

**Gay Dreams and Feeling Machines:  
Queering Mediating Technologies in Performance**

by

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## **Abstract**

What would it mean to let ourselves—as trans-feminist and queer (TFQ) subjects—be transformed by mediating technologies in ways that are creative, and not extractivist? In an increasingly precarious climate for artists and humanities researchers, TFQ creators working at the intersections of art, research, and technology have spearheaded subversive approaches to working with emerging technologies in order to undermine their functionality as tools of neoliberal progress, social control, and state violence; instead, they emphasize the timeliness of crafting alternate technological-poetic realities through creative practice. This dissertation builds from TFQ approaches to research-creation, phenomenology, and new media to design and analyze the conceptual-material ‘queering’ of three emergent new media practices—virtual reality design, intermedial theatre, and AI text generation—to imagine and model their creative directions. The first case study, “Bisexual Bedroom Imaginaries,” retroactively analyzes a queer virtual reality design practice which rejects the positioning of virtual reality as an ‘empathy machine’ to promote an experience of ‘identity tourism,’ instead positioning VR as a tool to perform and safeguard sensitive queer ephemera. The second theorizes a queer intermedial

theatre practice through the research and development of “JANE,” a one-act speculative fiction drama which uses shadow-based illusions to externalize and aestheticize critical TFQ ethico-political considerations of deepfake technology. Finally, the third involves the fine-tuning of a GPT-2 model to produce queer-feminist lyrical poetry for performance, interrogating the simultaneous possibilities and limits of engaging artificially intelligent models in collaborative creations of knowledge. This project ultimately demonstrates the possibilities of crafting alternate relations with technologies that may already be oriented against TFQ subjects, arguing for the urgency of practice-based interventional approaches to new media, technology, and design studies to procure the continued survival of TFQ people, politics, and poetics.

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## Introduction

From algorithmic theatre<sup>1</sup> to electronic literature,<sup>2</sup> wearable electronics<sup>3</sup> to virtual reality experiences,<sup>4</sup> the integration of emerging technologies into contemporary art and research practice has not only contributed to a radical transformation of pre-established mediums, methods, and academic disciplines, but also to an essential shift in how we do arts and humanities thinking. Arts and humanities disciplines have conventionally concerned themselves with “analytic and critical methods of inquiry derived from [...] the unique ability of the human spirit to express itself,”<sup>5</sup> differentiated in subject and method from the biological, physical, and social sciences; their branches of knowledge foreground the study of languages, literatures, fine arts, and philosophy, with contemporary offshoots including film and performance theory, media studies, critical race studies, and gender and sexuality studies. Despite their continued presence on North American university and college campuses, the humanities have been morbidly and widely declared “dead” or “in crisis,” citing questions of relevancy in a market dominated by science and computation, declining enrollment rates, institutional budget cuts, outdated curriculum, and a lack of concrete job prospects following graduation.<sup>6</sup> At the same time,

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<sup>1</sup> Annie Dorsen, “On Algorithmic Theatre,” *Theater* 42, no. 2 (2012), accessed 26 February 2025, <https://theatermagazine.org/web-features/article/algorithmic-theater>.

<sup>2</sup> J.R. Carpenter, “In the event of a variable text,” *Convergence* 23, no. 1 (2017): 98-114

<sup>3</sup> micha cárdenas, “Trans of Color Poetics: Stitching Bodies, Concepts, and Algorithms,” *S&F Online* 13.3 (2016), accessed 15 January 2025, <https://shorturl.at/ndyO7>; Zach Blas, *Unknown Ideals* (New York: Sternberg, 2022)

<sup>4</sup> Keziah Wallis and Miriam Ross, “Fourth VR: Indigenous virtual reality practice,” *Convergence* 27, no. 2, (2021): 313-319; Joseph Dunne et al., “Good night, sleep tight (remix),” *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 14, no. 2 (2018): 215-223.

<sup>5</sup> Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “humanities,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 24 November 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/humanities>.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Schmidt, “The Humanities Are in Crisis,” *The Atlantic*, 23 August 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/08/the-humanities-face-a-crisisof-confidence/567565/>; Nathan Heller, “The End of the English Major,” *The New Yorker*, 27 February 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/03/06/the-end-of-the-english-major>; Benjamin Winterhalter, “The Morbid Fascination With the Death of the Humanities,” *The Atlantic*, 6 June 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/06/the-morbid-fascination-with-the-death-of-the-humanities/37>

professional artists and regional arts organizations are facing devastating cuts and forced changes to programming, provoked in part by similar questions haunting the humanities research sector, not to mention the losses faced by working professionals as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>7</sup> In the midst of this precarious climate for arts and humanities thinkers and researchers, transnational trans-feminist and queer creators working at the intersections of art and technology—for instance, J.R. Carpenter,<sup>8</sup> Stephanie Dinkins,<sup>9</sup> Zach Blas,<sup>10</sup> micha cárdenas,<sup>11</sup> Annie Dorsen,<sup>12</sup> and many more—have leveraged practice-based artistic research methods towards new ways of doing and thinking in their respective fields, contingent on an erosion of disciplinary boundaries between art, science, and technology. Perhaps it isn't that the humanities are dead, per se, but that their survival relies on their ability to adapt to an increasingly technological and media-saturated epoch. This is the place, both conceptual and methodological, from whence my project begins.

Humanistic study, as noted by Dr. David Arndt, is theorized as “not primarily scholarly or scientific, but political, ethical, vocational, and spiritual.”<sup>13</sup> Arndt writes that the humanities are “thrown into crisis when [...] detached from their original meaning and purpose as liberal arts, and when the research model eclipses the ethical, political, vocational, and spiritual dimensions of education.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the notion of humanities education for its own sake—or for the sake of

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<sup>7</sup> James McWilliams, “The Humanities are Dead. Long Live the Humanities,” *Pacific Standard*, 13 March 2018, <https://psmag.com/education/long-live-the-humanities/>.

<sup>8</sup> Josh O’Kane, “State of the Arts: Canada’s cultural industry is feeling the squeeze,” *The Globe and Mail*, 12 June 2024, <https://shorturl.at/eKN10>; Steve Russell, “Toronto’s arts organizations are in decline. Here’s a brief overview of the struggling arts scene,” *The Toronto Star*, 14 March 2024, <https://shorturl.at/ncA6O>.

<sup>9</sup> J.R. Carpenter, “In the event of a variable text,” *Convergence* 23, no. 1 (2017): 98-114

<sup>10</sup> Stephanie Dinkins, “Conversations with Bina48,” *Stephanie Dinkins*, accessed 24 November 2024, <https://www.stephaniedinkins.com/conversations-with-bina48.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Zach Blas, *Unknown Ideals* (New York: Sternberg, 2022)

<sup>12</sup> micha cárdenas, *Poetic Operations: Trans of Color Art in Digital Media* (Durham: Duke UP, 2021)

<sup>13</sup> Annie Dorsen, “On Algorithmic Theatre,” *Theater* 42, no. 2 (2012), accessed 26 February 2025, <https://theatermagazine.org/web-features/article/algorithmic-theater>.

<sup>14</sup> David Arndt, “The Two Cultures and the Crisis in Humanities,” *Forum On Public Policy Online* (2007), accessed 24 November 2024, <https://shorturl.at/ZLpi7>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

capital-H humanity, itself an essentialism—may be philosophically compelling and deeply understood by those who work in the field, but how it competes in an all-administrative university whose funding and prestige hinges on its employment rates among graduates is another question altogether.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the arts and humanities—as they have been conceptualized, theorized, and practiced in higher learning institutions—have been amply critiqued by posthumanist scholars who challenge the concept of the human at its core. If, as Rosi Braidotti has stated, the concept of the human is historically and culturally entrenched in an essentialized white, male, heterosexual, colonial, able-bodied subjectivity, then the humanities as a whole may also reflect that mold, suffering from an entrenchment in white, Eurocentric, colonial perspectives.<sup>16</sup> These contradictions at the heart of humanistic study have influenced scholarly pivots towards a critical “posthumanities,”<sup>17</sup> which asserts that a “posthuman knowing subject” must be comprehended as a “relational embodied and embedded, affective and accountable entity.”<sup>18</sup> While also conceptually compelling, the marriage of ‘posthumanities’ theory and practice is contentious as humanities departments cling to an old disciplinary guard; what’s more, the concept of the posthumanities may be haunted by the question of who, historically, has had access to the category of ‘the human,’ and whether we have indeed warranted a move beyond.<sup>19</sup> All of this provokes the impossible question: Can the very project of ‘humanistic’ study, as it has been historically conceptualized and articulated, sustain itself in the face of poststructural, postcolonial, and postmodern critical and cultural shifts?

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<sup>15</sup> “Best universities for graduate jobs: Global Employability University Ranking 2025,” The Times Higher Education, 14 November 2024, <https://shorturl.at/bJwSZ>.

<sup>16</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (New York: Polity, 2013): 2.

<sup>17</sup> Rosi Braidotti, “A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, vol. 2 (2018): 1-31.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology* (New York: Polity, 2019), 32.

Arndt's work also poses art and research at odds with one-another, dedicated to fundamentally different outcomes and spheres of influence. Whereas the intersections of art and research may establish fertile grounds for humanistic studies, it may also be true that what we call 'art' can actively resist the processes we name 'research.' Whereas the precise definition of 'art' is contentious within contemporary philosophy, we can broadly understand it as a wide breadth of cultural activities, aesthetic practices, and expressions of human imagination that result in the public production and consumption of works appreciated for their beauty, as well as emotional and political power.<sup>20</sup> Research, on the other hand, is a creative and systematic investigation into a given topic in order to increase a knowledge base, establish facts, and come to conclusions based on intricate methodical study. Artistic institutions—including galleries, theatres, museums, and libraries—are largely geared towards a public audience, despite their many barriers to access.<sup>21</sup> Research institutions and their outputs, on the other hand, are largely gatekept and reserved for employees and tuition-paying student bodies. With different audiences, standards of taste, politics, and so on, one might conclude that any collusion of art and academic research must fundamentally acknowledge its core contradictions and perhaps irreconcilable differences.

Still, there exists a plethora of official practice-based disciplines in the arts—from practice-as-research<sup>22</sup> to artistic research<sup>23</sup> to the more geographically specific “research

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<sup>20</sup> “The Definition of Art,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Last revised 30 July 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/art-definition/>.

<sup>21</sup> Raphaela Platow, “Extending the Invitation: Strategies for Welcoming Visitors and Reducing Barriers to Access,” *American Alliance of Museums*, 26 April 2024, <https://shorturl.at/qkh8I>; Jennifer Justice, “Disabled Artists, Audience, and the Museum as the place of Those Who Have No Part,” in *Curating Access: Disability Art Activism and Creative Accommodation*, ed. Amanda Cachia (London: Routledge, 2023), 61-73.

<sup>22</sup> Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (London: Palgrave, 2013), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Julian Klein, “What is artistic research?” *Journal for Artistic Research*, 23 April 2017, <https://jar-online.net/en/what-artistic-research>.

creation”<sup>24</sup>—that paint a more thorough picture of research and its broader relations to art, thereby challenging these categorical distinctions. Citing the OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms, the *Journal for Artistic Research* defines research as “any creative systematic activity undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge about humanity, culture and society, and the use of this knowledge to devise new applications.”<sup>25</sup> If we take this definition at face value, we can understand research as inclusive of many activities beyond the scope of the hard sciences, embracing not only systematic but creative forms of inquiry. Both science and art are motivated by a desire to know something about an unknown or ill-understood phenomena, however Julian Klein writes that “research is not artistic when or even only when it is carried out by artists (as helpful as their participation may often be) but rather earns the attribute “artistic” no matter where, when or from whom it was undertaken—on its specific quality: the mode of artistic experience.”<sup>26</sup> This question of when research might be considered art therefore hinges on a highly subjective prescription of sensory experience, or “to look at oneself from outside a frame and simultaneously enter into it.”<sup>27</sup> How, then, considering the precarious collusion of art and research and acknowledging its institutional tensions and limitations, are we to theorize and situate ‘art’ as a process of inquiry for the purposes of this academic dissertation?

For one answer, I turn to Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin who champion a theory of aesthetics that takes its departure from eighteenth-century German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten’s “aesthesis”<sup>28</sup> which emphasizes material experience and “the way the

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<sup>24</sup> “Definition of Terms,” *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council*, accessed 2 December 2024, <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/definitions-eng.aspx>.

<sup>25</sup> Julian Klein, “What is artistic research?” *Journal for Artistic Research*, 23 April 2017, <https://jar-online.net/en/what-artistic-research>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> “18th Century German Aesthetics,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last revised 13 July 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetics-18th-german/>.

sensual world greets the sensate body, and [...] the affective forces that are generated in such meetings.”<sup>29</sup> In examining how artworks related to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the Indian Residential School system “have impacts that are *felt*—whether through emotion or sensory experience—and to what degree these impacts result in change,” Robinson and Martin coin the term “aesthetic action [...] to describe how a range of sensory stimuli—image, sound, and movement—have social and political effects through our affective engagements with them.”<sup>30</sup> By analyzing the anti- and decolonial sociopolitical affects of aesthetic and sensory interventions, Robinson and Martin theorize new media aesthetics as creative forms of survival, sociality, and world-making.

I come to this project as an artist, humanities scholar, and white queer woman. In the five-year-long span that this dissertation was conceived of and written (2020-2025), most of these markers of identity have come increasingly under attack by a radicalized political right which shuns subjective and humanistic inquiry,<sup>31</sup> condemns higher education,<sup>32</sup> strikes arts and culture funding,<sup>33</sup> threatens paramount 2SLGBTQIA+ and women’s rights,<sup>34</sup> and invests in ongoing heterocolonial fantasies of white supremacy. For these reasons, this project is as steeped in academic-creative inquiry as in survival. I strongly believe in the transformative potential of practice-based artistic research—even in spite of its core tensions and contradictions—as a radical interventional force in our institutions, as in our communities. I am especially provoked

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<sup>29</sup> Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin, “Introduction: The Body Is a Resonant Chamber” in *Arts of Engagement: taking aesthetic action in and beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier UP, 2016), 9.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Tristin Hopper, “FIRST READING: Inside the abyss of Canadian taxpayer-funded humanities research,” *The National Post*, 28 October 2024, <https://shorturl.at/VazvS>.

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Dummitt, “Universities should drop the wokeness or brace for conservative reforms,” *The National Post*, 1 September 2024, <https://shorturl.at/k04NI>.

<sup>33</sup> Anja Karadeglija, “With Conservatives promising to ‘defund,’ could the next election kill the CBC?” *The Globe and Mail*, 12 January 2025, <https://shorturl.at/iyrff>.

<sup>34</sup> Florence Ashley and JJ Wright, “Danielle Smith’s new policies make all Albertan youth unsafe,” *The Conversation*, 25 November 2024, <https://shorturl.at/LRtC8>; Martha Paynter, “Roe v. Wade: Canada can respond to U.S. bans by improving access to abortion care here,” *Dal News*, 8 July 2022, <https://shorturl.at/FCFpN>.

by creative trans-feminist and queer interventions into studies of emerging technology and design, whose disciplinary face is largely white and male.<sup>35</sup> In a culture suffused with design technologies which may contribute to the sustenance of sociopolitical inequalities, the urgency of crafting new relations with these technologies cannot be understated. Practice-based artistic research allows trans-feminist and queer artists, researchers, community activists, and more to participate in the design of themselves and their communities, thinking technologies radically otherwise in practice. Research-creation is thereby understood as an intervention, perhaps even a mode of resistance, into colonial, individualistic, and extractivist cultures both within and outside of the university.

Following Natalie Loveless, I champion the “insertion of voices and practices into the academic everyday that work to trouble disciplinary relays of knowledge and power,” including trans-feminist, queer, and Indigenous knowledges; in light of escalating attacks on marginalized artists and researchers, this project is invested in theorizing a “feminist university of creativity, experiment, and [...] a mode of *eros* that is committed, cathected, and sustaining.”<sup>36</sup> In drawing lines between anti- and decolonial approaches to art and new media studies to trans-feminist and queer processes, this project asks how new media arts and its associated mediating technologies can engage the sensate body in profoundly trans-feminist and queer ways, creating alternative modalities of relationality, desire, sexuality, gender, and kinship. Instead of rendering Indigenous and queer approaches selfsame, here I stress the importance of drawing lines of connection between Robinson and Martin’s ‘aesthetic action’ and emergent trans-feminist-queer survival

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<sup>35</sup> Debbie Chachra, “Why I Am Not A Maker,” *The Atlantic*, 23 January 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/01/why-i-am-not-a-maker/384767/>; Laura Bliss, “How ‘Maintainers,’ Not ‘Innovators,’ Make The World Turn,” *Bloomberg*, 8 April 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-04-08/forget-the-innovators-maintainers-conference-advances-alter-native-history-of-technology>

<sup>36</sup> Natalie Loveless, *How To Make Art At The End Of The World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation* (Durham: Duke UP, 2019), 3.



strategies within contemporary new media practices, especially as both are contingent on social constructionist and deconstructivist stratagems. Drawing from Jas Rault and T.L. Cowan's lesbian-leaning trans-feminist-queer method of "heavy processing," I wish to stress the importance of "contend[ing] with and divest[ing] from the prevailing systems of power and influence that shape the information with which we produce knowledge [...] to prioritize social systems of accountability, uncertainty, self-critique, deferred authority, non-extractive knowledge making and sharing, resource redistribution and reparation, fair labour, and reciprocity."<sup>37</sup>

I approach all this from a position of non-innocence,<sup>38</sup> which is to say that as an academic researcher within a settler-colonial institution with politics differing widely from my own, I have every subconscious capacity to reinstate and reproduce the violences that I work against. In bringing non-academic projects into an academic institution, thus subjecting them to institutional surveillance, this project is inherently contradictory; it is pursued, however, not in the spirit of creating ivory tower research for the academy, but in crafting methods of institutional survival grounded in trans-feminist and queer politics and poetics.

Following an introduction of my methods and literature review, this dissertation project contains three extended case study chapters, each exploring the conceptual-material "queering" of a new media practice at the intersections of art, research, technology, and design. Following Kara Keeling, I understand 'queering' as "naming an orientation toward various and shifting aspects of existing reality and the social norms they govern, such that it makes available pressing questions about, eccentric and/or unexpected relationships in, and possibly alternatives to those social norms."<sup>39</sup> I have used the term 'mediating technologies' throughout this dissertation to

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<sup>37</sup> T.L. Cowan and Jas Rault, *Heavy Processing* (Santa Barbara: Punctum Books, 2024), 95.

<sup>38</sup> See: Donna Haraway, *Staying With The Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke UP, 2016); Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2016)

<sup>39</sup> Kara Keeling, "QueerOS," *Cinema Journal* 53, no. 2 (2014): 153.

describe my three case studies as each of them theorizes an active collaboration between myself as an artist-researcher and a digitally mediated self as produced by and through the technologies. From virtual reality to intermedial theatre practices to algorithmic poetry, these processes within new media design—designed to engage me through a broad band of sensory experience, stretching across visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic spheres—allow me to encounter my own words, images, experiences, histories, and desires in a somewhat remixed way. My retrospective analyses of these practices allow me to make sense of the kinds of knowledges, relations, and desires enabled by that distance, which then allows me to encounter and critique the representational economies around my own emergence as a white, queer, femme subject.

Between August of 2022 and June of 2024, I undertook three laboratory explorations of performance practice that comprise individual case study chapters; while grounded in the theory and practice of research-creation, each process was informed by close readings and sensory analyses of trans-feminist and queer contemporary new media artworks as guided by trans-feminist and queer phenomenologies. My first case study, entitled “Bisexual Bedroom Imaginaries,” involves the creation of a surrealistic archive of queer ephemera designed for viewing in virtual reality; this project analyzes an emergent queer virtual reality design practice which rejects the positioning of virtual reality as an “empathy machine” to promote an experience of “identity tourism.”<sup>40</sup> This chapter is informed by close readings of artworks by Jordan Tannahill, Dylan Paré, Seanna Musgrave, and Jacolby Satterwhite. My second case study theorizes a queer intermedial theatre practice through the research and development of “JANE,” a one-act speculative fiction drama about college students embroiled in a virtual reality deepfake

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<sup>40</sup> Josh Constine, “Virtual Reality, the Empathy Machine,” *Tech Crunch*, 1 February 2025, <https://shorturl.at/fFHM6>; Caleb Garling, “Virtual Reality, Empathy and the Next Journalism,” *Wired Magazine*, accessed 30 April 2024, <https://shorturl.at/fsvLS>; Ana Luisa Sánchez Laws, “Can Immersive Journalism Enhance Empathy?” *Digital Journalism* 8, no. 2 (2017): 213-228.

pornography scandal. This project uses shadow and silhouette-based illusions to externalize and aestheticize critical ethico-political considerations of deepfake technology; with analyses of intermedial practices by Chiel Kattenbelt and Freda Chapple, Joanne Scott, Katie Mitchell, and Louise Orwin, this chapter asks how *queer* intermedial theatre can leverage its technical affordances to explore complex questions around queer-feminist identities, representations, and political power. Finally, my third case study involves the fine-tuning of a GPT-2 system—named the Trans-Feminist-Queer Transformer or T.F.Q.T.—to produce queer-feminist lyrical poetry for performance. With critical analyses of works by J.R. Carpenter, Allison Parrish, and Annie Dorsen, this chapter interrogates the simultaneous possibilities and limits of engaging artificially intelligent models in collaborative creations of knowledge, asking to what extent trans-feminist-queer experiences and desires can find resonance with machine generated performance text.

Each of my case study chapters features partial documentation of the creative practices in process, however links to more complete documentations can be found in the Appendices section of this dissertation. In Appendix A, a playable version of “Bisexual Bedroom Imaginaries” is publicly available via the peer-reviewed *Hyperrhiz: New Media Cultures* journal; although this work was conceptualized and designed for virtual reality, this version can be played on any desktop computer to give readers added context. In Appendix B, an archival of the January 2024 ‘JANE’ design workshop, along with three other compilation videos of design images, are available and accessible via YouTube link. Finally, Appendix C features a SoundCloud link to a song created with the Trans-Feminist-Queer Transformer, as well as a YouTube video taken by me in the BMO Lab for Creative Research as I play with the model to generate textual output. The challenge of this dissertation rests in its readers’ inability to experience each of the three

works in a live performance setting, as they were intended to be encountered. Still, even as this project is invested in analyses of process over access to any final product, this documentation has been positioned to convey some sense of meaning, experience, and engagement, however partial.

In situating my work as a white, queer, femme settler artist and scholar, my project establishes conceptual-material groundwork for white, femme, and queer imaginaries and political possibilities. Following Robyn Wiegman, I reject a paradigm for critical whiteness studies that “hopes to undo the multiple effects of dominant identity formations by projecting an increasingly empowered self-knowing subject.”<sup>41</sup> Whiteness studies—as a symptom of Western humanist tradition, an institutionalized academic project cloaked in abolitionist rhetoric—can itself be perceived as a move to innocence,<sup>42</sup> plagued by its inability to “bridge the gap between the social production of the meaning of whiteness and the privileges that repeatedly accrued to the corporeal embodiments of white skin.”<sup>43</sup> While this project inherently emphasizes my visibility as a white queer subject, it also foregrounds the processes—sociocultural, linguistic, symbolic—by which this visibility takes place within a reflexive framework of non-innocence, non-mastery, play, and possibility.

The term “femme,” adopted from lesbian culture, is a descriptor which signifies a queer presentation or performance of femininity in behaviour and/or appearance, divorced from cisheteronormative patriarchal aims; referencing Jessie Jeffrey Dunn Rovinelli’s *So Pretty*, McKenzie Wark delightfully leverages the statement “FEMME AS IN FUCK YOU” as an antifascist battle cry towards queer and trans liberation.<sup>44</sup> In my retrospective analyses of “Bisexual Bedroom Imaginaries,” “JANE,” and the “Trans-Feminist Queer Transformer,” I take

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<sup>41</sup> Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons* (Durham: Duke UP, 2012), 140.

<sup>42</sup> Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 17.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Mackenzie Wark, “Femme as in Fuck You,” *e-flux Journal* 102 (2019), [https://editor.e-flux-systems.com/files/282888\\_e-flux-journal-femme-as-in-fuck-you.pdf](https://editor.e-flux-systems.com/files/282888_e-flux-journal-femme-as-in-fuck-you.pdf).

a specific interest in how femininity is performed and constructed, and how mediating technological tools can provide an opportunity to encounter, disrupt, challenge, remix, and/or play with its associated tropes. While acknowledging my privilege as a cisgender white, queer, and femme practitioner-researcher, this project investigates the representational economies associated with each of these categories. Finally, circling back to Kara Keeling, my use of the term ‘queer’ signifies a disruption of normative uses of mediating creative design technologies.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout this dissertation, I take up the term “trans-feminist and queer” to describe the politics and poetics associated with these conceptual-material experiments. Following T.L. Cowan and Jas Rault, I understand that “trans-feminist and queer names formations of feminism and queerness that centre trans lives and analyses; transness that is inseparable from queer and feminist lives and analyses; queerness engaged with (and learning from) trans and feminist lives of analyses.”<sup>46</sup> Taking up “trans-feminist and queer,” as opposed to simply ‘queer’ and ‘feminist’ reflects my ongoing commitments within and beyond my research communities, both academic and artistic.

At its very core, this project is about increasing the capacity of imagining trans-feminist and queer alternatives to the present. It asks what it would mean to let ourselves—as trans-feminist and queer subjects—transform technologies in ways that are creative and not extractivist, leveraging institutional resources towards poetic and political ends. It imagines horizons for humanistic inquiry as grounded in conceptual-material explorations of mediating technologies, in order to tease out their philosophies and imaginaries. Finally, it explores the generative potentialities of developing intimate trans-feminist-queer relations with mediating technology to imagine and model its creative directions.

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<sup>45</sup> Kara Keeling, “QueerOS,” *Cinema Journal* 53, no. 2 (2014), 153.

<sup>46</sup> T.L. Cowan and Jas Rault, *Heavy Processing* (Santa Barbara: Punctum Books, 2024): xvii.