this chapter is a bit queer. Since the methods are largely drawn from the social sciences, the format has been adapted from the genre

⁴¹ Redditmetrics.com was a site that provided rankings of each subreddit and a total list of all subreddits. The site is now defunct. As of October 2018, the number of subscribers has grown to roughly 86,000 members, ranking 1,565 (redditlist.com).

⁴² Data compiled by author using the reddit API.

of a social sciences article. In keeping with this format, methods are presented first, followed by results, which are interpreted in the “Discussion” section. The point in bracketing the information in this way was to show the scope of research and the methods I undertook to obtain the results that supply a theoretical conclusion vital to my dissertation. Because I am drawing conclusions from a text (the subreddit itself) that no one else could possibly read short of following these methods my aim is to qualify as much as possible how I went about collecting and organizing this data into a cohesive text. However, I recognize that attempting this kind of objectivity can make for some dry reading, so I have placed a more full-scale discussion of the methods and results in Appendix C and D, respectively. For those who’d prefer to approach my conclusions after first familiarizing themselves with my methods and results, please start with the appendices.

To reconstruct this archive as it was constructed by visitors to the site, and to therefore study how ‘gaymer’ is interpreted by activity on the subreddit, I used python scripts to collect all posts, links and images shared on the r/gaymers subreddit over an eight-month span (September 14, 2017 to May 16, 2018). Using the Reddit API, I was further able to collect the top-rated posts over a one-year span (May 16, 2017 to May 16, 2018). This data collection yielded two corpora: all posts spanning Sep 14, 2017 to May 16, 2018 (3152 posts), and the top-rated 1500 posts from one year (from May 16, 2017 to May 16, 2018). I further obtained and analyzed images for each category, yielding 852 images for the “New” corpus and 901 for Top. To clarify, Top Corpus is the most upvoted material, arranged by highest to lowest karma score, while New Corpus is all material, arranged chronologically. (When visiting the site, users can change their viewing range to certain parameters, including according to what’s most upvoted that day, week, month or year, as well as by what is most recent.) Further, I conducted content analysis on the posts and images to determine the types of media redditors posted to r/gaymers, and what kinds of content

subreddit visitors upvoted. Topic modelling of top-rated post titles was conducted using MALLET software to determine the characteristic content of r/gaymers.

The rationale for this large-scale analysis comes from Jack Halberstam's perverse presentism model of analysis, which warns that "when observed from the outside, even a contemporary lesbian community [or, in this instance, queer community] cannot be depicted accurately if the observer has no sense of the vernaculars of that culture or its hierarchies, gender codes, or sexual practices" (*Female Masculinity* 77). This current research is thus an attempt to incorporate the richness of this gaymer community. There are nonetheless limitations to this approach that are necessary to mention. The large volume of textual material generated from these methods meant that much of the person to person communication was left unexplored. Moreover, for obvious reasons related to privacy, the Reddit API does not collect "whispers", private messages between users. The scope also required topic modelling to process the volume of data. Further research could explore the conversations that are taking place within the posts and especially in the virtual play domains outside of the subreddit. Further research could also explore how this prototypical 'gaymer' identified in this study is embodied, expressed and negotiated by visitors and contributors to the site.

This large-scale approach treats the whole r/gaymer subreddit as a community, which risks consolidating discrete subcommunities communicating to one another on the subreddit. In some instances of the New corpus, for instance, one post might provoke additional posts in response, creating a cluster of posts organized around a specific set of speakers and topics. A large-scale approach does not explore the discursive nuances of this granularity.

As I noted in my introduction to this chapter, I sought to make a year's worth of posts on a subreddit into a cohesive text, using various methods drawn from the social sciences and digital humanities to cohere thousands of disparate data clusters into a unitary object text. I have tried as

much as possible to limit the possibility of creating a Procrustean bed, but at a certain point alterations are unavoidable. Organizing the material according to topic modelling is a primary instance. Topics are based on semantics of text, and not the dynamics of subtext. Topic modelling software, for instance, measures denotations, not connotations. Topic modelling can be a great way to map out a large volume of texts, but it nonetheless requires an understanding of these texts and a capacity to understand them in their multiple contexts, some of which exist beyond the content shared directly by the community itself. Each post containing an image, for instance, represented a discourse between text and image, between post and subreddit, between post and game culture, post and gay culture, subreddit and internet more broadly, that would complicate even the most meticulous of methods. Indeed, posts are often metatextual, highly citational, and always citing material that has been subjectively interpreted by the person making the post, the reader interpreting the post, the topic modelling software processing the post and the research attempting to consolidate all three perspectives. Despite my best efforts to decode meanings, utterances are hard to process—both for computers and for humans—and interpreting images is even more highly subjective.

Given the emphasis I have placed on the subreddit materials in this chapter, I also must stress that the archive remains only an echo of the community which produced it. The archive cannot, for instance, access the perspectives of those who submitted the material, and how they negotiate their relationship to the various gaymer identity types I have outlined. Quantitative methods especially overlook the contributions of those who did not directly share content but who nonetheless were active listeners on the subreddit. With the *r/gaymers* subreddit, we can only glance at a community as it mobilizes itself across diverse media channels, gaining and losing members for one reason or another, with the contours of its communal identity shaped by the algorithms of the site itself. But this should not be taken to mean that the archive is

unimportant. These material interactions convey salient aspects about the formation of cultural identities. The archive represents a mediated approximate of the gaymer concept that suggests areas for further exploration. While this object text I constructed might map a labyrinth of meanings, it should not be mistaken as the territory it describes.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the types of content visitors to r/gaymers are submitting, discussing and engaging with on the site to consider what this activity can suggest about contemporary formulations of gaymer identity. While the number of authors, approximately 1895 and 825 authors, represent only 2% and 1% respectively of the 60,000 members subscribed to the subreddit at the time of this study, the variety of authors nonetheless suggests an active group of speakers. The fact that not all content makes it to the top suggests a degree of curatorial practice taking place on the community to push some content to more viewers and hide content for other viewers. What this top-rated content includes and what its selection suggests is the focus of the next section.

Making Gaymers into Gay Men

The description on the sidebar begins by discursively positioning the subreddit as a communal meeting space for LGBTQ people, a status that is reaffirmed in the second-to-last line which again calls the space “a community-based subreddit”. The description also explains how the subreddit is used to organize communication about games and to coordinate play. The description further defines how the space is intended to discuss a range of sexual attractions to men and women alike, including discussions about expressions of attraction for both humans and video game avatars, suggesting discussions like “how totally rugged David Hayter is, [or] how sexy Samus is in her zero suit”. However, the description declares that subreddit is “NOT solely

dedicated to discussing gay themes in gaming”, suggesting a communal function of the space beyond what might be associated with an online forum.⁴³

Despite this affirmative and inclusive messaging, most of the content posted to r/gaymers relies extensively on mainstream games culture and objectification of masculine-presenting, muscular white bodies (Table 5-3 and Figure 5-8). The topic modelling reveals that discussions rely predominantly on discussions of men, including gay male culture and discussions of boyfriends (with the words girlfriend or its acronym “gf” conspicuously absent from post titles).

This male-centric focus is especially prominent in the visual material posted to the subreddit. Only male homosexuality was represented in the content coded as homoerotic and/or NSFW (not-safe-for-work). Racial diversity is also absent: of the 852 images in the New corpus, only 8% featured non-white bodies. Of that number, roughly 2% were fantasy avatars and could therefore be considered non-racial⁴⁴, leaving only 6%. By contrast, 53% of all images from the New corpus included white bodies⁴⁵. However, this homogeneity is not because of user censorship: it is not the case that content related to lesbian, trans, two-spirit and non-binary appears on the subreddit but does not make it to the top-rated and most-viewed content on the subreddit.⁴⁶ Rather, as my analysis of the New corpus has found, *this kind of content does not appear on the subreddit at all.*

⁴³ Despite the emphasis I have placed on the importance of the description in framing activity, the presence of the sidebar is determined by the technology used to access the subreddit. On a mobile phone, for instance, users do not see the sidebar. Thus, the means of accessing the reddit platform can also determine one’s perception of the subreddit and the practices of communication. While statista.com reports that 40% of reddit traffic comes from desktop computers, no specific usage statistics exist for this subreddit.

⁴⁴ For example, Orc characters from *World of Warcraft* and *League of Legends*, typically represented by cosplay or bara art, were coded as non-white. In the case of cosplay, however, one could further consider the race of the person playing the Orc.

⁴⁵ Although this number also has a comparable margin of difference owing to the use of images that represent ostensibly Caucasian characters.

⁴⁶ Furthermore, in an interview I conducted with one of the moderator’s of the subreddit, I was informed that very little content is actually moderated, and the only instances of deletion occur when posts are flagged as offensive or derogatory.

The lack of diversity in representation on the subreddit does not align with the diversity of races and sexual orientations noted in prior research analyzing gaymer identity (see Shaw 2012b). In this section I want to explore possible reasons why the range of materials does not include more diverse representations of the LBGTQ+ spectrum. If ‘gaymerness’ on the subreddit is characterized by the sharing of memetic material related to negotiations with gay culture, masculinity and video games, in what ways and to what extent does the platform influence discourse on the subreddit?

This limited representation aligns with the narrow demographics of Reddit more broadly. The white male centrality of Reddit is well documented, particularly in relation to geek culture on the site (Milner, 2013, 2016; Massanari, 2015, 2017). While the exact demographics of the r/gaymers subreddit have not been studied, prior research has explored the site’s broader demographics, noting for instance that “[a]bout seven-in-ten (71%) of Reddit news users are men, 59% are between the ages of 18 and 29, and 47% identify as liberal, while only 13% are conservative (39% say they are moderate)” (Barthel *et al.* 2016). Massanari describes, for instance, how Reddit reifies “young, white, cis-gendered, heterosexual males” (330), and Milner similarly argues that reddit spaces often presume and enforce a white male centrality (Milner 2013); both of these claims place the demographic audience in line with what Henry Jenkins (2008) deems “elite consumers” of online media.⁴⁷ Nina Wakeford’s (1997) research also historically situates such cyberqueer spaces as privileged spaces determined by socio-economic and cultural factors (further stressing the need to account for these factors in queer games scholarship).

⁴⁷ Jenkins (2008) goes on to clarify their position in contemporary media culture, noting that “In this country [USA] they are disproportionately white, male, middle class, and college educated. These are people who have the greatest access to new media technologies and have mastered the skills needed to fully participate in these new knowledge cultures” (p. 23).

Beyond the demographics, I argue that the interface itself functions as a primary factor in the homogenization of queerness on the subreddit. In an important work on the study of social media platforms, José van Dijck proposes a model for analyzing the complex dynamics of interacting systems by combining theoretical approaches from actor-network theory and political economy.⁴⁸ The former considers and seeks to map the activities of actors in a network of material and semiotic relations, while the latter “accentuates the economic infrastructures and legal-political governance” in which these networked activities proliferate (26). In combining these two approaches to studying complex interactions within and between multi-modal systems, van Dijck establishes a model for evaluating the phenomenon of social media as a holistic ecosystem of “techno-cultural constructs” and “organized socioeconomic structures” (25). Her model stresses that scholars should engage with multiple constitutive factors of the broader social media system, including: technology, users, content and business models. Approaching platforms as interconnected microsystems emphasises the interplay between these systems, asking researchers to consider the relationship between technology and users in conjunction with the content shared on the platform. Indeed, the usage of a platform like Reddit particularly has clearly been shown to be determined by culturally privileged access to technology and the means of media production. The role of the platform in shaping the practices of sharing information to dominate the construal of a queer sexual identity that represents ‘gaymer’ as a male, gay-identifying video-gamer emphasizes how the connections between microsystems work to determine the formulation of identity.

⁴⁸ In a related case, Massanari (2017) makes great use of van Dijck’s methodology to explore the ways that the Reddit platform’s algorithmic and governance structures influence toxic technocultures and identification of geek masculinity on the SNS.

As far as the textual provenance of the term can be traced, *Know Your Meme* claims that the earliest usage of gaymer is in a personal ad from April 20th, 1991 on an alt.personals Usenet group, in which one user identifies as a gaymer seeking “any other gaymers out there”. In the words of the user, a gaymer refers to “a gay role-playing enthusiast”, which might refer to roles adopted in role-playing games like *Dungeons & Dragons*, or roles adopted during sexual activity for pleasure. Whatever the type of play being referred to, this definition points to the notion of ‘gaymer’ as a role one adopts oriented by sexual identity. Since the meaning of the term ‘gay’ in the 1980s and 1990s increasingly narrowed to mean male-gendered person with same-sex interest, to be a ‘gaymer’ would serve to simultaneously signal both gender and sexual orientation—as a male homosexual who plays games. *Know Your Meme* also records the appearance of the term on the popular website Urban Dictionary on July 27th, 2006, which defined the term as “a gay person who is also a gamer”, with the example sentence pointing to the male-centric and videogame biases of the term: “Rob and his boyfriend are always playing Guild Wars- they are big time gaymers”.

The utility of this term for male homosexuals has been problematic for other queer people seeking to define their desire to be non-normative and to play games, as it has frustrated their capacity to organize with other queer game players. For instance, Jason Rockwood’s 2007 gaymer survey sought to explore gamer identities related to sexual orientation. His survey found a plurality in the sexual orientations of those who responded (Sliwinski, 2009).⁴⁹ Rather than referring exclusively to male homosexuals, Rockwood concluded that the ‘gaymer’ identity label

⁴⁹ However, all three sites are now defunct. So far as I’ve been able to find, the work was never published on more than his personal website (now defunct, and irretrievable even on archive.org). Traces of the 2006 survey data can still be found on the websites of the various websites which reported on the data, including Cooper (2007), Sliwinski (2009). To my knowledge, no academic study has explored this particular Reddit community (r/gaymers), which began in 2011 and as of December 2017 included approximately 60,000 members, with an average of 150 visitors on the subreddit at any given time (Data compiled by author).

indexed a plurality of sexual orientations that were often tenuously defined, while participants were at best ambivalent about adopting the label ‘gaymer’ (Sliwinski, 2009). Drawing on her own ethnographic work of a queer game forum, Shaw (2012b) found that the label ‘gaymer’ was contentious among queer game players. Shaw, who has researched the question of gamer identity extensively (2010, 2011, 2014), argues that the range of people who identify as ‘gaymer’ extends beyond the simplification of “homosexual male who plays video games” (69). More recently, Shaw (2015) notes some ambiguity about the meaning of the term gaymer within queer communities:

‘Gaymer’ has been a contentious term [...] Some felt it hailed a gay male gamer, rather than a broader LGBTQ gamer, identity. On the site [undisclosed by author, studied in 2007], however, the term was used by everyone including heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian, and trans* members who did not identify as gay specifically. It was a way of embracing a gay sensibility, rather than a gay sexual identity. (162)

Shaw’s (2012b) analysis of gaymers as an identity category identified its applications more with sensibility than sexuality. Building on what Michael Bronski terms in *Culture Clash* a “gay sensibility”, she notes that “gaymers privileged an appreciation of and attentiveness to the artifice (and humor) of gender and sexual norms, even if they did not all share a preference for non-normative sexual practices” (69). She adds that “gaymer is an identity experienced at the intersection of, at the disruption posed by, two categories that are not always easily reconciled” (36)—that is to say, gamer and gaymer.

The means of engagement with the site, mediated by the affordances and constraints of the interface, are integral to the formation of identity expressions on the subreddit. The ranking algorithms that allow hierarchization of material regulate discourse about gaymerness towards stereotypical constructions of gaymer identity. The image-centric bias promotes visual material, which ensures it receives greater attention from the community.

A look at the types of the content that are upvoted on the site draws attention to the curatorial practices of the subreddit's users. The ratio of content from New that received scores high enough to make the Top threshold (Figure 5-6), reveals that the content most likely to receive upvotes were blogs and images, while individual reddit comments (text-only posts) are the least likely to be upvoted. In total, 23% of New content made it to the Top. Of the 781 images in New, 536 were upvoted to the top (69%), compared to only 4% of Reddit Comments that made it to the top (52 out of 1288). Blogs, it should be noted, only accounted for 2% and 7% of the New and Top corpus, respectively. Put another way, the subreddit maintains a heavy emphasis on visual content.

Though influenced by technological capabilities, users can nonetheless exert influence over the type of content that appears on subreddits. For instance, comparing between the New and Top corpora reveals distinctions in the topics and themes that will be gleaned from the rest. Content in New consisted primarily of group announcements of contemporaneous events related to gamer sociality (sharing game streaming ids, clan names, and requests for other player ids; see Figure 5-4). Content in the Top corpus was typically related to asynchronous expressions focused on gay and gamer cultural content (see Figure 5-5). Submissions typically tended to score higher engagement (represented as upvotes and comments) the more themes and topics they incorporated. In terms of image content, for instance, the average number of themes in images from New corpus upvoted to Top was 3.2 against 2.9 in images which remained below the score threshold for Top.

The activity on the site is also coordinated by the subreddit description.⁵⁰ The description of the subreddit offered on the sidebar positions the subreddit as a community space informs the range of activities members on this subreddit perform. The results of the topic models in the Top corpus reveal several discursive conventions (see Table 5-5) that can nonetheless be grouped into four major types of activities: discussing, seeking, sharing and expressing. These conventions match the activities suggested by the subreddit description (see Appendix B). Furthermore, since the types of content that get voted to the top correlate with the types of activities and discussion themes listed in the description, the discursive framing of the site frames the curatorial practices of its visitors, informing the types of content that get upvoted and discussed. In other words, the highest upvoted posts align perfectly with what the subreddit description suggests people should perform on the site, whereas practices that don't replicate this description receive fewer upvotes, and less attention as a result.

⁵⁰ Since Reddit's revamp in the summer of 2018, that sidebar has been condensed to only one instruction: "Selfies do not belong here". It remains to be seen what impact this will have over the content that appears on the subreddit. Even the description does not alter the community practices it has habituated in coordination with the interface operations.

ludic_scribbler (418 - 0) | preferences | logout

R/GAYMERS

Will never succeed in capturing myself with this fish.

show images (8)

new rising controversial top gilded wiki show images (8)

happi Get Happi. Design, buy, and deploy hosted infrastructure anywhere in the world. Try it now for free and let us know what you think. (happi.io)

SELFIES DO NOT BELONG HERE (self.gaymers) submitted 1 month ago by [kustard](#) 57 comments source share save hide give gold report crosspost

Prostate massager for gamers??? (self.gaymers) submitted 5 hours ago by [petr4eps](#) 25 comments source share save hide give gold report crosspost

When he throws it back for you (r.redd.it) submitted 58 minutes ago by [KorokRoundTheClock](#) 2 comments source share save hide give gold report crosspost [1+<]

My group and I are streaming some DND, come join! (twitch.tv) submitted 13 hours ago by [SentryMindEposition](#) 2 comments source share save hide give gold report crosspost [1+<]

The Stroke of Midnight - Mystery/Detective Visual Novel with LGBT characters (store.steampowered.com) submitted 23 hours ago by [Tuffy62](#) 7 comments source share save hide give gold report crosspost [1+<]

Any local gamers? Upstate NY (self.gaymers) submitted 30 minutes ago by [BoilingFrustration](#) 1 comment source share save hide give gold report crosspost

Looking for a board or computer game group in the area. Wide interests in either category. Near Saratoga Springs.

Looking for XBoxe gamers (self.gaymers) submitted 15 hours ago by [redpanther1001](#) 1 comment source share save hide give gold report crosspost

What are your top Dark Souls Bosses?! (substack.com)

search Submit a new link Submit a new text post

gaymers

Use subreddit style

73,017 readers

260 users here now

Show my flair on this subreddit. It looks like: ludic_scribbler

Gaymers is a community for LGBT and ally redditors. We host frequent voice and/or video chats where we can talk about our interests together, talk about how to totally rock David Hayter, how sexy Samus is in her zero suit, talk about how we love big Switch sessions, and playing with an Xbox all night long.

Expect to be offended by something you see here at least once.

This is a community-based subreddit NOT solely dedicated to discussing gay themes in gaming.

Self-plc posts that are not text-accompanied go here: [/r/GaymersGameHid](#)

Want to see more of something on [/r/gaymers](#)? Don't be afraid to use the [report](#) button! All content here is user-generated. **Be part of the team.**

Figure 5-1: The frontpage of r/gaymer, May 2018. (note: after the Reddit interface change in August of 2018 the appearance of the front page has changed in subtle yet important ways that remain beyond the scope of this study)

The affordances of the platform can constrain community discussion because the way information is structured determines the kinds of information people can engage with. The ability for users to store, search and retrieve content on Reddit is an important affordance to consider when studying the community engagement that can occur on the site. Olson and Neal (2015) stress the importance of site navigation in sustaining communal engagement, noting that “[t]hese interest-based devices provide structure to the growing worlds of social media” (n.p.). With only a few clicks, a user wishing to view the top-rated, most controversial or newest content on a subreddit can access all of its submissions since its inception, ranked in a descending order accordingly (unless the submission has been removed, either by the author or the moderators of the subreddit). If the submission is newer than six months old, the user can also engage with it through the site, by voting or commenting. Users are thereby conditioned to stick with the current information available on the site, and to model the pre-existing practices popularized by the platform affordances.

Score numbers are an important determinant in the homogenization of gaymer identity on the site. The default sorting algorithm for ranking posts on reddit, “hot”, works by measuring the proportion of upvotes within a specific timeframe. The more upvotes a post receives in a specific time span relative to all other new posts within similar time spans, the higher it ranks on the “Hot” scroll.⁵¹ A post that receives the same number of upvotes but over a longer period will rank lower on the scroll. The higher the score, then, the more likely people are to view the post, and the more likely it is to receive comments.⁵² While suggesting something of the ways typical

⁵¹ It would be inaccurate to call the reddit webpage as a traditional codex page, since the frame is persistently populated by content from a ranked list as the user scrolls down.

⁵² And not the other way around. The high score is driving higher comments rather than many comments contributing to a high score. While the correlation matrixes found a high correlation between score and comment

users navigate the subreddit, sorting content either by “Hot” (the default) or by “Top” based on time (‘hour’, ‘day’, ‘all time’), this correlation emphasises the role of the sorting function on the reddit interface. Content with the most upvotes is more likely to be viewed and discussed than content with a low score, regardless of comment volume. Put simply, algorithms regulate what visitors see, channeling attention towards the new and popular, and away from the outliers. The Reddit interface is an engine of prototypicality promoting a homogenization of content types.⁵³

The karma system influences the organization of community interest structures on the site, which in turn determines Reddit’s overall content. As Massanari (2017) puts it, “upvotes represent visibility on Reddit” (338). Moreover, sharing content is also yoked to the platform’s algorithmic operations. The default sorting filter, for instance, caters to the new and popular in both submissions and comment threads. Redditors need to expend extra energy on each subreddit, submission and page to view content that the platform and its algorithmic processes do not deem worthy (either because of low karma or user participation or time and place of posting). Olson and Neal (2015) further observe that these tools for organizing interest maps enrich links between related interest maps, using the example of Miami Heat fans connecting with the interests of Miami Dolphins fans through shared content on the site. Redditors can scan the front pages of their self-defined subreddit aggregates to view and interact with popular content pushed to them by users sharing similar interests on subreddits organized around a communal interest in a defined range of topics. By voting on content appearing on a subreddit according to their interests, users feed into the articulation of communal identities.

number, content in the New corpus with a high number of comments did not necessarily correlate with a high score. Moreover, some of the content with the highest karma score had few comments. Indeed, since there is no limit on the number of times an individual can comment on a post, multiple comments can be attributed to only a few authors, giving it a high comment score, while the post itself would receive minimal engagement from the community.

⁵³ For more on how identity formation can be determined by homophily, see Wimmer & Lewis (2010).

The visual structure of information evokes meanings that may radically differ between users and produce drastic distinctions in interpretation that influence group identity. Judith Donath (2002), drawing from both Lakoff and Johnson's seminal *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) and Tufte's *Envisioning Information* (1990) remarks that "We do not think in pure abstractions; rather, our thinking is metaphoric and grounded in the spatial world. For instance, things higher seem positive—and thus how the axes of a chart are labeled can subtly but strongly influence how it is interpreted" (49). Situational factors like the time and day in which content is submitted might also have a bearing on when users will encounter it, since as a multi-national site, users in different time zones will encounter the content at different hours in the day, altering the composition of content in the 'hot', which influences the 'top'. Thus, a user in Australia browsing r/gaymers according to 'hot' will be susceptible to activity conducted when most Reddit users in the US access the site and upvote content.

Reddit's submission criteria enforce a moderate degree of curatorial practice. To post a submission, individuals must first have an account and must provide a headline and a subreddit for the content. Reddit will warn users if a link has already been submitted, presumably to discourage re-posts. The need to submit a headline encourages users to contextualize their content within the discursive conventions of the subreddit to which they are posting, such as making references to both reddit culture and video game culture.

Headlines will often take the form of discursive conventions previously established on Reddit more broadly and r/gaymers more specifically. Indeed, as my topic modelling reveals, most post headlines on the subreddit for the New corpus can be consolidated within roughly 20 topics, and only 12 for the Top corpus. Most of the headlines in the Top corpus are related to a small set of themes of expressing, discussing and sharing materials related to video games and

gay culture, while the pictures they transmit emphasise the meta-discursive and metaleptic play of discourse prevalent on the site.

Conclusion: The Introjection of the Medium

This chapter presents a snapshot archive of a community organized around the construction of gaymer identities. I use the term “archive” in the sense that Foucault offers, as a place that “defines a field in which formal identities, thematic continuities, translations of concepts, and polemical interchanges may be deployed” (127). Describing the subreddit as an archive is intended to call attention to the ways the subreddit functions as a repository that, as Foucault points out, “defines a limited space of communication” (126). Though an archive sets an arbitrary and even biased terminus on the scope of its field, this scope nonetheless conveys the dimensions of a discourse, “a discourse [that] at a given moment, may accept or put into operation, or, on the contrary, exclude, forget or ignore this or that formal structure” (128). R/gaymers functions as a node in a discourse network that puts into operation the discourse of gaymer identity.

As this research has shown, the subreddit favours visual material, predominantly focused on video games and queer remaking of video game materials, typically towards objectifying male homosexuality. The majority of the content on the subreddit discursively frames the notion of a ‘gaymer’ as a white, male homosexual who plays videogames. While I’ve already discussed how this doesn’t match the literature on gaymer identities, I’m also struck by how this construction is at odds with its earliest deployment in the 1990s as someone who identifies as a gay person who roleplays (without any explicit mention of video games). In other words, the history of the term suggests nothing inherent in the typical construction of the term ‘gaymer’ that can be found on the r/gaymers subreddit: an identity associated almost entirely with explicitly male homosexuality, gay pop culture references and big studio videogames.

The impact of gaymer being construed in this way — as belonging to a particular group with the means to participate — is that this ownership complicates or precludes its use by another group. As previous scholars exploring gaymer identity have noted (see Rockwood and Shaw 2012b), even to reject the gaymer label is in some sense to affirm some degree of correlation with its discursive range presented on this site. Short of appending numerical superscripts or additional signifiers to every instance of the term gaymer — as I once attempted to do in an earlier version of this research — how might we resolve this terminological problem? I think we can start by recognizing that all labels are homographs. Indeed, I'm resistant to the idea of using numerical qualifiers like gaymer₁ and gaymer₂ because it suggests both a linear causality where none may exist. Even alphabetical symbols posit the notion of some Ur-gaymer label from which all others either derive or are to be placed in comparison against.

The question of what it means to be a gaymer, and how one may come to such knowledge through media systems gets at the heart of the onto-epistemological focus animating this dissertation. In my mind, the word gaymer conveys a plurality of subjectivities and beings, which includes activities occurring on a subreddit for the past ten years, and it also encompasses activities that occurred on a message board years before the foundation of reddit. Yet I am also aware that this set of significations would likely not be shared by someone unfamiliar with the term's provenance. Moreover, one may engage with gay culture and games without identifying as a gaymer, or may do so identifying as a gaymer, but without identifying as a reddit gaymer. Nor must someone who identifies as a reddit gaymer at one time necessarily belong for all time. These identity labels are porous, transitory, ambiguous, contested and subjective (as are the identities to which they refer). And it is this capacity for multiplicity that affords the formation of identities and subcultures.

The affordances of the platform (including the persistent storage of material, the capacity to comment, share and upvote content, and to organize the subreddit for personal viewing) allow visitors to experiment with expressions of a range of identities. However, the prevalence and persistence of a narrow range of topics and themes points to the capacity for the reddit platform to habituate expressions of gaymer identity. While my analysis may sound like I am advocating for a hard-technological determinism, I must stress that more research beyond the reddit platform is needed to determine to the extent of the cultural influence that r/gaymers holds on the construction of gaymer identities. Future research could explore how this narrow media representation on the site impacts adoption of the gaymer label. Since one major finding was that visitors to the subreddit share player ID tags to find other players on various consoles to organize play, more research is needed into the shared game spaces of r/gaymer members to determine in what ways the social and cultural practices of r/gaymers extend beyond the Reddit platform.

Some caveats are needed, however: this research does not attempt to speak for all gaymer communities, nor indeed even the gaymer communities that may have formed on the subreddit, since, as my analysis shows, a great many visitors use the space as a nexus for finding other players to interact with beyond Reddit. Moreover, gaymers should not be mistaken as a monolithic community consolidated solely through Reddit. The gaymer community suggested by the subreddit description might be best understood as three separate groups⁵⁴: those who visit the r/gaymers community and identify as an r/gaymer gaymer, those who visit r/gaymers but do not identify as an r/gaymer gaymer (but may identify as a gaymer nonetheless), those who do not visit r/gaymers but identify as a gaymer.

⁵⁴ And more formations may be possible.

The operations of the interface outlined above signals how the nuances of gaymer identities are marginalized by a combination of site protocols and broader Reddit user habits. The site governance, which relies on algorithms to keep new and popular content in the focus of the frame and filter out the rest, combined with the need for an account to influence the rank of content on the site, create normative constraints on otherwise queer possibilities, routing information towards homonormative routines. The use of discursive conventions in creating post headlines points to the ways in sharing on the subreddit invokes performance. To share content, users adopt ‘gaymer’ conventions to help their information circulate within the space.

These user practices invite comparison with the communal magazine explored in the previous chapter. Both *r/gaymers* and *Vice-Versa* relied on processes of gleaning to cultivate an archive of queer materials. Gleaning, as we saw in the last chapter, refers to the act of purposefully combining data from multiple sources into one repository. According to Garvey, gleaning confers value on the selected material (47-48). Garvey draws on a phrase popular amongst scrapbookers of separating the wheat from the chaff. The act of upvoting content on the subreddit is one example of this sort of gleaning, as is the act of submitting content to the subreddit in the first place. The erroneous conclusion this metaphor invites is the presumption of having gleaned the cream of the crop — especially erroneous since the scope of this crop is determined, as I have stressed in this chapter, by socio-cultural and technological factors. Thus, we might extend the concern to the construction of lesbian and gay identities more broadly, since this dissertation has sought to argue that certain constructions have been historically privileged by one’s level of access to technology within a given media scene.

This relationship between tools and the construction of identity becomes especially pertinent to consider in light of the immediacy and ubiquity afforded by digital technoculture. Whereas a magazine like *Vice Versa* continuously and conspicuously signalled the intervening

subjectivity of its gleaner and author, Lisa Ben, the subreddit archive is shaped by an amorphous group consciousness. Moreover, as I have sought to show with this chapter, the mechanisms that serves to manage users' engagement with the profusion of digital information coordinates the attention of this group, and directs the development of this digital culture in the process.

Technological affordances designed to assist access to information can also shape the information itself. Putting these results in conversation with other media scenes in this dissertation underscore the potential for the solidarity of a given community to become totalizing and thereby foreclose queer possibilities.

Despite what the content analysis of the r/gaymers subreddit suggests, the results of this study should not be used to fix the meaning of 'gaymer' as a video game player who identifies as male, masculine and gay. Instead, this study suggests the ways that identities can be habituated by our encounter with media technologies and the systems designed to process, store, organize and relay data to the user. The gaymer identity consolidated by the aggregation of content shared on r/gaymers supplies a socio-cultural *and technological phenomenon*. A reddit 'Gaymer' topos is a prototypical construct: a discursive formation accreted through the agglomeration of media objects consolidated by communal engagement around a topic. The 'gaymer' identity type of r/gaymers obtains from the mediation of material extending multiple technological platforms. The emergence and the evolution of a technological phenomenon like 'gaymer' emphasises how technology affords a radical capacity to direct identity expressions towards ever queerer potentials or ever more intractable homogeneity.

Chapter 6

Critically Unmaking a Culture of Masculinity, 1900/2000

The previous chapter looked at the use of media technologies by a group of queer game players to form friends and communities, and considered the ways in which these media technological practices can inadvertently marginalize queer identities. Rather than observing a snapshot of digital culture and its capacity to shape discourse and identity, this chapter is an attempt to intervene directly in this process. This last chapter explores in greater depth the ways media technologies can control the discursive construction of identities by exploring the ways gender and technology can be wielded to frame, share and especially to dismiss identities. My aim in this chapter is to use research creation methods to make and apply a media theory to a speculative design. If the dissertation has so far been concerned with the ways in which identities can be set by their technological contexts, this chapter is an experimental attempt to intervene in this procedure. It seeks to do so through a speculative research-creation object that unites two disparate media scenes to queer the onto-epistemological act of making identities I have explored throughout this dissertation.

The starting point for this inquiry is an unlikely source. In his 1900 book, *Ideal Physical Culture*, professional strongman William Bankier (AKA ‘Apollo’) ambiguously described a ‘muscle developer’ he had invented. Though he provides no details of its construction, nor any diagram, his remarks offer some clue as to what it might have been. He describes it as “a combination of electricity and light dumb-bell exercise at the same time” (124). The device was intended as both an aid to muscle development and a restorative cure.⁵⁵ Bankier claims the device

⁵⁵ For the history of electric belts in medicine during the end of the Victorian era, see de la Peña, *The Body Electric*, chapter 3.

was functional, since “[e]veryone who has tried it is enthusiastic about its efficiency in driving rheumatism away” (124). If Bankier’s remarks are anything to go by, muscle developers were apparently quite common at the turn of the century, for he adds that “as a mere muscle developer it stands a long way ahead of any other so-called developing-machine” (124). This developer is not an aberrant technology but rather involved within a larger framework of physical development.

The book emerges within a broader context of the physical culture movement of the late nineteenth century, which included other self-publicizing bodybuilders like Prussian émigré to London, Eugen Sandow, and his more eccentric American imitator, Bernarr MacFadden.⁵⁶ These bodybuilders all used a range of media materials like books, magazines, pamphlets and trading cards to advocate for the pursuit of physical culture through the cultivation of the body (which was always presumed to be male).⁵⁷ The decisive role of media technologies owes to their discursive capabilities, which undergirded the construction of bodybuilder identities. Despite circling around the same theme of physical culture, each bodybuilder nonetheless built a unique identity to better interface with the public whom their very discourse sought to shape.

What set these bodybuilders apart were their idiosyncratic techniques for developing muscularity. Sandow authored seven books, including his most popular work, *Strength and How to Obtain It*. MacFadden produced several of his own books about making physical culture (he wrote over 100), including *Muscular Power and Beauty*, replete with half-tone photographic

⁵⁶ Of the two, Sandow was the more widely publicized and it is perhaps largely for that reason that his legacy has perpetuated to the present. Bankier, his book, and especially his muscle developer, have been almost forgotten in the sweep of history.

⁵⁷ For the early history of physical culture magazines, see Black, *Making the American Body* 11-30. For the rise of physical culture in the United States during this period, see Green, *Fit for America*, especially chapter 8. For a history of Sandow, see Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan and the Perfect Man* 21-76; Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent: Eugen Sandow and the Beginnings of Bodybuilding* 33-128; and Waller, *The Perfect Man: The Muscular Life and Times of Eugen Sandow, Victorian Strongman*, especially chapters 8 and 10.

reproductions of the author, in the nude, modeling keyframes demonstrating hundreds of exercises, which mostly relied on body weight and the contraction of isolated muscle groups. Sandow was quick to market his own line of gymnasium equipment including branded dumbbells and isometric devices (and later, in the first decade of the twentieth-century, his own line of gyms). Bankier wrote only one book, and his invention is of a piece and a pace with the integration of technological devices intended to facilitate techniques of muscular development.

While the ways we perform masculinity through physical culture may have changed since Bankier's personalized account of his muscular development, the discourse and its emphasis on technique remain unchanged in principle. Scan the front covers of any contemporary physical culture magazine lining any store checkout aisle, and you will recognize the phenomenon to which I refer. A sample, chosen at random, all within the past five years: "18 ways to turn pizza into muscle fuel", "325 body hacks", "31 ways to look younger now", "48 ways to boost testosterone" (that cover also includes the promise of "genuine muscle hacks"). There's no point in citing any particular cover, the language is so repetitive as to recirculate every few years or so, always in conjunction with digitally manicured images of men. Coincidentally, nearly every male cinema superhero actor has graced the cover of *Men's Health*, including but not limited to Ryan Reynolds, Chris Hemsworth, Chris Pratt, Henry Caville, and Robert Downey Jr. Their muscular physiques, especially adopted for the duration of their cinematic roles, are shown amplified through the appearance of sheen, veins and tight-fitting clothes, and typically with those aforementioned phrases neatly compartmented around their imposing frames. In all cases, the body is discursively positioned as an apparatus for signalling masculinity that can be fine-tuned through techniques of muscular development. Their bodies invoke associations with power, energy, and control, and their virility amplified by every technique modern technologies can supply—from gyms to supplements to photoshop to high gloss magazine production techniques.

The technological function of the body is maximised; fine-tuned as an implement for constructing and communicating masculinity.

I became fascinated with Bankier's device because I saw it as an object that evoked a great many of the tropes of masculinity that remain in circulation to the present.⁵⁸ In this rhetoric, men are expected to take an active role in the physical production of masculine bodies. The body becomes a discursive object and an apparatus for communicating gender, where masculinity can be determined by the ways particular signs of health are reified in the body.⁵⁹

It is an object, moreover, that speaks to a larger complex of techniques for defining masculinity through muscularity being developed at the close of the Victorian era.⁶⁰ The ideal male, according to Bankier, could be developed only through the development of muscles, and so fabricated a fabulous muscle developer to assert his role in the development of masculinity. Bankier stresses that his physical form is the ideal, which he emphasises by rendering it into a cultural object using the printed word and photographs that comprise his book *Ideal Physical Culture*. In the discourse of masculinity articulated by Bankier, bodily repetitions inscribe in the

⁵⁸ For a fuller discussion of these tropes and their relationship to stereotypical portraits of white masculinity in this period, see John F. Kasson's *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* and *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, edited by Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen. For contemporary accounts of making masculinity, see *Exploring Masculinities*, ed. Pascoe and Bridges; *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Berger, Wallis and Watson; *Understanding Masculinities*, ed. Mac an Ghaill. For modern contestations of constructions of masculinity informed by physical culture, see Lee F. Monaghan and Michael Atkinson's *Challenging Myths of Masculinity: Understanding Physical Cultures*.

⁵⁹ In this regard I am inspired by works like Raewyn Connell's *Masculinities*, which discusses how masculine identities are constituted by negotiations with social axes that position bodies in relation to cultural codings of race, gender and sexuality. See also Fausto-Sterling, "How to Build a Man" in *Constructing Masculinity*, eds. Berger, Wallis and Watson. For a more detailed exploration of the concomitant developments between technology and the discursive meanings of gender, see *Gender and Technology*, eds. Lerman, Oldenziel and Mohun, especially Part II; and Shapiro, *Gender Circuits*. For more recent implications of these gendered divides in the domains of technology and engineering see *Women, Gender and Technology* eds. Fox, Johnson and Rosser; *Feminist Technology*, eds. Layne, Vostral, and Soyer; and Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*.

⁶⁰ On the range of masculinities developing in Victorian America from numerous social and cultural factors, see *Meanings for Manhood*, eds. Carnes and Griffen.

flesh the power masculinity is intended to secure. Bankier's book typifies how the scripts of contemporary masculinity are predicated on our relationship with media technology.

Applying Applied Media Theory

To explore this device further, and how it could be considered within its techno-cultural moment, my initial approach was to conduct archival research into both the device and the cultural scene in which it emerged.⁶¹ However, the direction of the project shifted in a radical direction to align with a call put out in 2018 by Grant Wythoff, curator of the R-CADE symposium held at Rutgers University. The annual symposium invited scholars to engage in “hands-on research with digital ephemera”. Under the direction of Marcel O’Gorman, our group used this topic to think through the role of technique in what O’Gorman calls digital rituals.⁶²

With the assistance of Matt Frazer at the University of Waterloo’s Critical Media Lab, I was able to build a working device that modelled the function of Bankier’s device without creating a faithful reproduction of the device.⁶³ The final project involved an Adafruit accelerometer attached to an Arduino Gemma microcontroller, which was further attached to an LED screen and a shock mechanism disassembled from a novelty shock pen—technologies that would obviously have been unavailable to Bankier in 1900. Every time the accelerometer registers a dip, it sends a signal to the microcontroller, which adds one pixel to the LED. This operation also instructs the microcontroller to output a brief electrical charge to the shocker. Put simply in relation to its intended use, every time the user completes a bicep curl they receive a

⁶¹ I was inspired to make this move by a range of media archaeological scholarship focusing on the history of ephemeral technologies outlined in Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka’s *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications and Implications*, Carolyn Marvin’s *When Old Technologies Were New*, and Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey P. Pingree’s edited collection *New Media 1740-1915*.

⁶² The term ‘digital rituals’ was coined by O’Gorman for the R-CADE conference after developing it through his work at the University of Waterloo’s Critical Media Lab. His work on digital rituals is the focus of chapter 7 of his upcoming book *Making Media Theory*.

⁶³ In this regard, I was inspired by speculative maker projects like Jentery Sayers’ “Kits for Cultural History,” which draws on the cultural history of Fluxkits of the 1960s and 1970s and conducts an archaeological excavation of Victorian era wearable technologies to present a purposefully anachronistic Fluxkit-inspired “Early Wearable Kit.”

shock. All of these materials were then sewn onto a tensor bandage—a material technology for alleviating muscle pain that offered an ironic clash with the mild electric shock (see Figure 6-1).

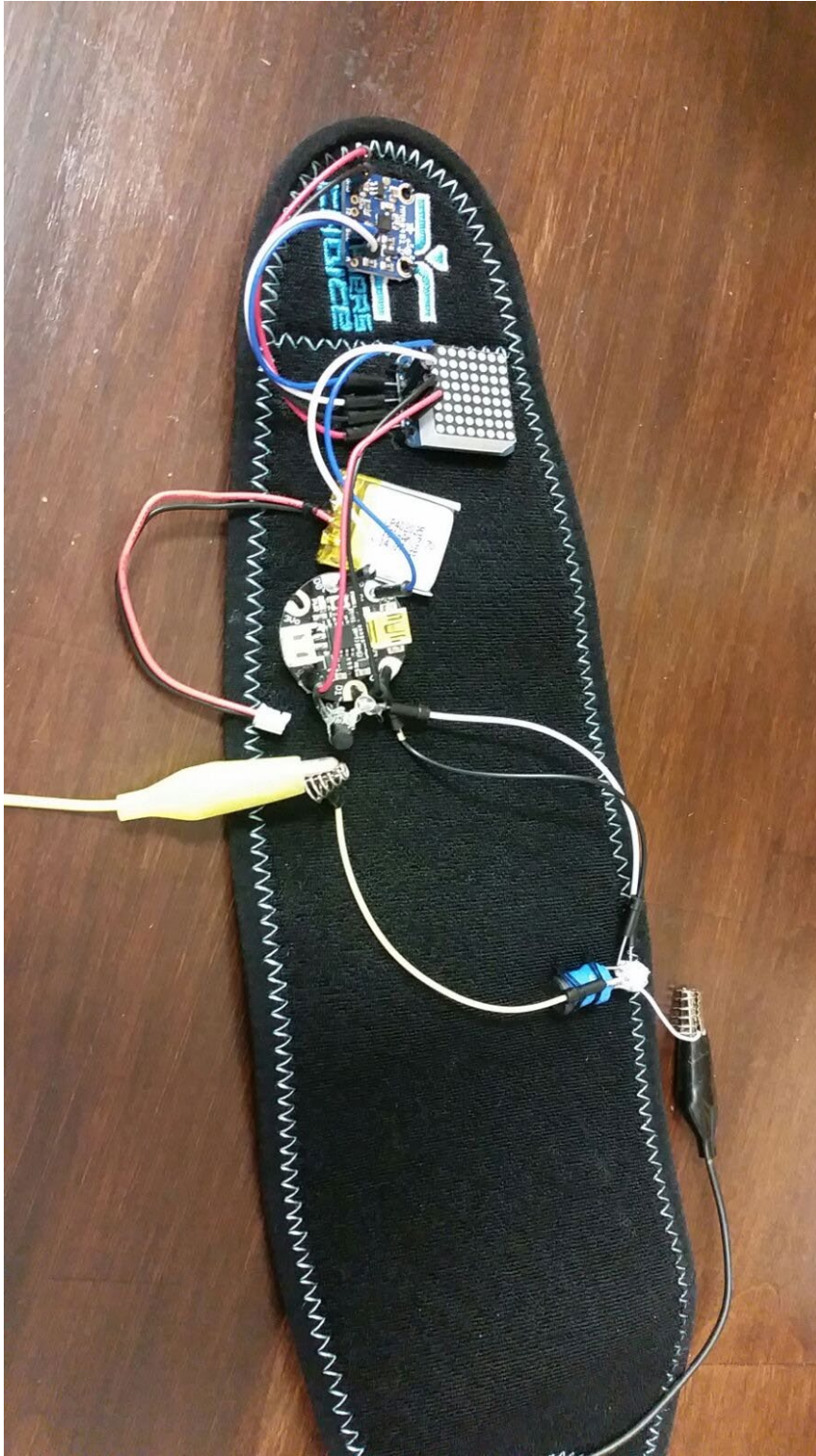


Figure 6-1: Speculative object made by author, with the assistance of Matt Frazer at the University of Waterloo's Critical Media Lab

Informed by my ongoing research exploring how books, magazines, cards, and the tools of their inscription have been constitutive of gendered and social bodies, the maker project became a means to think through how material objects themselves function as discursive practices integrated with cultural techniques of production and use. With this cultural function in mind, I tinkered with the idea of building a device that would approximate the intent of Bankier's invention in such a way as to critique the very object I was researching. Bankier's invention highlights the broader relationship between sexuality and male bodies that occupied Victorian scientists, medical practitioners, cultural critics, authors and strongmen, who each in their idiosyncratic deployment of technology contributed to radical revisions of sexual and gender identities at this time. Indeed, Bankier's willingness to cede credit for his physique to an external factor further suggests the importance that electricity played in the construction of masculinity. The developer, whether it existed or not, represents an instance in the technological construction of masculine tropes, associated with the use of technical apparatus to build men or to unmake them as the need for power called.

My critical approach to the maker project was further informed by Rita Raley's *Tactical Media*, which explores ways of making critical and political interventions through media. Raley discusses critical media projects that model abstract interactions between things, arguing for the ways tactics can make visible the ideologies which bring these things into discursive assemblages. The aim of tactical media is to provoke resistance to power through strategies like procedural rhetoric (Bogost). "If there were one function or critical rationale that would produce a sense of categorical unity [to tactical media], it would be disturbance" (6). While tactical media operates, in Raley's words, "in the field of the symbolic" (6), I am interested in a theory of tactical media technologies: a methodology of critical media production that critically engages with the ways technology produces and frames the very discourse in which intervention might be

articulated and construed. To my mind, and as I have sought to argue through this dissertation, a theory of media technology is needed that articulates the mechanisms which structure power in the first place.

The conceptual making of this device followed a methodology formulated by Marcel O’Gorman at the University of Waterloo’s Critical Media Lab (CML). The CML seeks to blend critical making with media theory. In *Necromedia*, O’Gorman articulates what he calls an Applied Media Theory (AMT), in which scholarship engages with the construction of digital objects-to-think-with. The intent is to create critical objects that evoke conceptual and theoretical premises and integrate modes of theorising media and technology with practices of making them (143-8).

Critical making engages with the intersections of methods, methodologies and cultural ideologies that comprise the circuitry of social systems in ways that move the research beyond the domain of making things per se towards new modes of making meanings. Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk have similarly advocated for critical making approaches to scholarship, outlining four modalities including “research-for-creation”, “research-from-creation”, “creative presentations of research” and “creation-as-research”. These modalities offer a non-linear structure for organizing research as a process of multiple modes of creation, from the gathering of materials to the engagement with the ontology of materiality itself.

Within the framework of critical making, engaging with technology affords modes of making ontological and epistemological critiques. Garnet Hertz explains that critical making offers a means to augment critical thinking by focusing on the process of artifact creation. Jentery Sayers also explores the capacity for critical making to serve as speculative inquiry to re-engage and re-contextualize the past (“Kits for Cultural History”). Matt Ratto views making as “a ‘critical’ activity [...] that provides both the possibility to intervene substantively in systems of

authority and power and that offers an important site for reflecting on how such power is constituted by infrastructures, institutions, communities, and practices” (*DIY Citizenship* 1). Critical making offers a mode of engagement with technology “to supplement and extend critical reflection and, in doing so, to reconnect our lived experiences with technologies to social and conceptual critique” (Ratto, “Critical Making” 253).⁶⁴ Research creation through processes of making allow for the objects themselves to serve “as vehicles for testing or generating theories” (O’Gorman 31) in which the materiality of the object influences the insights generated from research. Critical making is thus a praxis of meaning-making through object making ontologies. Indeed, the ontology and materiality of Bankier’s invention became a helpful way of understanding the critical importance placed on making in late Victorian culture, and the gender dynamics that inventor identities helped to enforce.

The role of making things as a form of scholarship has already been discussed at length elsewhere,⁶⁵ and some key features are worth repeating here. In “Developing Things: Notes toward an Epistemology of Building in the Digital Humanities”, Stephen Ramsay and Geoffrey Rockwell argue that making as a form of research can contribute to scholarship. Building from Jason Farman’s claim that “a provotype is a theory” (with the added injunction that we should “stop apologizing for our prototypes”) (qtd in Rockwell 77), Ramsay and Rockwell argue that engaging with the tool used to produce scholarship affords more nuanced engagement with humanistic inquiry. For Jason Farman, “making is a mode of thinking”—an apercu that he makes verbatim twice in his contributions to *Applied Media Studies*, and which Marcel O’Gorman

⁶⁴ For more on the relationship between political activism and social engagement, see Matt Ratto and Megan Boler’s edited collection *DIY Citizenship*.

⁶⁵ For a thorough accounting of the various, sometimes overlapping and often contradictory strands of maker-based media theories, see chapter 1 of Marcel O’Gorman’s *Making Media Theory*.

advances in *Making Media Theory* to argue that makerly objects can “serve as vehicles for media theory”.

Following a creation-as-research approach (Chapman & Sawchuck), my initial intent was to build an authentic replica of the device, limiting my tools to those that would have been available to Bankier at the time. Bankier insists in his book that the developer existed, claiming that he had “fully protected and patented this [developer], and the machine will shortly be procurable at a low price” (125). However, as I continued my research into the state of electrical devices and muscle developers that existed at the turn of the century, the total lack of available material evidence for Bankier’s device became increasingly clear.⁶⁶ Indeed, despite his fervent pitch, Bankier does not mention the device anywhere else in the book, nor does he provide a customary mailing address so that readers might write to obtain the developer. By the publication of the fourth edition of *Ideal Physical Culture*, Bankier appends a note which reads, in part: “In reply to many enquiries from all over the world, respecting my electrical developer, I here inform future applicants that I have decided not to put it on the market” (125). It’s not hard to imagine why Bankier would sustain the pretense in later publications of having invented a muscle developer, the interesting point is that he felt it necessary to invent the device in the first place. Rather than seek to build a replica of a device I had become increasingly convinced never existed, I began to think instead about what the device represented in its social and cultural context.

While this electric muscle developer may be a purely textual phenomenon, Bankier’s invention is worth investigating because of what it suggests about the roles technology and

⁶⁶ The closest invention to Bankier’s muscle developer I could find was Eindred Viko’s 1902 patent (patent US714067A) for an instrument designed for “Developing the Muscles of the Human Body and for Reduction of Corpulency” that works by a series of pulleys and rotors—no electricity required.

electricity had assumed by 1900.⁶⁷ The fanciful nature of an electrical invention and Bankier's efforts to sustain the fantasy of its existence suggest the importance placed at the turn of the century on human invention, technological innovation and technical mastery over phenomena like the body and electricity. As my research began to point to the nonexistence of the object, I began to think about the speculative functions the device would have served in the formation of Bankier's identity. Carolyn Thomas de la Peña explains that whatever their actual medicinal value, electric belts held psychological utility in that they "helped, primarily, male consumers understand technology as the means by which their bodies could achieve the physical power necessary to meet the modern era's public and private physical demands" (275). The demand for the invention noted by Bankier suggests the credulity of his audience in believing that it both existed and worked, further indicative of the importance placed on technology and electricity in this time. Whereas electrical belts of the period were designed to be gender neutral and to appeal to both sexes (de la Pena 117-8), here was an electrical apparatus that discursively signalled men. As a purely speculative object, Bankier's fantastical muscle developer is a testament to the development of physical culture in the nineteenth century.

⁶⁷ The following section on the history of electricity and the development of masculinity relies on several sources, including Ruth Oldenziel's *Making Technology Masculine*, Cynthia Eagle Russett's *Sexual Science*, David E Nye's *Electrifying America*, and chapter 7 of Harvey Green's *Fit for America*.

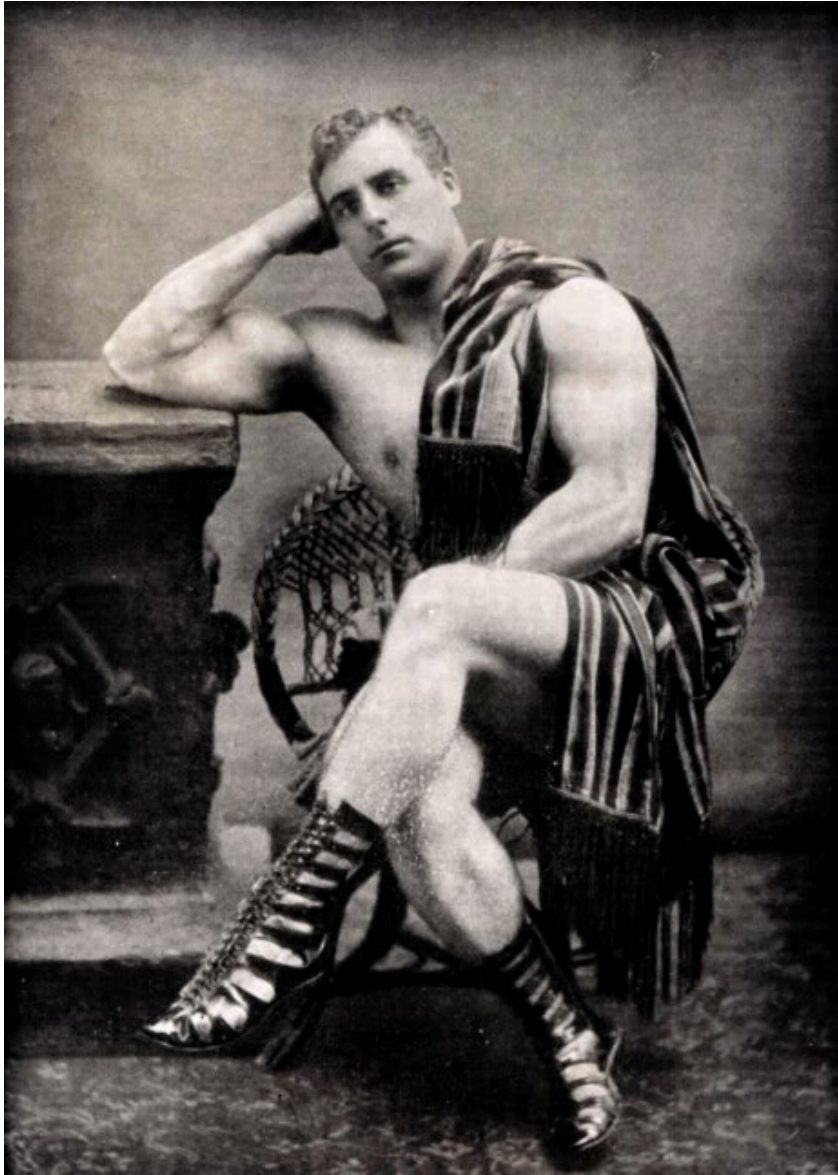


Figure 6-2: Bankier, posing in Roman garb. Half-tone photograph from Ideal Physical Culture

Bankier's claim is also notable for how unnecessary it seems, given his apparent skill as a bodybuilder. Despite several half-tone reproductions appearing in the book which show the author's muscular physique and thereby testify to his adherence to physical culture (see Figure 6-2), Bankier nonetheless felt compelled to exaggerate his qualifications further by claiming to have invented an electrical device for building muscle. His invention asserts more than would be needed to establish his claim on physical culture. Given the risk to his reputation, the components

of this fantasy suggest a great deal about their cultural significance. How could technology in the early twentieth-century supplement his identity as a man, and as an ideal one at that?

Electricity played a critical role in the structure of enlightenment rationality and scientific progress.⁶⁸ Iwan Rhys Morus explains how electricity became an investigative tool of scientists in the early nineteenth century for “unlocking the secrets of vitality” (“Galvanic Cultures” 7), to the extent that by the end of the century it was widely believed to be the vital principle of the universe.

The widely publicized experiments of men like Andrew Ure and Giovanni Aldini (nephew of Galvani—the man responsible for the theory of animal magnetism), who applied electrical stimulation to organic tissues, including the corpses of deceased criminals (and which likely provided the inspiration for Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*) suggested how vitality might be restored through the application of electricity⁶⁹. The human body quickly came to be understood as a machine obedient to mechanistic causes. Electricity and electrical inventions, like the telegraph, shaped interpretations of animal biology, with Alfred Smee in the 1840s reading the operations of the nervous system as a “bio-telegraph” system relaying messaging to the central battery (i.e. brain). Simmons Mackintosh, building on the work of Ure and Aldini, proposed in the 1830s that:

the animal system is a bundle of circles, each connected with the others, like the wheels of a watch, or like the different parts of a steam engine, and that the primary circle, the main spring, which may be said to originate the animal functions, is the nervous, and that the nervous circle is actuated by electrical agency. (qtd in Morus, “Galvanic Cultures” 10)

⁶⁸ See Thomas Park Hughes, *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930*.

⁶⁹ See Iwan Morus, *Frankenstein’s Children: Electricity, Exhibition, and experiment in Early-Nineteenth-Century London*.

Such philosophising led to increasingly radical social politics underwriting human, civilizational, even universal teleologies as constituents in an “all-encompassing network of power” (Morus, “Galvanic Cultures” 249) that held electricity as the prime motivator.

The discovery of electricity and universal laws of energy led to profound changes in the status of the body, which came to be seen as a machine, obedient to the newly understood laws that seemed to govern everything according to the mechanisms of power in a system. This altered view of the body as machine led society to reevaluate the place of the human in a universe that became variously understood as, at best, indifferent to his existence (I use the pronoun intentionally here). Evolution dealt a further blow to man’s superiority, matched by the ferocity by which women were now beginning to assert a desire for equal rights alongside men. Perhaps unsurprisingly, towards the close of the nineteenth century, Victorian men felt themselves to be increasingly in need of curatives.⁷⁰

There was great power accorded to the newly emerging empirical disciplines that blended science with radical social politics, galvanized by Darwin’s research on evolution, and great prestige to be claimed in identifying oneself as a learned man of science. As Cynthia Eagle Russett explains, “Sharing with other men the apprehension created by women’s determined assault on the enclaves of masculine privilege, scientists had a particular need to reaffirm their ontological stature” (204). Electrical inventions expediently analogized mastery over all these domains. In this context then, Bankier’s fabricated claims to an electrical invention are easier understood: what man wouldn’t want to use a muscle developer to prove his masculinity? In

⁷⁰ Carolyn Thomas de la Peña explains that whatever their actual medicinal value, electric belts held psychological utility in that they “helped, primarily, male consumers understand technology as the means by which their bodies could achieve the physical power necessary to meet the modern era’s public and private physical demands” (“Designing the Electric Body” 275). See also de la Peña’s discussion of Pulvermacher belts and powering physical intimacy in chapter 4 of *The Body Electric*. For further discussion of electrical therapeutic machines, see Carolyn Marvin *When Old Technologies Were New*, esp. pp. 128-33.

addition to adding physical vigor, electricity augmented the discourse of manhood, particularly inventions which made novel use of electricity and which signalled ingenuity and scientific progress.

Beyond explicitly reconfiguring scientific perspectives on the boundaries between the binaries of life and death, human and machine, electricity also implicitly reworked boundaries between the sexes. The notion of the body as a battery meant it was prone to decay and drainage—particularly if overtaxed by physical or mental activity. The category of woman, supposed since the natural philosophy of Aristotle to possess a physically weaker body than men, was precluded from higher intellectual exertions on medical grounds relying on advances in electrical science. Barbara Maria Stafford explains that by the end of the eighteenth century, the represented body “had become a kaleidoscope gallery of conflicting and paratactically juxtaposed curiosities” (215). With the nineteenth century, the techniques of figural representation ceded to technologies of reproduction, which inaugurated diverse cultural techniques of constructing and cohering the body to be represented in media. Ruth Oldenziel relates how the early twentieth-century increasingly implicated technology within the mobilization of gender roles that positioned men as breadwinners through their mastery of technology, while women were discursively and technologically situated as passive consumers of manufactured goods. This ‘gendering process’ underscores how the construction of gender was at its core a system of signal processing coordinated between social and technological actors.

Bankier’s device, embedded as it is within a history of anthropometric apparatus and anthropological sciences,⁷¹ emphasizes how not all acts of making are unambiguously

⁷¹ I am thinking here of the work of Francis Galton, described in Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, especially chapters 6 and 7. For a contemporary rebuke of Galton’s specious conclusions obtained from his anthropometric devices, many of his own invention, see Martin Brookes, *Extreme Measures: The Dark Visions and Bright Ideas of Francis Galton*.

emancipatory. The invention emerges within a longer work excoriating Bankier's Anglicized German rival, Eugen Sandow. The professional bodybuilder was more well-known than Bankier even at the time, due largely to Sandow's media empire, which extended to books, magazines, cabinet cards—Sandow even appeared in one of the first cinema features, an actuality film produced by Thomas Edison. It was this persistent and pervasive showmanship that led Bankier to repudiate Sandow's efforts. Bankier's device offered yet another means of asserting his role as the ideal masculine specimen. Thus, both the speculative device and the technological object in which it appears (Bankier's book) demonstrates the struggle for the control of masculine discourse at the time. For Bankier, the struggle to control the discursive object 'Man' was to be decided in the material content of the body, rather than in the mere spectacle of its hyper-masculine performance. As Bankier writes in *Ideal Physical Culture*, Sandow's greatest strength lies in his rhetorical deployment of words and images that convey the semblance of strength. Sandow was merely the simulation of strength, not its real instantiation. Bankier was, in a sense, espousing a proto-Baudrillardian rejection of simulacra. It was not enough to look like the real deal (even so Herculean as Sandow), one must be a man of true, *demonstrable* strength. Indeed, putting masculinity under a Baudrillardian prism reveals how the widely mediated dispute between two world-famous bodybuilders slips the tropes of masculinity into the discourse about men. The question these physical culture advocates address is not whether muscularity is the affirmation of masculinity—which for them is a truth too obvious to be questioned—but how it might best be obtained, and from whom. For Sandow, physical vitality was a capacity that could be achieved by all, whereas for Bankier, it was privileged property bequeathed by race and even class.

All of this striving for recognition takes place, it must be noted, through media, and through gendered interactions with media technologies. The effect of this hyper-mediated strife is a

Baudrillardian generation of simulacra upon simulacra, whereby media is conscripted into a generative critique of that hyperrealized simulacrum to resolve who is the truest exemplar of a manufactured sign whose significations are mistaken for the reality of man's ontology. The status of an ideal physical culture represents a third-order simulacra, a hyperreal simulation without "relation to any reality whatsoever", only to the material production of signs. The idealization of physical culture is predicated on the embellishments and fabrications of its authors, themselves simulacra in a play of references.

Bankier's dismissal of the simulation presented by Sandow's body and his rhetoric was based on a desire to control the hegemony of the system. He states it quite plainly in the beginning of *Ideal Physical Culture* that Sandow is a fraud. To that end, Bankier dismisses Sandow by appealing to discourses of eugenicism and masculinity, writing that Sandow "has three very grave faults—viz., the sloping shoulders, small calves, and flat feet, common to all the German athletes" (40). Bankier is keen to insist that Sandow cannot represent the ideals of physical culture because of what Bankier perceives as physical deformities owing to Sandow's Germanic 'race' and effeminate qualities—as Bankier puts it. Bankier refutes Sandow's capacities by appealing to an essential hegemonic construction of white masculinity that positions true strength as innate to White, Anglo-Celtic male bodies. In Bankier's mind, for any other race to attempt to obtain physical culture — the subtitle of one of Sandow's first books — would be an inauthentic copy: a simulacrum. Apparently unaware of the irony of his position, he secures this absurd ontological status by inventing an object impossible to replicate or obtain. Nonetheless, in Bankier's formulation, the electrical developer merely *extracted* potential; the machine could not supply it — only blood and class could. Bankier's activities emphasise how maker culture can be a force for hegemonic repression depending on the ideologies of the maker and the context in which objects are made.

The history of the muscle developer evokes a milieu when the acts themselves were beginning to be developed and their codings began to be defined through mass production of media; a time when techniques of muscular definition arrived in tandem with technologies for defining contemporary gender codes. In *The Open: Man and Animal*, philosopher Giorgio Agamben examines the origins of the “anthropological machine” of Western thought, discussing approaches to the ontology of man beginning with ancient Greek philosophy. The technical and methodological dispositif that centred human epistemologies around the privileged position of man achieves its sharpest relief with the scientific progressivism beginning in the eighteenth century. Agamben discusses several of the Darwinian anthropological works that established a strict hierarchical order between species, with man secured firmly at the top. Bones, behaviours, languages and cultural objects became the semiotic input for the anthropological machine. The game of Western anthropology became the task of excavating a series of linkages across time and space, seeking the supposed truth of man through numerous binaries: man/animal, man/woman, man/degenerate, etc. The primary focus of science became the decoding of man’s externalizations — to compute the processing of data. The search for the origins of language characterized the ontology of man as a being that presupposes himself in the act of making marks. Situating Agamben’s anthropological machine within Kittler’s discourse networks clarifies how mechanisms of making inscriptions afford mechanisms for making meaning with inscriptions. In my understanding, the muscle developer is a metonym of this whole complex of meaning-making undergirding the anthropological machine.

(Un)Making Masculinity

I designed the object — which I will refer to as a critical muscle developer — to give its wearer a shock each time they complete the motion of a bicep curl. When the device is turned on, the Arduino microcontroller is instructed to continuously read the persistent input signals written

by changes in the orientation of the Adafruit accelerometer. When the signal passes a specific threshold (assigned by the user — myself in this case) and then returns to its original value, the Arduino Gemma is instructed to output 3.7v of current from the lithium ion battery (its power supply) for less than one second. The output of current is enough to light an LED or similar electrical device. This Gemma is wired to an 8 x 8 pixel LED screen that is instructed to light up one pixel for every repetition (in this case, a bicep curl) and to continue appending one pixel for every repetition until the screen is filled or the device is powered down. The wires are also attached to the capacitor of a disassembled novelty shock pen, and have been extended by more wires that attach to the operator. Each repetition instructs the Arduino Gemma to emit a mild and brief electric shock, which is intended to shock the operator when they are connected to it.

I offer this set of technical details to suggest how the critical muscle developer can also be thought of as an assemblage of systems (lines of wires, threads, codes, muscles) for relaying signals. This description is intended to call attention to the denotations of words like signal, threshold, append, device and instruct, since they are crucial components of the critique that I will soon discuss. The language of this description is intended to reflect on the semiotic agnosticism animating the device: the developer operates through the embodied switching of position within vertical and horizontal axes. I have conventionally assigned them to the act of performing bicep curls, but any sufficient change in orientation may trigger the shock. At a technical level, signals determined by the analogue position of the Adafruit accelerometer (the controller) are read by the Arduino Gemma and processed as digital data by a confluence of code and technology.

Even with all that I've explained above, the rationale for this device will likely need some explaining, particularly the significance of the motion, the screen and the shock. The motion required to operate this device is central to my media theory. In the rhetoric of making

masculinity in physical culture, the body becomes a discursive object and an apparatus for communicating gender, where masculinity is determined by the ways particular signs are reified in the body's performative acts. The act of straightening and then curling the arm according to specific procedures set out by these strongmen functioned as performative acts that prescribes gendered bodies. Judith Butler describes performatives as "forms of authoritative speech" (*Bodies* 224) which produce a cascade of effects through the power invested by hegemonic discourse. The power of the performative binds the subject through the citation; the performative makes subjectivities hermetic and unified. In her queer approach to phenomenology, Sara Ahmed theorizes a similar capacity for bodies to orient meaning, observing that "what bodies 'tend to do' are effects of histories rather than being originary. We could say that history 'happens' in the very repetition of gestures, which is what gives bodies their dispositions or tendencies" (552-3). The discourses of physical culture literally and figuratively straightened the body to encode a unitary truth of gender, where straightened male denoted masculinity and straightened female denoted femininity. The body itself became a medium that needed to be straightened to reproduce its gender. Put simply, the unity of masculine and feminine genders was historically reproduced through cultural techniques of becoming straight. The primary site of my critique is therefore this act of straightening, and the critical muscle developer shocks the user each time they straighten their arm.

Though the LED screen was obviously absent from Bankier's design, I added it to comment on the function of objects in the construction of identity. While my use of contemporary technology undoubtedly oversteps the historicity of the original technology available to Bankier, I did so self-consciously and purposefully anachronistically to comment on the use of technology in the creation of identity. Bankier's invention offers a primary site for thinking through how muscles, technologies, and electricity were mobilized in media to confer

traits that have since become tropes of masculinity. The muscle-developer, whether Bankier's or my own, suggest the ways material objects offer a language for communicating identity formations: man, inventor, academic, etc. The unit operations of the developer offer a radical deconstruction of the techniques for making identities through media technologies I have been examining throughout this dissertation. If we recall the line-casting metaphor offered in the first chapter, or the procedurally generated rhetoric of the self outlined in chapter 2, the symbol by symbol procedural operation aims to provoke contemplation on the coordination between media technical production of signs and the signification of identity.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler contends that gender has no originary basis in biology but is instead produced by sustained repetition of gender-coded acts. In a frequently cited passage she defines gender as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (33). Butler's talk of substance and congealation evokes in my mind a Baudrillardian precession of simulacra, with the performance serving as the substance of simulation. Though simulation can mean something that operates on the level of deception and falseness, as far as Baudrillard and Butler are concerned, the “simulation is real” in that it serves as a rarefied form of imitation, a meaning akin to the definition of simulation offered in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a “suitably analogous situation or apparatus” (OED) capable of becoming its own reality. To Baudrillard, the simulation is not built from the real, but by the gradual accretion of simulation, and contains no trace of a real referent.⁷² Thus, sifting through simulation to uncover the real is impossible: The simulation has “no relation to any reality whatsoever”, it becomes “its own pure simulacrum”.

⁷² As he explains in the beginning of his essay, “Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal”.

Baudrillard suggests to me a way of making knowledge, and discourse about knowledge, by processing light into material substrates stored and transmitted by media technologies. The ‘simulation is true’ because the simulacra are ubiquitous and persistent. The truth of the simulation does not derive from a single simulacrum, but by the succession of simulacra that draw their meaning from the procession of signs. Similarly, in Butler’s view of gender performativity, the ‘truth’ of gender comes not from any single act but through sustained repetition. Gender performativity produces meaning in the same way that the simulation is performed: through the succession of materials captured by an apparatus and processed according to a system of knowledge making. The truth of the gender does not emerge from any single image or act, but through the sustained sequence.

The critical muscle developer approximates Baudrillardian simulation and Butlerian performativity in their simplest forms, with each repetition of the action adding one pixel to the LED screen. When the screen is filled, it becomes a larger assemblage of identical parts, 64 pixels becomes a single square of light. The procession of signs proceeds inexorably to more signs. The banality of this procedure ironically emphasises how much of the epistemology of gender depends beyond any single repetition or representation on the screen; how the encoding of gender performativity proceeds from one processed image leading to the next. The addition of the pixel with each repetition of the arm, until the screen of simulation is filled, signifies my attempt at a *reductio ad absurdum* of the process of gender performativity.⁷³ To think through how gender itself is produced by a system of referents, my device parodies the technical procedures by which muscles, and the techniques of building muscles, serve to underwrite claims to masculinity at the end of the Victorian era.

⁷³ I am here thinking of and drawing language from Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*.

My aim with critical making was to abstract the construction of gender and thereby destabilize its meaning. To think and make critically then, I made an anthropometric device designed to record the most mundane of differences: the orientation of a Gemma Arduino microcontroller. The rhetorical irony of my device, then, which shocks as it counts the repetition of signs added to the screen, represents my playful attempt to shock the short-circuit between image and meaning, sign and signifier, pixel and data. The appendage of pixels invokes the stultifying procedure of masculinity habituated by the “anthropological machine” (Agamben) of the Victorian era.

From a media studies perspective, my device can also be construed as a relay system that queers the ontology of discourse networks.⁷⁴ In the cybernetic arrangement of my device, human flesh becomes an interface for the console to communicate its control. Human tissue joins silicon and copper wiring as inscription media implicated within a recursive network of discursive formations coordinated by media technologies and the cultural techniques of their operations. The shock suggests the capacity for the fluid interchange of signals between interfaces, while the screen remediates human activity to the abstraction of a single pixel. The device’s techniques of communication abrade contemporary perspectives of ergonomic solidarity between machine and human. The linkage of the movement of the body to the representation on the screen to the

⁷⁴ I borrow the term and its meanings from Friedrich Kittler’s *Discourse Networks*, which refers to the episteme that develops within a culture based on its relationship with media technologies. From a game studies perspective, this procedure can be read analogous to that of using a video game controller, whereby electrical signals activated by switches are relayed to the console in a video game. Yet the trick comes from the playful continuation of the output into a recursive loop with the player. Rather than ending at the screen, the console (in this case the Arduino) plays/writes/reads back the move the player has just completed. The resolution of the screen, 8x8, is a consciously abstract retroversion of resolutions output by contemporary video game consoles and computer systems, which exceed 3,840x2160 pixels on screens to match. Rather than a device, the muscle developer can be construed as console, controller and screen.

production of the shock prods the user to reflect on the role of the body, the sign and electricity in Western technocultural development.⁷⁵

The speculative device itself exists at the intersection of disciplines, cultures and histories. It is both a conceptual revenant of earlier speculative imaginaries about the capacities for technology, and a disciplinary interloper, straddling the domains of scholarly and artistic practice. Out of place and out of time, the critical muscle developer embodies for me a queer object-to-think-with.

Unmaking Gender

The term “object-to-think-with” comes from Sherry Turkle’s anthology *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*, which collects autobiographical essays from “scientists, humanists, artists, and designers [that] trace the power of objects in their lives, objects that connect them to ideas and to people” (5). As Turkle explains in the introduction, objects have power to evoke and shape identities. Turkle’s concept of evocative objects outlines the reciprocal relationship between objects and identities: how objects situate our identities while we situate ourselves in relation to objects. Reading Turkle’s work on objects from the lens of Applied Media Theory, O’Gorman describes objects as reifications with the capacity to serve “as epistemic repositories, embodying an individual’s unique way of knowing” (32). Put another way, objects situate our identities, as we situate ourselves in worlds of archives and systems by our relation to objects. Objects connect individuals to the past, to others, and to a vibrant ecology of material and cultural assemblages.⁷⁶ They concretize the abstract forces of power that shape identities. Indeed, the formulation of

⁷⁵ See, for instance, David E. Nye, *Electrifying America*.

⁷⁶ I am following this new materialist perspective by way of O’Gorman, drawn in part from Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter*, which outlines a concept of assemblages. According to Bennett, we are complex entanglements of “material configurations”: objects in relation to objects (ix). Critical making as critical connecting engages communities in the processes of meaning-making, emphasising the kinds of vibrant entanglements — and the recognition of such connections — I am advocating for in this chapter.

sexuality as a sexual object-choice emphasises the ways in which the identities of objects contribute to the crafting of identities. Objects which orient our thinking can orient our selves. The interactions can be amplified by the objects we make, which in turn can make our identities. As I discussed earlier with Bankier's muscle developer, objects are bound up with the identities of their makers, and vice-versa.

The way gender is bound up with the identity of makers remains a critical juncture in maker culture, most notably framed in Debbie Chachra's critique of maker culture as a male-dominated and masculine oriented culture that distills difference into a competency for making objects. Despite her years of experience as an engineer (thus a maker in a sense beyond the tinkerer associated with male maker culture), Chachra nonetheless declines to identify as a maker. Chachra's aim is to step outside the capitalist circuit of technocultural production that values the pursuit of an ambiguously understood and typically male-coded 'makerliness' over care; *care* for remaking, reworking, revisiting, or rethinking current structures, which remain intensely associated with these male-dominated structures.

By refusing to self-identify as a maker, Chachra is hitting on something that goes beyond nomenclature. Her resistance emphasises how the values she holds as fundamental to her identity are so outside the traditional paradigms of maker and DIY cultures as to be inimical to mere linguistic modification. It would not do, as it were, to call Chachra a maker or even a feminist maker. Critical making, as Chachra points out and which Sayers emphasizes ("Introduction"), is about the ambiguities, complexities, and entanglements between materials, with which we are indelibly bound up.

Chachra's implicit critique that *making* circulates social, cultural and especially academic capital better than critical thinking has become one of the primary critiques within DH scholarship from multiple theoretical perspectives, from decolonialist, queer and critical race

studies. Indeed, this critical reappraisal of the values encoded in DH methodologies threads like a skein through the recent anthology on critical making, *Making Things and Drawing Boundaries*: In the introduction, Jentery Sayers reviews the history of male-centric maker cultures, “which tend to fuse logic with mastery, control with masculinity, engineering with rationality, and programming with revealing” (3). Sayers notes that contemporary critical maker culture has moved from mastery of circuitry towards the cultivation of productive ‘indeterminacies’. Sayers points to the ways mastery over the materiality has enabled a critical neglect of the problematic structures of oppression in which technology has been historically embedded. In this perspective, technology can put us into new relations, remaking our interpretations and our positionalities to each other, to history and to things.

My resistance to the epistemic reifications of gender extends the logic of Chacra’s resistance to a maker identity to the broader system of making and being identities. In a sense then what I am espousing an approach to gender as a technology that produces effects and exerts these effects on others. The critical muscle developer is thus my playful intervention that seeks to queer the compulsion to reproduce the topos of masculinity as it has been supplied to me through media objects like the ones that I explored in the beginning of this chapter.

The critical making of a speculative object afforded me a chance to illuminate what I perceive to be the processes of meaning-making in technocultural systems. By thinking of the ways Bankier’s developer was imbricated within an extended network of discursive objects, I reflected on the formations of discourses of technology that developed to determine who gets to wield technology and the signification of bodies and materials. I thought about the ways Bankier’s efforts to master the circuitry of gender and physical culture in 1900 paralleled the activities of maker cultures a century later; the ways that the media of physical culture discursively formed and positioned gender according to techniques of media production echoed

how contemporary maker cultures have discursively positioned gender according to technological production. I wanted to evoke the ways in which we are continually hailed through discursive formations—mentally and physically shocked and prodded to process signals according to epistemic ideologies.

In doing so, I am drawing on the interventionist logic offered by *Applied Media Theory*. In “The Making of a Digital Humanities Neo-Luddite”, O’Gorman advocates for a speculative Neo-Luddism in maker culture, which he offers “intervenes directly in the production of technoculture rather than responding to it post hoc” (17). These interventions are conducted primarily through scholarly writing as well as “by creating critical objects to think with” (117). O’Gorman’s approach to maker identity combines tinkering with objects and deep critical thinking about their capacity to position makers in cultural systems outside the normative pressures of techno-capitalist consumption and production (40). For O’Gorman, the ideal of DH scholarship would be an ever-critical approach to the logics and practices of techno-capitalism rather than a disgruntled embrace of their utility. Though O’Gorman suggests we adopt an identity as a Neo-Luddite maker to critically engage with makerliness and digital humanities scholarship, I am willing to extend the injunction further, and to read it alongside O’Gorman’s earlier call for an applied media theory. As O’Gorman explains, “[a]n applied media theorist must learn to create her own hypericons, and to create not just ‘summary images,’ but summary objects, or, ‘objects-to-think-with’” (31). The term ‘hypericon’ is drawn from W.J.T. Michell’s *Picture Theory*, which describes “a piece of moveable cultural apparatus, one which may serve a marginal role as illustrative device or a central role as a kind of summary image ... that encapsulates an entire episteme, a theory of knowledge” (qtd in O’Gorman p. 31). With critical making then, we might at least start to undo systems of power with anti-anthropological machines.

Matt Ratto's formulation of critical making similarly stresses the "shared acts of making rather than the evocative object" ("Critical Making 253), where "[t]he final prototypes are not intended to be displayed and speak for themselves" ("Critical Making" 253). Ratto sets out making as a process of "critically-infused reflection" ("Introduction" 3) that values the process over the object. Ratto seems to be pushing against the overreliance on commodity goods found in Turkle's collection *Evocative Objects*, where consumer products like cameras, rolling pins, toys, string, and a mickey mouse watch supply the framework for thinking of objects as evocative in the first place. I nonetheless want to push back somewhat against Ratto's suggestion that objects don't already speak for themselves, don't always already signify. Rather, I think they are always homographs in the way I have been arguing throughout this dissertation: capable of multiple and even contradictory significations and not always determined by epistemic power relations. As Bennet reminds us, pushing against the "tradition of philosophical material in the West" ("Systems and Things" 223),⁷⁷ objects "are formally monistic but substantively plural" ("Systems and Things" 229).⁷⁸ I am resisting the imposition of control over the object that its critical making might presume.

The identity of critical making and its political capacities has become a central question in maker studies, in part galvanized by Chacra's rejection of the maker label. In an interview with Garnet Hertz, critical maker Phoebe Sengers discusses what constitutes critical making compared to more traditional modes of maker culture such as DIY. Sengers suggests that the criticality of makerliness will depend on the technological milieu of the maker. In other words, the political

⁷⁷ In this philosophical tradition, "fleshy, vegetal, mineral materials are encountered not as passive stuff awaiting animation by human or divine power, but as lively forces at work around and within us" ("Systems and Things" 223)

⁷⁸ Elsewhere, Ratto has put forward a variation on this distributed assemblage, explaining that "Critical making invites reflection on the relationship of the maker to the thing produced, reflection on how elements (whether nuts and bolts, bits, and bytes, or breath, blood, flesh, brain, and neurons) work together—in short, consideration and awareness of the mediated and direct experiences of interacting with the material world" ("Introduction" 3).

ramifications of their work will be determined in part by the roles technology play in their society.

Senger's perspective reminds me of O'Gorman's Kittlerian claim that the practices of cultural and self-production are determined by the technicity of a milieu, by the psychographic capacities media and technologies afford to process data and make meaning. Media make the category 'Man' by supplying the critical apparatus for orienting the production of knowledge and the decoding of knowledge according to this articulation. To my mind at least, this relationship between meaning and technology affords a critical perspective for approaching the processes of making that can move us away from the myth of the self-made Man, towards a recognition of the ways socialization and technologization configure the ontologies of identities. A medium supplies the form for the message, coaxing its emergence from the data of experience and coordinating the forms it can take. Discursive formations and the perspectives they orient are constituted by the material configurations of signs they store and transmit. Media that process, store and transmit the data of culture articulate the epistemic range of the messages. Senger's point asks makers to think critically about the ways objects are embedded in networks of meaning, serving an indexical function beyond the maker's control that make meaning in the process. In a way then, if objects cannot speak for themselves, they nonetheless always already supply the discursive framework for any interaction that might take place.

Despite the distinct perspectives at play here, what unites all these theories is the view that objects offer an indexical function, tethering materials to meanings and vice-versa. As Garnet Hertz points out, material objects "can link concepts in a different way than language can, and can have a life of their own and can travel through different contexts" ("Preface" 4). We do not produce identities alone: we are always already configured in a network of discourses in which we coordinate our processes of meaning-making. As such, objects can either reify and entrench

systems, or they “can work to expose the hidden assumptions and values embedded in technological systems” (Hertz, “Preface”, 5). While objects orient our epistemologies, our orientations towards objects are also habituated by techniques controlling the production and use. In the introduction to *Making Things, Drawing Boundaries*, for example, Jentery Sayers explains how critical approaches to technology and technological production in the collection underscores our *entanglement* with things, and how these messy entanglements shape the experiences of interaction and making things. The ways we make signs, and the ways signs can be made, make our identities.

In this chapter, I have sought to use critical making to consider how we might situate our identities beyond the ideological matrices set by successive regulatory patterns of technocultures. By excavating the histories of anthropological science, my critical approach has been to think through how we might rewrite the epistemic circuits of power to step outside these supercilious rhetorical models to make meaning. Perhaps there can be no escape from the matrix of gender; no overcoming the ways bodies, minds, even the very ontologies of the self are structured by gender. Critical making nonetheless emphasizes the crucial importance of attending to the processes of symbolic production—attending to how things are made and enter into processes of interaction with other things to make meanings. Techniques of production also offer techniques of disobedience, resistance and the capacity to resignify. The perspectives on critical making as a mode of making critical connections suggest to me a theory of *poesis* enculturated by a posthuman metaphysics of things and the entangled networks of their interactions.

Conclusion: A Queer Typewriter

This dissertation has been an attempt to adumbrate how queer identities might develop through a sustained dialectic engagement with tools, media and their sociocultural episteme. Throughout, it has explored instances of critical engagement with technology to express queerness, and even instanced where technologies were queered in service of making these identities. In exploring these scenes, it has uncovered conflicts over inscription systems and discourse networks; conflicts to control the means of access and ability to make cultural reproduction.

Though the media scenes in this dissertation span more than a century, they are nonetheless united by common themes. They have all touched upon in varying degrees the capacity to make queerness legible through queer media practices. By these practices, I mean making and queering marks (i.e. inscription and homographesis) and making the means of making marks (i.e. creating technology, be it a conceptual technology like Turing machines, or even creatively repurposing technology as in the case of Lisa Ben's typewriter). Even in the absence of the means to make mass media, practices of gleaning can involve the makerly activities described above and can in itself serve as a means of making queer culture.

To better contextualize this perspective, I want to revisit David Halperin's definition of gay culture which began this dissertation. Halperin defines gay culture as "a peculiar, dissident way of relating to cultural objects (movies, songs, clothes, books, works of art) and cultural forms in general (art and architecture, opera and musical theater, pop and disco, style and fashion, emotion and language)" (original emphasis, 12) that creates "new works ... produced by queer people and that reflect on queer experience" as well as "mainstream works ... that queer people have selectively appropriated and reused for anti-heteronormative purposes" (421).

Though Halperin is referring to gay people, which for him includes gay men and lesbian women (8), I think we could extend this definition more broadly to think of how queer subjectivities can make queer culture. Indeed, as he puts it, being gay “involves learning how to queer heteronormative culture—[learning] how to decode heterosexual cultural artifacts and recode them with gay meanings” (12). This dissertation has focused on how these meanings could come to be established, and how they can propagate in discourse networks.

With this conclusion I want to tease out several corollaries of this research. First and foremost is the onto-epistemological problem provoked by this variantology. For, as I have sought to show through my excavations of key media scenes surrounding the mass publication of discourse in the 1890s, 1920s and 1970s, the cultural objects used to express these queer subjectivities were built on foundations that privileged certain discourses from certain sources. This limits the range of material a queer gleaner or producer can use and further precludes the participation of certain queer groups and subjectivities.

Admittedly, my own research is lopsided in that it overwhelmingly relies on media materials created by and for white males. The focus unfortunately perpetuates a broader institutional neglect to study the experiences of diverse queer people from a variety of racial and cultural backgrounds. I further admit, hopefully without sabotaging my thesis, that its perspective therefore remains shamefully myopic. Yet, as I argued in my first and third chapter, part of the reason for this narrow range of representation stems from the historically excluded access to media technological systems. While further archival research could excavate more scenes of critical engagement from a diverse range of participants, focusing on how certain meanings come to be established, and how they propagate through discourse networks, should

spur us to review and perhaps even to queer the conceptual stability that terms like gay or lesbian are intended to supply.

To be clear, this dissertation is not intended to offer an argument for technological determinism — quite the opposite in fact. As I have sought to show in my chapters on Turing and Lisa Ben, queer making — be it of marks, media or technology — stands as a viable means of overcoming the factors controlling our situation. The queer practices I have explored in this work align with Bonnie Ruberg’s concept of “queer play”, which they describe as “a mode of self-expression, a mode of taking pleasure, and a mode of resistance” (19).¹ For Ruberg, queer play, and queerness more broadly, “describes a way of remaking the world as well as a way of desiring within it” (228). I nonetheless hope that this dissertation will encourage critical reflection about the tools used to do so — be it media, discourse or technology — since they too can influence the worlds that will be made in unanticipated ways. As I have sought to show throughout these chapters, media can even determine our identities if we let them.

These scenes, and my theoretical reading of them, have emphasized the potential for these practices to inadvertently perpetuate hegemonic discourses. Even discourse intended to celebrate queerness can marginalize the possibilities for queer expressions to develop and proliferate if these significations are perpetuated across a long enough time span. The power of discourse to make and control epistemology has led many media philosophers to focus on those tools which shape discourse. As early as Socrates, media philosophers were concerned about the ways that writing controlled our ways of thinking. Socrates decries writing because it might lead people from the truth, particularly as the mark comes to substitute the essence it projects. After

¹ Ruberg’s *Video Games Have Always Been Queer*, which explores the various ways that players, makers and designers have used their queer subjectivities to produce queer readings, experiences and even games, was only published during the conclusion of this dissertation, but otherwise would have had a much deeper integration in this dissertation.

his first speech, modeled on Lysias', Socrates chides his own rhetoric and insists that he must start over. Following Lysias' discourse, and, more to the point, the printed matter of his speech, Socrates realizes he himself has spoken falsely because he has allowed Lysias' discourse to channel his own thoughts. By following the line of thinking passively, discourse coordinates the thoughts of the recipient. Because it is asynchronous, the text constrains discourse to its static form.

Contained in Socrates' reproach against writing is an aphorism that would later appear in Nietzsche's writing, offered after extensive use of his Malling Hansen typewriter: "Our writing tools are also working on our thoughts". For Nietzsche, it was the shift from the pen to the fragmented constellation of keys constituting his writing ball that produced profound psychographic effects.² Kittler's focus in both *Discourse Networks* and its remake, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, became to understand the processes underlying this technological programming Nietzsche described.³ His main finding was that "people were programmed to operate upon media in ways that enabled them to elide the materialities of communication", leading to increased homogeneity and cultural stability (xxii).

As this dissertation has also sought to show, practices of gleaning, making and discoursing are implicated within socio-cultural and technological situations. How one comes to know the exteriorization of one's being is determined by the contiguities of one's historical situation. Media mediate information according to their own identity. As Madeleine Akrich

² In *Track Changes* Matthew Kirschenbaum supplies a more contemporary example by way of the Stanley Elkin's relationship with his Lexitron word processor machine, which he affectionally dubbed "The Bubble Machine" and claimed affected pronounced changes in the way he composed his manuscripts — both their language and their plots. (see pp. 163-5)

³ Prior to this assessment of Nietzsche, for example, Kittler quotes from Heidegger at length, who claims that the typewriter is not a machine but is rather a mechanism, "an 'intermediate' thing, between a tool and a machine" (*Gramophone* 200).

shows in “The De-Description of Technical Objects”, all technologies — whether analogue or digital — coax specific postures and reify certain epistemic structures.

Given the power to control discourse afforded by media technologies, the control of technology—be it pen, typewriter or social media platform—is a matter of who makes the sign, who validates it, and who erases it. This control is a matter of who gets seen, and who gets to determine what is seen, when and to what extent; who speaks and how they are spoken about. Access to technology affords access to expression, to the ability to extend human senses and hone them in the process of their extension through media. I am reminded here of the discourse on the r/gaymers subreddit, which is channeled by years of pseudo-anonymous information sharing towards the perpetuation of stereotypical representations of gaymerness.

If the digital revolution has changed the ways to search for information, these digital systems also determine the information we find. Media convergence afford increasingly ubiquitous mobilizations of information, allowing community practices to easily migrate from one platform to another, one space to another, especially as platforms integrate evermore complex media inscription tools. As such, we should be mindful of the power these platforms hold to regulate identity expressions even as they provoke them. To control technology is to be the adjudicator of Turing’s game; to be able to claim which signs signify specific epistemological meanings through media technology. Write or be overwritten. Make, or be made in another’s graven image. Program or be programmed— to borrow the title of Douglas Rushkoff’s book, in which he implores the modern day reader to learn critical digital literacy skills. “In the emerging, highly programmed landscape ahead,” he explains, “you will either create the software or you will be the software” (7).

My concern is drawn in part from the central focus of Butler's *Gender Trouble*, which argues matrices of power can govern our identities so long as we remain within them. Butler argues that gender identity is fundamentally constructed according to a normative heterosexual imposition of power (xxx). "Indeed," she writes, "when the subject is said to be constituted, that means simply that the subject is a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses that govern the intelligible invocation of identity" (*Gender Trouble* 185). Thus, to be an identity entails only a deeper integration of normalizing routines, structured by specific regimes of power. For Butler, it is performance all the way down. There is no escaping the matrix; the only outcome is the perpetuation of its discourses that engender subjects "through the production of substantializing effects" (*Gender Trouble* 185). Agency is illusory because the routine is always pre-defined within "the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms" (185). This would seem to dissipate the emancipatory potential of any activity, since to be an identity is only ever to inscribe oneself within the socio-cultural matrix always already pre-determining the valences of one's acts.

In one sense, chapters 1, 3 and especially 5 can be read as attestations of this effect, where the creation of topoi allows the various significations they corral to be condensed into tropes that then perpetuate through discourse networks. The cases in this dissertation have sought to clarify how many of the concepts of queer identities we have inherited through the decades have been overwhelmingly dominated by their privileged proliferation in media technological systems. New formulations are then grafted onto reified epicentres consecrated by the potency afforded by their systemic deployment in media systems. Pursuing this logic, the future of queer discourses stands to be set by those with the requisite access to the means of making media. In the case of gaymer, we can see how this quickly veers into the reification of white, male gayness, despite whatever inclusive rhetoric is intended within its community. If nothing else, the key

takeaway from this dissertation is that more research is needed into the ways media technologies have been and continue to be instrumental in developing the perspectives of queerness.

To explore ways of countering the imposition of these media scenes, I have sought to recuperate possibilities for making identities through queer media practices. Chapters 2, 4 and 6 can be read as instances of cultural technical interventions into their respective media scene — Turing’s imitation game with its queering Universal Machine, Ben’s queered typewriter and my own queer intervention into gender performance. In the case of both Turing and Lisa Ben, the work was made by those who sought to go beyond the normative prescriptions of their situation. To do so, they tricked the tools at hand to make new discourses of identity ready-to-hand. Through my extended investigations of their work, I have sought to describe an existential project of making queer matters and making queerness matter through sustained engagement with the socio-cultural and technological situation of a given media scene. The playful work of Turing’s game reveals how our epistemology of the human can be queered by the accumulation of marks — by typewritten messages no less — carefully created by a machine, then scanned and gleaned in ways that trick and thereby trip discourses out of their well-worn grooves. Lisa Ben’s playful work with a typewriter emphasises how a queer ontology might obtain from gleaning and making marks.

In my introduction I explained that the spur for this dissertation was my experiences on Grindr, but here I must stress that its focus was inspired by Lisa Ben’s queer work with a typewriter. As a media scene, it contains all the themes I have explored throughout this dissertation and emphasises how queer media practices afford modes of resistance to heteronormative and even homonormative hegemonies. In chapter four, I described how Lisa Ben creatively extended the affordances of her typewriter and carbon copy paper towards the

creation of queer work, and focused on the impact of the carbon copy paper in cultivating queer connections among a developing lesbian scene in LA. Here I want to focus on how her work with the typewriter itself points to the possibilities of queer liberation from a media scene.

In her review of *The Children of Loneliness* Lisa Ben writes “If only the third sex could be recognized and accepted as equally as ‘honorable’ as their smug and uncomprehending fellows who dare to pass judgment upon them!” To have this sentiment expressed in print in 1947 is extraordinary in itself, yet what is also remarkable to me about this statement is its exclamation mark. Exclamation marks were not part of the standard typeface on English-language typewriters until the introduction of the 1 key (which could be shifted to give an exclamation mark, a convention which continues on modern keyboards). If Ben had used a 1946 Royal KMM typewriter, which I strongly suspect she did, then she conjured up a mark without the ready means of doing so, for that typewriter contains no specific exclamation key (or 1 key for that matter; the lower case l was used instead as a visual homograph). Instead, to express her emphasis on a machine not designed for that purpose, she had to make the mark by pressing the shift key and the ‘8’ key, which in its shifted register would supply a single quote tick, then she would have needed to hit the backspace key, followed by the period key. The result looks something like a smudged semi-colon, but its impact is important to consider. Engaging beyond the affordances of technology allowed Ben to better express her point. Obviously, Ben did not invent the exclamation point, but I think her creative repurposing of keys conveys in essence the project of her queer making. Rather than accept the matrix as given — whether the configuration of typewriter keys or the anti-homosexuality of 1940s America — she combined and repurposed technologies and capacities of inscription to collate a vision of a queerer future. Like

Turing's *n*-state of possibilities, she sought to queer normative conceptions through a playful engagement with inscription apparatus.

As I think about my current media scene, with the ubiquity of connectivity across persistently updating social media systems, each affording the rapid proliferation of discourse and discursive practices, I return to the thought of Lisa Ben at her typewriter in a stuffy office in LA in 1947, mechanically driving each key through five layers of carbon copied paper to concretize her queer emancipation in print. I reflect on how dependent her queer making was on the socio-economic conditions that provided her access to a typewriter but which precluded her access to more extensive media production machines — or even electric typewriters, which would have afforded her more copies with more precise typesetting. In thinking about the social and cultural implications of this media technological interaction for future queer cultures, I turn to a photograph from the ONE Archives which shows Ben at her office, taken sometime in the late 1940s, with her hands poised over a typewriter, the return lever mid-line, carrying what appears to me to be the distinctive handle of a Royal KMM model. This might be the typewriter she used to produce her magazine, but then again, it might have been another Royal machine. After all, the typeface of her magazine also matches that of the Royal Quiet Deluxe model (which also lacks an exclamation key). We may never know conclusively which typewriter model she used exactly to write *Vice-Versa*, and in truth, it likely wasn't the Quiet model, but I like to imagine that it was, if only for symbolic impact. The shift keys on that particular model, which she would have held down each time she spelled out VICE-VERSA in her typical all-caps fashion, contained two labels: the first was the customary word "SHIFT", while the other, centered just beneath, was "FREEDOM".

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Appendices

Appendix A: 'Gaymer' as Search Term

To determine the popularity of the subreddit, I conducted a Google Trends search for the term 'gaymer' and I analyzed the results to determine relevancy to the subreddit. Google Trends reveals that, after the term 'gamer', 'reddit' is the second most related topic to the term 'gaymer', followed by the terms 'Minecraft', 'Vegetta777' and 'Cider- Beverage'. Beginning with the cider, "gaymer" is the name of a cider company in England, while 'Minecraft', 'Vegetta777' and 'gamer' are actually related: Vegetta777 is a popular Spanish-language Youtuber who plays video games on his channel, with over 25 million subscribers, originally famous for his *Minecraft* playthroughs. On his YouTube page, Vegeta777 labels himself as a "gaymer". As best as I can determine⁴, the label owes to a peculiarity of English to Spanish translation, whereby the "a" in 'gamer' is sometimes written out phonetically as "ay" to match its pronunciation as "ei". Thus, Vegetta777 identifies as a 'gamer' in the North American sense of the term, but phonetically spells it as 'gaymer'. This peculiar quirk of translation points to the cultural ambiguity of the term 'gaymer' owing to its phonetic duplication of the term 'gamer'.

The remaining five topics are related to these Vegetta777 and gaming: 'Tumblr' (6), where Vegetta777 maintains a popular profile; 'Vegeta' (7), a fictional character from *Dragonball Z*, and either Vegetta777's namesake, or a name users search by accident; 'Gaymer Cider Company' (8); 'Willyrex' (9), another popular Spanish-language Youtuber who collaborates with Vegetta777; and '*League of Legends*' (10), a game played on Youtube by both Vegetta777 and Willyrex. Considering these uses of the term 'gaymer' are disambiguations from the identity label, the only related search topic to "gaymer" is Reddit by a wide-margin.

⁴ see mechuchemen.

Appendix B: r/gaymers subreddit description May 2017-2018

Note: this description was removed from the subreddit August 2018.

Gaymers is a community for LGBT and ally redditors. We host frequent voice and/or video chat nights, regularly play multi-player games together, talk about how totally rugged David Hayter is, how sexy Samus is in her zero suit, talk about how we love big Switch sessions, and playing with an Xbox all night long.

Expect to be offended by something you see here at least once.

This is a community-based subreddit NOT solely dedicated to discussing gay themes in gaming.

Self-pic posts that are not text-accompanied go here: /r/GaymersGoneMild

Appendix C: Methods

Sample and Data Collection

With the help of my collaborator Mirko Vucecivich, we wrote a python script to access the Reddit API. Using this script, I scrapped the r/gaymer subreddit each month for both top ('year'), and new between December 2017 and May 2018. These sorting categories provided two sets of data from the subreddit, hereafter referred to as Top Corpus and New Corpus, which I could use for comparative analysis to address the aims of this study. Top Corpus is the most upvoted material, arranged highest to lowest, while New is all material, arranged chronologically.

The data set for each scrape consisted of 1000 posts per category (the maximum allowed by the API). The following data was also cultivated for each post: date (in unicode format), title, author, score, comment total, URL. Further, we wrote a python script to scan the URL's and determine the type of post based on preset criteria. The script delivered a 'true' or 'false' value for each type based on the following URL criteria. The value for each type was then tabulated.

Table 5-1: URL keyword search and resultant content type

URL keyword	Type
'instagram', 'imgur', 'gfycat', 'deviantart', '.jpg', '.jpeg', '.gif', '.png', 'dorkly', 'flickr'	Image
'youtube', 'youtu.be', 'vimeo', 'liveleak', '//vine'	Video
'tumblr', 'wordpress', 'blogspot', 'buzzfeed'	Blog
'facebook', 'twitter', 'snapchat', 'instagram'	Social media
'reddit', 'redd.it', 'reddituploads' and either 'jpg' or 'png'	Reddit post image
'comments'	Redditcomment
'meme', 'me.me'	Meme

For example, a post with 'instagram' and 'jpeg' in the title would add one value for both 'image' and 'social media categories', and would be identified as belonging to both the 'image' and the 'social media' categories, but in none of the other categories. This approach allowed for further comparative analysis between posts based on content type, and guided interpretation.

I did not scrape comments for each post, and they remain beyond the scope of this study (see "Limitations" section).

For "New" and "Top" categories, I consolidated the monthly sets by category and then I deleted the duplicates. This process yielded the following content:

Table 5-2: "New" and "Top" Corpus statistics

Corpus	Time span	Posts	Images
New	Sept 14, 2017 – May 16, 2018	3152	852
Top	May 16, 2017 to May 16, 2018	1492	901

With these two corpora created using the above methods, I engaged in a qualitative content analysis of what I had extracted from r/gaymers. Rather than reading posts chronologically or by score, as they would have been organized by the API, I used the topic modelling software MALLET to group the content into 20 topics for the New Corpus and 12 topics for the Top Corpus. The benefit of using MALLET for this procedure is that it groups the

posts according to semantic usage rather than word token frequency.⁵ I then manually examined the posts in each topic, and developed a list of qualitative codes to conduct post-level analysis—a procedure which would have been time-consuming without MALLET having grouped them.⁶

Similarly, all images were separately analysed. I iteratively developed twenty topics for each post, reviewing the entire set of images once the twenty topics were finalized to re-code the images and determine relevancy to each topic. The image content by type for both New and Top Corpus can be found in Table 5-3 of the Results section.

After the coding was completed, I also conducted a close reading of the r/gaymers subreddit description to determine concordance between this description and the content themes that had emerged (to view the description in its entirety, see Appendix A).

Appendix D: Results

Contributor Metrics

To assess the number of authors and their relative contributions to forum content, I used pivot tables to calculate the total number of unique authors and the volume of their contributions to the subreddit. The results can be seen in Figure 5-2 and Figure 5-3. Each block represents one author, while the size is proportional to the total number of posts they submitted for the corpus (the smaller the block, the less that author contributed).

⁵ In other words, it looks at words in their contextual usage, rather than in their tabulation. For instance, MALLET would group a post like “*Destiny* is a great game!” with other declarative statements, and in a distinct group from a post like “I’m looking for players to play *Destiny* with”, which would be grouped with other interrogatives—despite both posts containing the same word.

⁶ Indeed, while the grouping of content in this way can bias the researcher by suggesting semantic patterns organizing each topic, I concluded that my iterative coding would be biased in a different way by reading the posts in the order created by the API—chronologically for New, and by score for Top. Moreover, it would have been so mentally taxing to determine the semantics of each post that had I not grouped them with MALLET I doubt I would have been able to code these post titles otherwise.

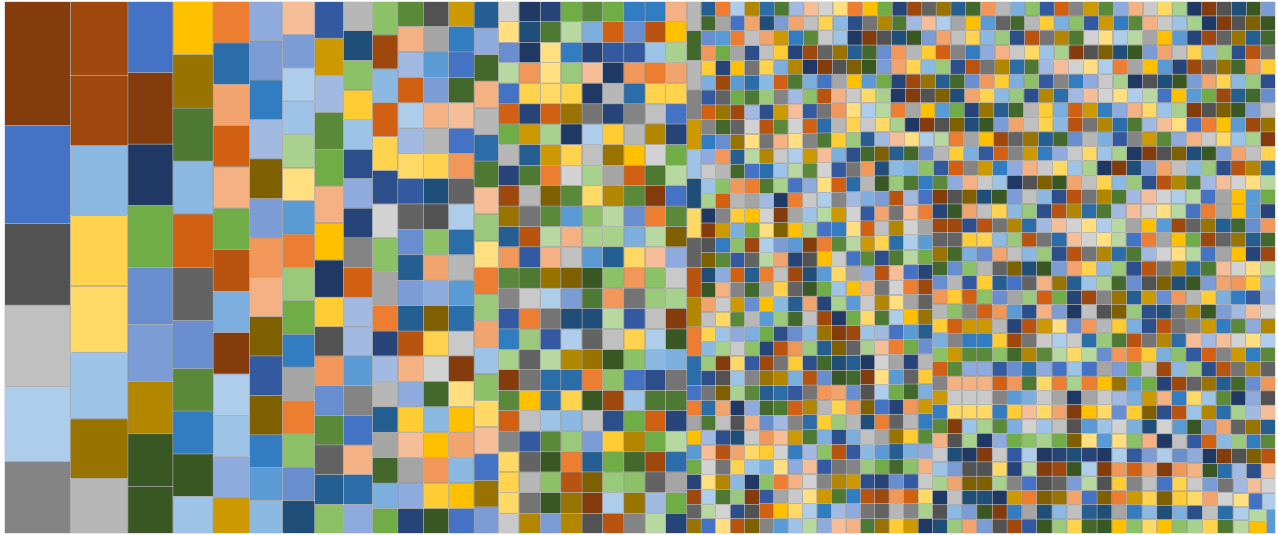


Figure 5-1: 1895 unique authors from Sep 2017 to May 2018 contributing 3156 posts

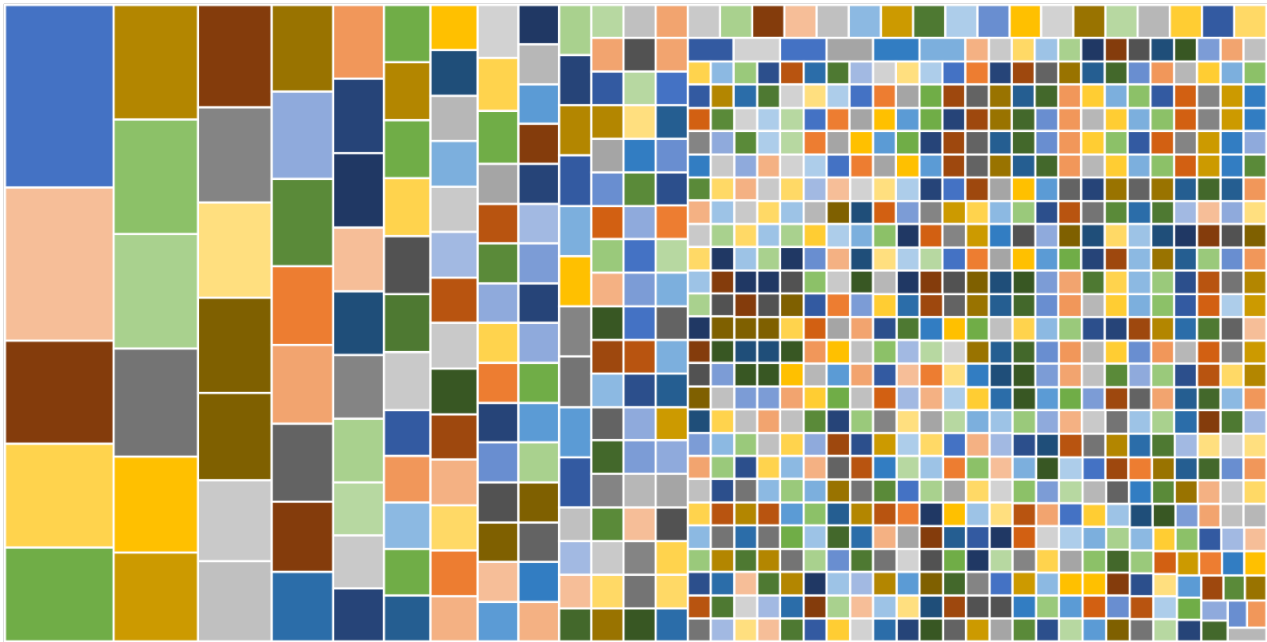


Figure 5-2: 825 unique authors contributing 1493 posts to Top 2018

Posting is not the only way to engage with the subreddit. Members can also contribute to the content on the subreddit in non-linguistic ways by upvoting and downvoting content.

Moreover, this study did not examine the number of unique authors in the comments. In total,

over an 8-month span, members exchanged over 32,200 comments⁷ on 3142 posts, averaging 10.2 comments per post.

Content Metrics

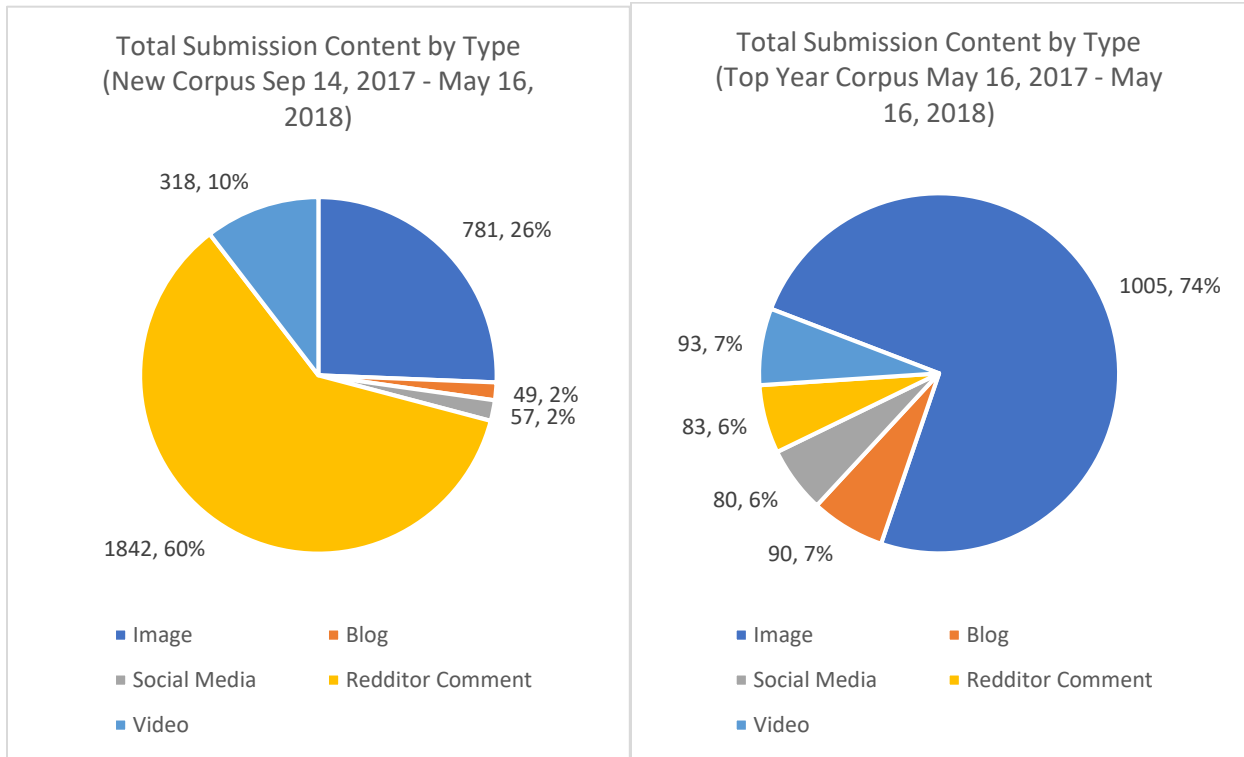


Figure 5-3: Total submission content by type (New Corpus Sep 14, 2017 – May 16, 2018)

Figure 5-4: Total submission content by type (Top Year Corpus May 16, 2017 – May 16, 2018)

From September 14, 2017 to May 16, 2018, there were 3147 posts in the New Corpus, of which 737 made it to the top, or 23%. The ratios for content that made it to the top are shown in Figure 5-6 and Figure 5-7. Nearly 80% of all posts containing blogs were upvoted enough to make it to the Top Corpus, while less than 5% of posts that were Reddit Comments (text-only posts) made it to the Top Corpus. I discuss the significance of these findings towards the end of

⁷ This is not an exact count, as comments that are deleted are not counted by the API. However, that means that there were at least 32,200 comments.

Discussion section, particularly the fact that while nearly 70% of all images made it to the top, some did not, suggesting something of the preferences of this community.

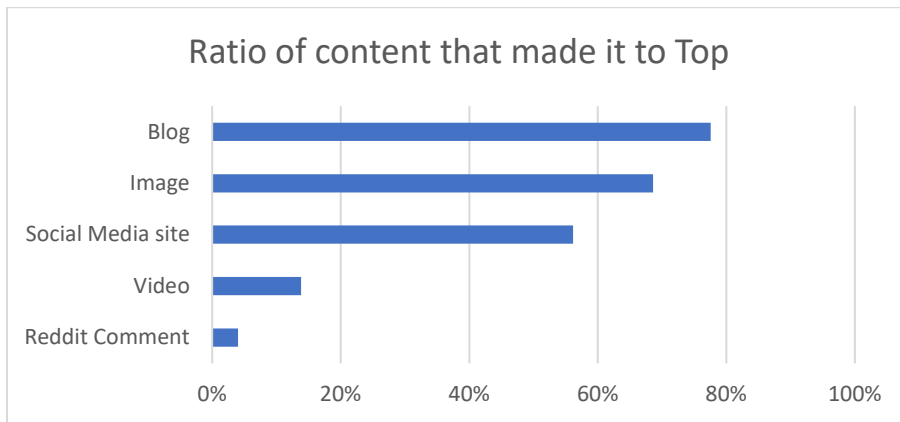


Figure 5-5: Ratio of content that made it to Top (from Sep 14, 2017 – May 16, 2018)

Images

Table 5-3 presents the tabulated results of my image codings for both New and Top Corpus. Images coded as “games” and “homoerotic” received the most number of content across both corpora (note that images often received more than one code).

Table 5-3: Image type for each corpus.

Note: counts will add up to more than 100% because the counts are not mutually exclusive

Type	New	Top
fan art	184	173
game art	20	42
queer making	137	147
queer reading	33	61
human	91	110
cosplay	43	53
homoerotic	119	136
funny	95	99
personal	148	121
gameplay	211	184
meme	46	34
game	494	451
comic	16	24
queer culture	70	107
community play	16	9
miscellaneous	73	82
gay sexuality	80	103
NSFW	42	57
chat	9	6
repost	19	11
gaming rig	25	25
game mod	17	23

Figure 5-6 presents the ratio of image content that made it to the Top. Images with cosplay almost always received enough upvotes to propel these posts to the top. Like Figure 5-7, the types of content that get upvoted to the top suggest something of the practices and preferences of this community, as I discuss below.

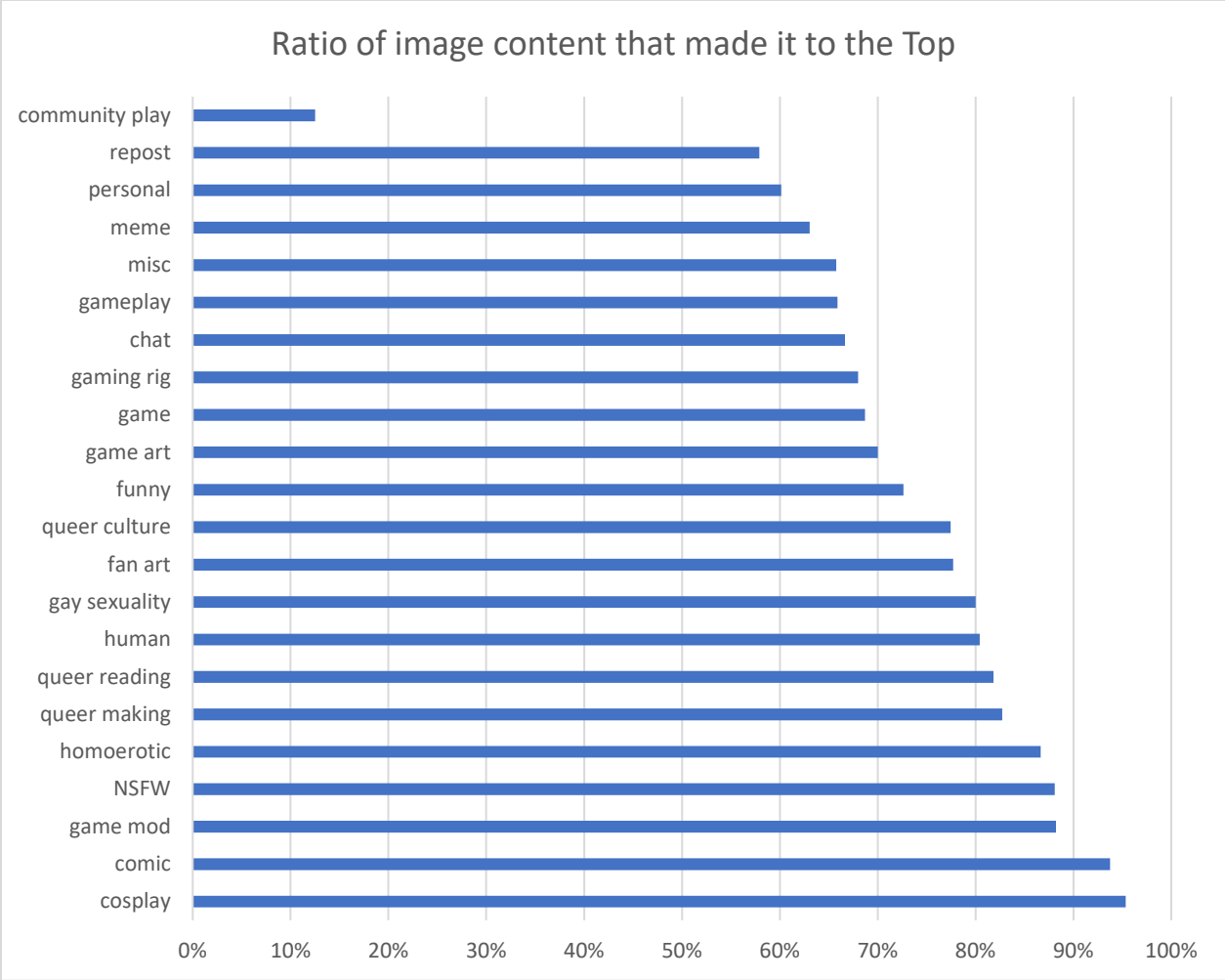


Figure 5-6: Ratio of image content that made it to the Top from New

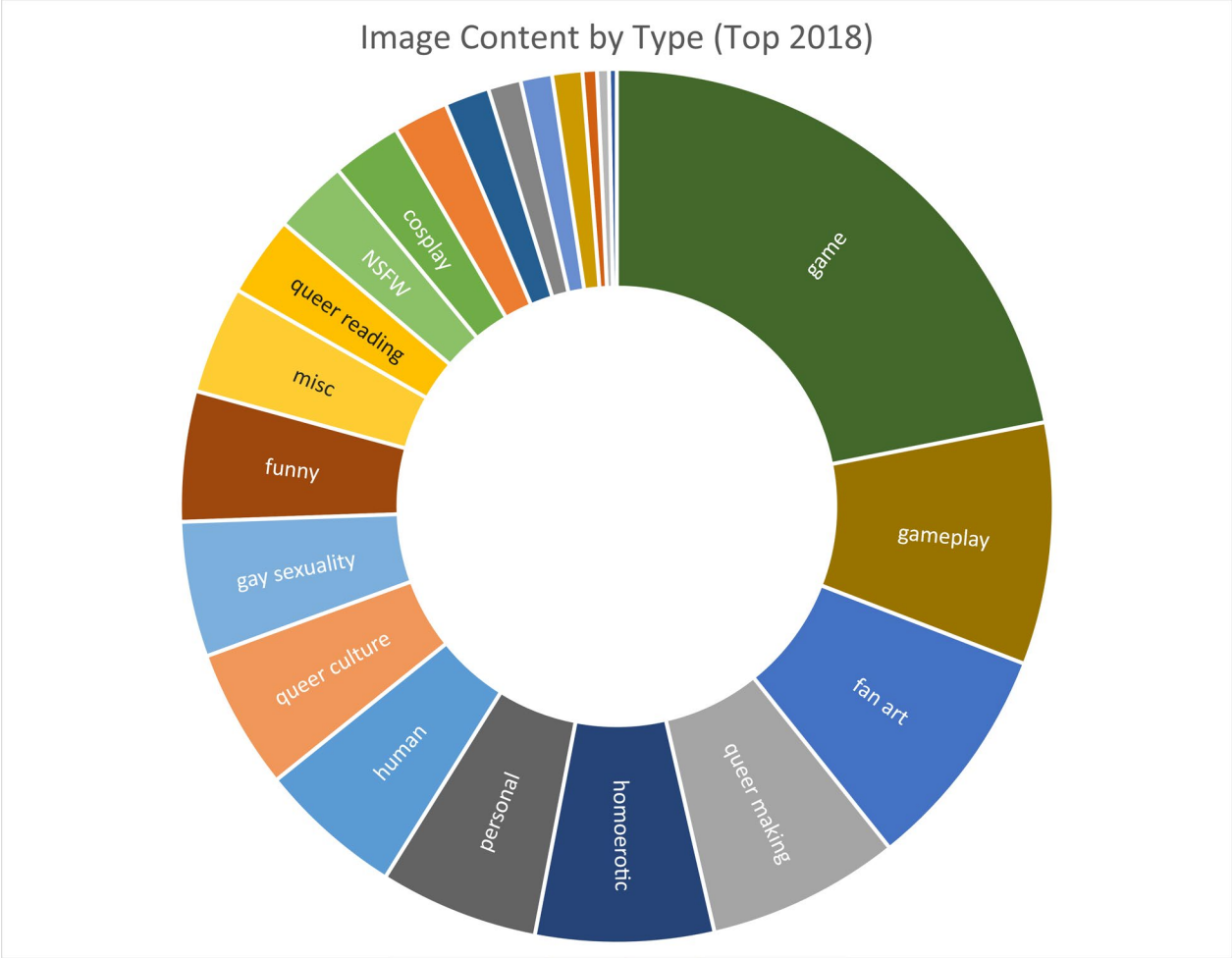


Figure 5-7: Image content by Type (Top 2018)

Figure 5-8 displays the volume of image content in the Top, organized by type. Images coded as “game”, for instance, represent the most type of content at 451 results. This figure does not represent the proportion of image types because images could receive more than one code (i.e. a piece of fan art that showed a character from a game in the nude would be coded as “game”, “fan art”, “homoerotic” and, depending on the activity, perhaps even “gay sexuality”⁸). Finally, because of the high ratio of images from the New corpus appeared in the Top corpus, it was decided not to include a graph for the New corpus image content type.

⁸ Initially this code was created to distinguish between other types of sexual activity between other identities, such as lesbian, trans, etc, but these alternatives were not found in the image content. The original code was left as is to emphasize this fact.

Written Content

Correlation matrixes were created for each corpus using Matplotlib, however the only meaningful correlation found was between score number and comment number, meaning that posts with high scores also had a higher number of comments proportionate to the rest of the corpus. (In other words, posts that received a high score tended to also receive more comments, and vice-versa, but it is unclear whether high score caused more comments, or vice-versa.)

Using MALLET software, topic models were made for all posts in both the New and Top corpora. Results are listed in Table 5-4 and Table 5-5.

Table 5-4: Topic Models New Corpus

Topic 1	asking players their thoughts, mostly related to game content (surveying)
Topic 2	seeking other players and 'gaymers', to play and to watch streams
Topic 3	seeking other players for specific titles
Topic 4	sharing general reflections, mostly related to game content
Topic 5	expressing sexual attraction to video game characters
Topic 6	coordinating clan meetups (and mostly about <i>Destiny 2</i> and <i>Injustice</i>)
Topic 7	discussing <i>Stardew Valley</i> and <i>Sea of Thieves</i>
Topic 8	discussing <i>Overwatch</i> and seeking fellow players (particularly for pc)
Topic 9	announcing and seeking guilds for various titles, mainly <i>WoW</i> , and particularly with LGBT focus
Topic 10	sharing sexually explicit and otherwise homoerotic content (most of the content tagged "NSFW"—not safe for work—gets placed here)
Topic 11	seeking other players for <i>League of Legends</i>
Topic 12	seeking <i>WoW</i> and <i>Monster Hunter</i> players
Topic 13	seeking players, mainly for <i>Friday the 13th</i> and <i>Final Fantasy</i> online games
Topic 14	seeking players for <i>Diablo 3</i>
Topic 15	seeking players
Topic 16	seeking players, mainly <i>Dark Souls 3</i> and discussions of boyfriends
Topic 17	seeking gaymer friends
Topic 18	seeking players for <i>PUBG</i> and <i>Dead by Daylight</i> , mainly on Steam
Topic 19	discussing mobile and handheld games, mainly 3DS
Topic 20	sharing PSN IDs and seeking players for <i>COD</i>

Table 5-5: Topic Models Top Corpus

Topic 1	sharing sexual content, mostly related to McCree (many NSFW)
Topic 2	expressing love (for games, for characters, for “bfs”—boyfriends or best friends)
Topic 3	reading gay culture in games
Topic 4	sharing sexy images of game characters
Topic 5	discussions about <i>Dream Daddy</i> and daddies types in games
Topic 6	sharing experiences (‘the day I ‘finally’ did something)
Topic 7	discussions about bear types in games (and expressing sexual attraction)
Topic 8	announcing gay representation and game releases (which may or may not include gay representation)
Topic 9	announcing personal relationships and issues related to gay marriage
Topic 10	announcing sexual attraction and crushes on game characters and gay visibility in games (particularly the controversy regarding the dating options in <i>Mass Effect: Andromeda</i>)
Topic 11	expressing love for game content and gay content in games
Topic 12	seeking gay content and representation in mainstream culture

