

CODA

PALEOGRAPHY AND MANUSCRIPT studies are profoundly imaginative disciplines. In order to make connections between the vicissitudes of manuscript transmission and survival and the real lived experience of scribes, readers, and users, scholars have to think creatively through the material record. To some extent, such connections require us to dispense with our own material-textual realities and put ourselves into the mindset of the medieval scribe. Working back through the peculiar and the odd, or even the “usual” and normalized, in the manuscript record requires a stepping back through and layering up of the material interactions a book has had across its lifetime. Such manoeuvres take imagination.

For the study of minoritized histories, imaginative approaches are not just a useful analytical tool, but an indispensable method for producing just and non-violent/violating narratives about the past. In my introduction, I quoted Saidiya Hartman, who formulates *critical fabulation* as a mode of “advancing a series of speculative arguments and exploiting the capacities of the subjunctive (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities), in fashioning a narrative, which is based upon archival research, and by that I mean a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history...to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling.” The structures and strictures of the archive—understood in the Derridean sense of both the physical space of the collection and the items bounded together within that space—have required scholars like Hartman to find ways of seeing truth through absence and creating wholeness out of the fragmentary. Critical fabulation “strain[s] against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enact[s] the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration.”¹ Trans archives, and the methods we have been taught to parse them, are similarly fragmented. By offering a subjunctive past (“if it were”), we open imaginative possibilities for the present future.

1 Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 11.

The interventions in this book have asked readers to set aside some conventional approaches to manuscript studies method in favour of imagining something other. In fact, we might contend that imagining something other is just what trans people *do*. Realizing that one is trans requires a person to step outside of what they have been told—by friends, family, and/or society—and ask, how might things be different? How could they be better? And while the world might not always be there to help, things can be better. Trans affirming healthcare has some of the highest satisfaction rates of any medical interventive.² Permanent desistance rates after hormone therapy rank as low as 4 percent.³ But even without considering affirmative medical intervention (which is not sought by all trans and gender non-conforming people), Karen Barad contends that by understanding our embodiment as a series of interactions with the world around us, we enter into a perpetual state of re-becoming: “Not imaginaries of some future or elsewhere to arrive at or be achieved as a political goal but, rather, imaginaries with material existences in the thick now of the present.”⁴ We have cultivated present futures by imagining that change is possible.

This book asks manuscript scholars to reorient their imaginative skills: “to imagine what liberatory archival practice may look like.”⁵ I have suggested some possibilities—tactics—in medieval manuscript studies for navigating the white supremacist cisheteropatriarchal structures that marked the field’s formation, the legacies of which perpetuate in modern methodologies. Some have been more successful than others: they were experiments, after all! And not all will appeal to every reader. Our experiences, like those of our historical counterparts, are culturally contingent and socially embedded. However, these approaches, I suggest, offer avenues to strengthen,

2 James, Herman, and Heng-Lehtinen, *Early Insights*, 17, reports that 94 percent of those who had received gender affirming care reported an improvement in their well being and quality of life. Bustos, Bustos, Mascaro, Del Corral, Forte, Ciudad, Kim, Langstein, and Manrique, “Regret after Gender-Affirmation Surgery” reports that the regret rates after gender affirming surgery are less than 1percent. An erratum was published in the same journal in 2022 in which “The systematic review was re-conducted, and the meta-analysis was re-run with the updated numbers with no significant or major changes.” By comparison, regret rates after total knee arthroplasty (knee replacement surgery), for example, range between 6 and 30 percent. See Mahdi, Svantesson, Wretenberg, and Hälleberg-Nyman, “Patients’ Experiences.”

3 See Feigerlova, “Prevalence of Detransition.”

4 Barad, “Transmaterialities,” 388.

5 Caswell, *Urgent Archives*, 12.

deepen, and diversify the field. By combining book historical imaginations with trans imaginaries, we open space for other approaches, turning the field toward liberatory justice. I turn the three tactics I developed toward locating historic trans experience and harnessing it as trans historic community building and care work. As I suggested at the start of this book: when facing down the destruction of trans literature and learning in the digital sphere, relearning methods for cultivating, maintaining, and tending trans community through the material text will be crucial to our survival. The need for sustenance and nourishment is acute. But others may benefit from such methods too. In a moment when AI is degrading (and surveilling) digital communications in the service of technofascism, revitalizing the messy material connections offered by the book-object can serve as a lifeline—a line of flight into what is real and felt.

The experiments undertaken here offer a glimpse of a present future for manuscript studies. Other areas of bibliography require similar attention. Print bibliography operates through paradigms that overlap with those of manuscript studies in some places and diverge in others. For instance, the shared embodied language of letterforms (tail, shoulder, ear, neck) is uniquely gendered in the casting of type. Here, male and female blocks (the catches on the upper and lower half of the type matrix) are pressed together, holding the mold in place to produce a piece of type: “their mechanistic heterosexual coupling is an essential part of the creation of words.”⁶ The language is reflective of compulsory cisheterosexuality in the age of mechanical reproduction. But I am not carving out a field alone: trans bibliography is here, and it is growing. The queer bibliography conferences, and the publications derived from them, have showcased work on materials from the seventeenth-century handpress to twentieth-century ephemera. Kadin Henningsen, Liz Ott, and Brandi Adams have, in various presentations, issued methodological challenges to combat the ontological assumptions of the field.⁷ Carlisle Yingst analyzes Romantic-era pseudonymous writers (like David Lyndsay/Mary Diana Dods/Walter Sholto Douglas) through a trans lens, using trans naming practices to trouble bibliographic categories of authenticity and forgery.⁸ Sonja Drimmer assesses the seductive, yet troubling, status of the trans body in hand-copied woodcut images, upsetting

6 Maruca, “Bodies of Type,” 328.

7 Henningsen and Ott, “Bibliography’s Trans* Becoming”; and Adams and Henningsen, “Towards a Trans* Bibliography.”

8 See Yingst, “Transition by the Book.”

progressivist arguments surrounding the uptake of technologies.⁹ Heidi Craig, Laura Estill, and Kris L. May make the case for trans-inclusive practices in enumerative bibliography, rather than “aspir[ing] to stability” in publication history, they apply trans-inclusive citational practices to affirm scholars and “challenge[...] binary systems and templates.”¹⁰ Across periods, trans bibliographic study remains committed to exposing the cisheterosexist assumptions behind methodological commonplaces and appealing to trans approaches as a tactic to circumvent the cruxes caused by such assumptions.

Like me, these scholars have benefitted most from the more developed fields of trans and queer librarianship. In 2009, K. J. Rawson put out a call for librarians and archivists to consider “environmental accessibility and geosemiotics” as they work with trans collections and trans users.¹¹ As I did in my final chapter, Rawson emphasizes the importance of touch in activating affective relations with trans objects. Trans archivists and librarians have thought carefully about the places and spaces in which books, documents, and archival objects are kept and how those materials might be accessed. In doing so, they have reiterated that trans and queer bibliographic space is political; that the objects we care for (and those that we exclude), the ways that we talk about them, and the strategies we have for engagement are enmeshed within political and politicized structures. These factors impact whose stories we tell and how we tell them. I am immensely grateful to the book-workers within institutional and grassroots collections for setting the agenda for trans bibliography to follow.

I have been lucky to find connection with trans and queer book-workers and bibliographers, in person and in print. As the need for sustenance and nourishment among members of the trans community becomes more acute, I hope that the approaches laid out here may meet you with connection: connection to a community of trans and queer book historians in the present, but also connection to a trans temporal community of care through the shared intimacies of our constellated pasts. We are here, but we were also there: our books tell us so.

9 Drimmer, “Queer Transmissions.”

10 Craig, Estill, and May, “Trans-Inclusive Bibliography,” 10 and 9.

11 Rawson, “Desiring Queer(er?) Archival Logics,” 129.