**Crooked Print:**

Queer Zine Counterdiscourses and the Survival of Gay and Lesbian Print Media

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**CHAPTER 1:**

**Printed Pasts, Commercialized Cultures and Queer Counterdiscourses**

*Introduction: Origins and Directions of Crooked Print*

When I was a closeted youth in the early 1990s and coming to recognize my homosexuality, I collected gay-interest magazines, flyers for gay-related events and other gay printed paraphernalia in a box hidden in my bedroom. I either acquired these documents at gay-friendly businesses in downtown Vancouver, or had them mailed to my home in discreet envelopes by a friend in the United States that I had met online. Although I had access to the Internet, and used it to search for information about homosexuality, I had a preference for printed materials, which offered physical, tangible traces that other people with same-sex attractions existed. I wasn’t aware at the time, however, that this connection through print to a public of gay readers had a long tradition of historical precedents, nor that homosexuals had a unique relationship to print media, which helped coalesce the first gay and lesbian communities in Europe and North America. In fact, because homosexuality is not a visible identity category, print media has been an essential form of communication which has allowed gay men and lesbians to locate one another, and has announced the emergence of a gay and lesbian population, as well as permitted the articulation of distinct gay cultures and identities.

However, the discursive constitution of sexual identity is often influenced by competing articulations, and the restraint imposed by increasingly corporate advertising has impacted how homosexuality is represented in gay and lesbian print publications. The commercial magazines I consumed as an adolescent, for example, participated in an interpellation of gay identity, which argued that gay men could, and should, be ‘just like everyone else.’ The content of these magazines presented a sanitized, integrationist image of homosexuality, and I did not find the alternative representations of queer nonconformity that I was searching for. This was, in part, because the influence of consumerism on gay and lesbian print had contributed to the muting of politically radical and sexually explicit representations of homosexuality in favour of assimilative, class-specific articulations of gay professionalism and tastefulness (Sender 2001).

As gay and lesbian print media has become commercialized, it fails to represent large segments of the fragmented and diverse homosexual demographic, such as a growing public of young, nonprofessional, countercultural and politically radical queers. Filling this gap in relevant print media forums, the Internet has become the predominant medium of communication for the Montreal queer community I am now part of, leaving print media in a tenuous position. However, this community’s most popular online social media platforms also mediate queer discourse and impose limitations on representation of sexuality. With corporate advertising’s restraint on confrontational, erotic and subversive print content, and the predominance of digital communication, is print still a necessary medium of gay and lesbian communication? What is the relationship between print media and homosexuality, and what is being lost if contemporary gay and lesbian communities abandon print media in favour of digital communication?

In order to answer these questions I decided to begin a research-creation project and uncover insights about the contemporary relationship between homosexuality and print by editing an alternative queer publication. I began this endeavour by consulting fifteen Canadian queer zine titles at the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives in Toronto in order to inform myself about independent, amateur, queer print production, as well as to compose an article on Canadian queer zine history. This research helped me articulate a subversive, countercultural identity for the publication I produced, which was shaped collaboratively with nine contributors, the majority of whom were from Montreal, although one was from Edmonton and another from the United States. Recognizing that the contemporary Montreal queer community is not sufficiently addressed by the city’s several monthly gay and lesbian community magazines, it was my intention to create a platform for candid, subjective commentary on contemporary queer experience, where alternative messages about radical politics and independent arts and culture could be circulated without restraint from corporate advertising. I sought to produce a transgressive publication that celebrates queer difference and deviance, which would capture some of the confrontational energy traditionally associated with independent gay and lesbian presses. However, how can such a publication unite a particular counterpublic, while also acknowledging fragmentation and diversity within LGBT communities? What do the representations in the publication I produced say about contemporary queer identity, and how has a distinctly queer counterpublic been interpellated through its content?

The termqueer is loaded with significations, and employed in a number of ways to mean a number of different things. The originally pejorative term was reappropriated in the 1990s by a new generation of politically and sexually radical individuals that believed the gay and lesbian liberation movement had failed to achieve its objectives as it “did not produce the gender-free communitarian world it envisioned, but faced an unprecedented growth of gay capitalism and a new masculinity” (Adam 1987). Whereas gay liberation politics sought to work within “presently existing institutional arrangements” (Morton 1996), queerness “refuses to fit within any conventional category, thereby calling into question the very notion of categories” (Solomon 1992). While queer theory has destabilized notions of identity based on commonality in favour of unorganizable difference and “generalized perversity” (Morton 1996), I am using the term to articulate an audience for a publication, and it must therefore signify a certain set of shared interests, experiences and non-normative sexual behaviours. Queer is a useful term because it addresses communities composed of varying genders and sexualities, in distinction to the more restrictive term gay. Although the publication I have produced only contains texts by gay men, I continue to identify it as a queer zine, for the term queer denotes a sexual and political radicalism and critique of gay conservatism with which my project is aligned.

Donald Morton explains “the shiftingness, the agitation in the meaning of words, is produced not by the inherent slipperiness of language but by the ongoing contestations between different groups” (1996), and the ability to arrive at any universal definition of the term queer is destabilized by a multiplicity of understandings. In fact the term queer is often employed by the more mainstream elements of gay culture that it seeks to criticize, such as with television programs like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* or *Queer as Folk.* Because sexuality and language are not static but changing forces, and the term queer has undergone several semantic shifts since its use as a pejorative term for homosexuals, it is important to acknowledge that there are multiple meanings that can be attached to the word queer. For example, Dennis Cooper argues that queerness is “the punky anti-assimilationist, transgressive movement on the fringe of lesbian and gay culture” (1992), and it is this notion of being on the fringes that I mean to invoke when I use the term queer. I do not see queer communities as completely separate from LGBT communities, but more as peripheral collectivities that reveal internal political differences within broader sexual minority groups.

Queer, for me, is not a synonym for gay, nor is it a rejection of gay and lesbian identity, but an anti-assimilationist critique of gay conservatism based on a celebration of political and sexual radicalism. Queer is a more inclusive category that acknowledges a plurality of non-normative genders and sexualities and proposes alternate directions for LGBT communities. The acronym LGBT captures a similar sense of inclusivity as queer, but does not imply the same anti-commercial, anti-assimilation politics, nor does it allow for quite as broad a diversity of sexualities and genders as the term queer.

While queer political critiques often create associations between the term gay and commercialism, I use the terms gay and lesbian more broadly to refer to people that understand their same-sex attractions as a sexual identity. This creates a distinction from the more clinical term homosexual, which also denotes same-sex behaviours, but does not necessarily preclude identification with gay and lesbian identity or community. Although the term homosexual has come to be associated with psychological discourse and is less frequently employed in everyday speech, it remains useful in more scholarly contexts for referring to a broad range of same-sex practices that include, but also pre-date, our contemporary understanding of gay identity. Homophile, on the other hand, was a term used by sexual minorities in the 1950s and 1960s, which fell out of use rather quickly. While there is a historic tension between the terms gay and queer, my work positions queer zines in a longer history of gay and lesbian print media. I do not use the term queer to mark a radical separatism, but rather to signify peripheral groups on the fringes of gay and lesbian communities.

I named the zine I produced *Crooked,* and it was circulated through a launch party at a downtown Montreal punk venue that hosts occasional queer nights. By exploring methods of independent production and distribution, I was interested in uncovering a framework for sustainable printed queer representation that could exist without reliance on revenue from advertising. Given the predominance of electronic communication, how can independent queer print media that are not supported by corporate advertising be sustained? What is the future of gay and lesbian print and what efforts are necessary to prevent its disappearance in a digital era?

In this first chapter I will provide a succinct history of several gay and lesbian presses in 20th century North America, and offer insights into the historic relationship between homosexuality and print. I will describe the tension between assimilative representations of gay identity and representations that celebrate homosexual difference, tracing how corporate advertising has influenced the discursive articulation of gay and lesbian identity. I will also introduce queer zines as a medium and outline the intentions behind my research-creation print intervention.

*Print and its Relationship to Homosexuality*

Gay men and lesbians have a particularly significant relationship to print media, which has functioned as a medium of communication for locating and forming community, building community identity, organizing political actions, and circulating counterdiscourses. As Rodger Streitmatter remarks, “because we exist everywhere, but each of us must consciously identify himself or herself as a gay person, newspapers and magazines are uniquely important in our social movement” (1995).

Gay and lesbian media is often a first point of contact with representations of homosexual identity. It provides audiences with an introduction to the codes that denote the various manifestations of gay and lesbian culture, and helps sexual minorities recognize each other in the everyday. As Barnhurst argues, “ethnic, racial and religious minorities within a given society usually raise up most of the heirs who will join their cultural heritage. Sexual minorities are unusual for not necessarily following that pattern” (2007). Unlike other marginalized youth, young homosexuals often grow up without guidance for understanding their minority identities. Therefore, gay and lesbian media plays an essential role in offering affirmative representations and instruction for recognizing homosexual signs and signals, which, as Larry Gross remarks, are “nobody’s native tongue” (2001).

In distinction to more expensive forms of communication available during the 20th century, such as film and television, print has been a relatively accessible medium that has helped the gay and lesbian community imagine and shape its emerging identity. As Rob Cover claims, “it is the lesbian/gay print media which effectively permit the circulation of symbols (signifiers) such as ‘pride’, ‘outness’ and essential ‘difference’, imaged and imagined bodies, codes of desire and the desirable.” He goes on to argue that print media plays “a significant role – perhaps the *central* role- in the mediation of sexuality, and the provision of codes of non-heteronormative performativities” (2002).

Early studies conducted shortly after Stonewall demonstrated that a significant portion of gay men first recognized their sexual orientations through print (quoted in Bergman 2000), and gay and lesbian print media has provided a platform for positive representation in order to stage a politics of resistance to heterosexist messages espoused by dominant political, psychiatric, and religious institutions. These messages characterized homosexuality as deviant, illegal, and sinful, and contributed to discrimination against homosexuals in society more broadly. However, print media has allowed the gay and lesbian community to assert its legitimacy, cast off its invisibility and collectively ‘come out of the closet.’ In fact, it is partly because of print’s capacity to declare the lived existence of homosexuals in the physical world –a more symbolic ‘coming out’– that it remains important as a means of communication in an era of digital technologies. Print media exists as a material trace of frequently unidentifiable identities, which circulates in public spaces, rendering the invisibility of sexual minorities more visible. Print also often requires readers to leave the privacy of their homes to pick up newsletters and community magazines in gay-identified spaces, such as gay bars and bookstores, where essential collectivities are formed.

Whereas print has helped shape gay and lesbian identity and facilitated the formation of community, online media often encourage the loss of collectivity. For example, as social networking and dating sites become the focal point of gay and lesbian communication, gay men and lesbians meet less frequently in communal environments such as gay villages, leaving less opportunity for collective organizing and visibility. Since homosexuality does not constitute an overtly visible identity category and homosexuals have often been pressed to remain invisible, it is important that gay and lesbian communication has a material circulation in urban locations such as bars, bookstores and other gay-friendly establishments, declaring the presence of a demographic whose members may sometimes be reluctant to do so themselves.

*Gay and Lesbian Print in the 20th Century*

Although the first homosexual publication, *Der Eigene*, was launched in Germany in the late 19th century, the existing scholarship on gay and lesbian print media’s origins is largely concerned with the homophile newsletters that emerged in the United States during the 1950s. Larry Gross discusses how the homophile publications, *ONE Magazine, The Ladder* and *Mattachine Review* helped cultivate the early gay rights movement by providing alternate representations of homosexuals that “brought a radical shift in public consciousness and discourse” (2001).

Tom Waugh (1996) points out that, emerging concurrently with the homophile newsletters, the physique magazine circuit amassed far larger circulation numbers and he argues that there are important political dimensions to the collective consumption of erotic images. David K. Johnson (2010) reflects Waugh’s perspective, arguing that physique magazines slowly began to validate and normalize homosexual attractions. He goes on to point out that the modern gay rights movement did not begin with the Stonewall riots of 1969, but emerged through court battles that sought first amendment rights for homosexual publications and fought for the right to consume these homosexual cultural commodities.

In *Voices of Revolution,* Rodger Streitmatter (2000) discusses the gay and lesbian liberation papers of the 1970s, many of which made radical claims such as calling for the use of violence in order to establish a separatist gay nation. It was during this period of radical and ambitious print production that the hugely influential *The Body Politic* was launched in Toronto in 1971, and became the primary publishing effort of the Canadian gay rights movement until it folded in 1987. During its lifespan, *The Body Politic* released 135 issues and acquired prominent international contributors as well as international distribution. However, a series of obscenity trials and divisions within the editorial committee, as well as debt and exhaustion precipitated the collapse of *The Body Politic* (Churchill 2003), which was further solidified by the launch of a less radical and less political publication, *Xtra!* in 1984, which, with its subsidiary publications *Xtra Vancouver* and *Xtra Ottawa,* are now the principal English language LGBT publications in Canada.

David S. Churchill’s research on *The Body Politic* illustrates the gay and lesbian press’ fragmentation and challenges notions of a unified community, marking “a move away from an explicit commitment to sexual liberation to a politics framed by questions of difference, power, identity, and representation” (2003). While gay and lesbian print media have certainly mobilized large readerships, they have not coalesced these communities in any uncomplicated manner, and *The Body Politic*’s editorial committee often struggled with issues around race and gender exclusion. In fact, the predominantly white gay male print media’s fixation on ‘unity’ as a symbol of LGBT community is symptomatic of a frequent disregard for fragmentation, internal differences and diversity. As Alexandra Chasin points out, “it is absurd to speak of the lesbian and gay press as though it were one institution; taking gender into account suggests at least two “gay” presses” (2000). The underrepresentation of lesbian perspectives in primarily gay male print media has often led women to “take a somewhat separatist line, resisting interaction with the gay male press” (Kotz 1993) in favor of an “expressly feminist network of periodical publishing created, sustained and read by women” (Chasin 2000). Taking this separation into account, it was the intention of my research-creation project to create a publication that acknowledges fragmentation within LGBT communities and I sought to address traditional imbalances in gender and race representation. However, as my project developed, the results of my work ended up reproducing familiar divisions to those found within gay and lesbian print history, which will be elaborated on in the discussion of my collaborative process in Chapter 2.

Gay and lesbian editorial committees set aside their differences in reaction to the mainstream media’s silence concerning the onslaught of the AIDS epidemic, and laboured to educate themselves and others about medical details, legal regulations and alternative therapies. However, in the late 1980s and early 1990s gay and lesbian publications garnered increasing attention from corporate advertisers. Ostertag points out that when *POZ,* a lifestyle glossy for HIV positive men, was launched in 1994, Calistoga, Perrier and Benetton all bought advertising space in the first issue. He goes on to state that within 50 years, gay and lesbian print media had gone from illegal to becoming a lucrative platform for corporate advertising revenue, remarking that “no other social movement has been so successfully commercialized” (2006).

It is important to clarify, however, that gay men and lesbians have never existed outside of consumerism and early homosexual print media contained publicities long before the introduction of corporate advertising. Nevertheless, the businesses that did advertise in these publications tended to be local, gay enterprises, as other establishments were hesitant to be associated with gay and lesbian presses (Chasin 2000). Johnson points out that much of the gay rights movement has been motivated by pursuing the right to consume gay-related products from gay-identified establishments. He argues that within this context “consumer choices were political acts” (2010). Furthermore, although the encroachment of corporate advertising marked a transition towards a more commercialized gay and lesbian press, issues around consumerism and financial resources emerged much earlier than the 1990s. For example, whereas the homophile press was largely subsidized by contributions from editorial committees, external funding quickly became a necessity for large circulation periodicals. Rodger Streitmatter points out that the publications with the greatest longevity were often those “with a combination of relatively calm voices and stable finances” (2000), and he describes the moderate editorial content required of commercial gay and lesbian publications that circulated during the 1970s and relied on advertising from Mafia-owned gay bars and bathhouses.

This earlier impact of external funding on editorial content foreshadows the commercialization of gay and lesbian presses in the 1990s, which resulted from increased corporate attention on gay and lesbian consumer demographics and a consequent boom in advertising revenue in gay and lesbian magazines (Gross 2001). During this period, many gay interest magazines underwent a concentration of ownership and largely depoliticized their content in order to attract high-end advertisers. In the process, these publications began to “address readers as a consumer market more than as movement participants” (Chasin 2000), which demanded a conscious and deliberate shift in representation. Rodger Streitmatter laments the depoliticization of editorial content that took place in order to shape the gay consumer market by “blurring the line between editorial and advertising into a marriage of convenience and profit” (1995). Goltz’s research on *Instinct* magazine, for example, draws attention to how new definitions of homosexuality were produced by “actively depoliticizing gay identity to sex, partying, fashion, and travel” (2007). Rather than viewing this commercialization as a consequence of a purportedly emancipated gay and lesbian community, Harris argues that gay magazines are “tacking onto the forever unfinished story of gay rights a happily-ever-after ending” (1997).

Katherine Sender describes how “editors recognized that to encourage consumption alone is not enough: Gay magazines also needed to cultivate particular tastes” (2001). She goes on to describe how cultural capital, constructed around ideals of consumption, became a means for gay people to recognize each other, and consequently, a means for magazines to interpellate a new vision of gay and lesbian community. Sender clarifies, however, that consumerist representations of gay identity do not necessarily originate from outside of the gay community, but are largely formed by gay-identified marketers, who are employed for their valuable understanding of homosexual demographics. Sender’s qualitative research with these marketing professionals uncovered that they often saw their work as a form of activism that “advanced the politicized project of LGBT visibility” (2007). However, Sender problematizes this vision of progress, as “it positions the free market economy and its popular manifestations –advertising, advertiser-supported publishing, and public relations- as the rightful place of social struggle.” Although recently emancipated groups often view their inclusion in advertising campaigns as a political gesture of solidarity, this recognition is most often a strategy to encourage brand loyalty amongst emergent consumer demographics (Gross 2001). Sender remarks that although advertising is not necessarily problematic, the “production of the ideal gay consumer has costs for a diverse gay citizenship and for a lively, heterogeneous, sex-positive gay politics” (2001).

There is a recurrent tension in gay and lesbian print media between assimilationist politics, which strive to prove homosexual normalcy, and agendas that celebrate homosexual difference. This friction recalls arguments that emerged within the early homophile press, which urged lesbians not to wear pants and gay men to act masculine. The debate around integrationist politics is raised in an article published in the 1950s by *ONE Magazine*, where Jim Kepner asks, “Ought we celebrate and cultivate our difference, or try to hide and erase it?” (quoted in Kepner 1998). Sender reminds us that there is a largely accepted belief that “the successful construction of a respectable, consuming, homosexual public is precisely what is needed for openly gay people to gain credibility and acceptance” (2001), and Fejes and Petrich (1993) propose that the professionalization of gay identity is an effective strategy for counterbalancing pejorative characterizations endorsed by the conservative right. However, although many homosexuals welcome integration, the establishment of a restrained gay and lesbian print media that is attractive to advertisers and moderate enough to subdue their anxieties has placed a significant amount of representational agency in the hands of entities whose principal interest is incurring profit. Daniel Harris (1997) believes that through a proliferation of articles on “gays in the church, gays in the military, gays in sports, gays as parents, and gays as legally married spouses” these profit-seeking organizations create homosexual readerships similar to the heterosexual audiences they are accustomed to addressing. He goes on to describe advertisers as colonizers who are “laying waste to the natural habitat of homosexuals and slashing and burning their way through the subculture, all the while professing their earnest commitment to preserving its most perishable features.”

While studies have shown that gay men generally earn less than heterosexuals (Fejes & Petrich 1993), many print publications cultivate advertisers’ ideal gay readerships through marketing strategies that characterize homosexuals as affluent, white men – gay yuppies, or guppies, as they have been referred to by certain marketers. Those who do not conform to this demographic are generally ignored because advertisers are not interested in reaching them (Gross 2001). This disregard not only renders invisible the identities of economically disadvantaged gays and lesbians, but also other marginalized groups that intersect with the gay and lesbian community. As Barnhurst argues, the professionalization of homosexual visibility has been employed as “a containment system for individual difference, so that the dominant culture can interpellate or call to *individuals* without acknowledging a history of devaluing collective identities: their class, race, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality” (2007).

As gay magazines constitute a professionalized image of homosexuality, their content is cleansed of sexually explicit material, marking a drastic shift from the erotic representations traditionally found in many homosexual periodicals. Most notably, *The* *Advocate* removed all of its sexually explicit content, and distanced itself from more subversive elements of the LGBT community such as drag queens, transvestites and transsexuals (Sender 2001). Sender (2003) argues that notions of “tastefulness” are articulated in gay and lesbian print media in order to “produce a class-specific ideal gay consumer…whose image is beamed back at gay and lesbian readers as a lesson in ‘socially correct participation.’” She explains that, in an attempt to dissociate themselves from the stereotype of the hypersexual gay man, gay magazines have created a peculiar paradox: “a market that is constituted as distinct through the nondominant sexuality of its constituency” yet is “brought into being only through the effacement of that sexuality.”

However, through a Foucauldian analysis, Sender clarifies that rather than silence sexuality, articulations of tastefulness participate in a particular discursive regime focused on the containment of representations of homosexual sex. Michel Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality* that sex has not been prudishly concealed in Western culture, but instead, an institutional framework has encouraged a verbosity of discourse around the control of sex. “Rather than a massive censorship … what was involved was a regulated and polymorphous incitement to discourse” (1980). This was particularly true for homosexuals during the 19th century, who experienced increased scrutiny from the judicial, religious and psychiatric apparatuses of the West. However, rather than silence homosexuality, inquiry into same-sex sexuality compelled a deluge of dialog that drew it out from obscurity. Furthermore, through this dialog, homosexuality became articulated as a permanent identity rather than a temporary behavior. “We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized … The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (1980).

Foucault’s theories point to the central power of dominant discourses in shaping sexual identity, but also propose a unique function of the individual’s avowal of sexual identity through confession. By articulating one’s own sexuality for oneself, it was no longer a “value granted to one person by another, it came to signify someone’s acknowledgement of his own actions and thoughts” (1980). Although the compulsory confessions in 19th century France that Foucault discusses often occurred under force and constraint, to some degree they foreshadow the more liberated, voluntary avowals involved in ‘coming out’ which permitted homosexuals to articulate their own identities. This disclosure was concretized on a collective level by the development of gay and lesbian print media, which demanded recognition of an emergent demographic of sexual minorities.

Although Foucault focuses on hegemonic constructions of sexual identity, he clarifies that to reduce this form of domination as simply one group exerting force over another would be reductive. He proposes that there are multiple expressions of force that occur within nonegalitarian networks of power, and this understanding allows for contention and opposition. He states that “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (1980). Gay and lesbian print media has exerted power, not only by articulating and mobilizing a gay rights movement, but also by transforming discourse and claiming the agency of self-representation.

However, the discursive construction of sexual identity remains a complex composition influenced by competing articulations, and advertising regulates representational autonomy in present-day gay and lesbian print media. Foucault nods to these more contemporary, economic forms of domination by describing “new methods of power whose operation is not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus.” It is a central conviction of my research-creation project that because sexual minorities have struggled against psychiatric, legal and religious misrepresentations, it is essential that they obtain and retain the agency to discursively constitute their identities in arenas that are able to confront external expressions of power, such as the dominant ideologies of economic markets. Because print media has been such an important mode of communication for the circulation of gay and lesbian counterdiscourses and has also been a focal point of assimilative commercialization, it was my intention to work through this medium in order to investigate the opportunities for discursive autonomy that it offers.

In contrast to Foucault’s discussion of sexual verbosity, Eric Clarke argues that one of the largest obstacles to gay and lesbian participation in the public sphere is “the relegation of erotic experience, which has largely shaped a queer sense of self and collective belonging, to the proprietary privacy of the intimate sphere” (2000). However, Nancy Fraser’s critique of the public sphere, as theorized by Jürgen Habermas (1962), asserts that the notion of a singular public sphere is insufficient, as it disregards heterogeneity, ignores social inequalities and favours dominant ideology to the disadvantage of subordinated groups. She emphasizes that within the public sphere, members of subordinated groups, such as homosexuals, “have no areas for deliberation among themselves about their needs, objectives and strategies” (1993).

Through this critique she introduces her concept of subaltern counterpublics, which she describes as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, so as to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs” (1993). Fraser suggests that, in distinction to Habermas’ singular, universal public sphere, a more egalitarian and democratic vision acknowledges a plurality of polyvocal publics. This distinction helps account for the internal differences within the gay and lesbian community, which might be more accurately addressed as a multiplicity of communities. One of the central challenges the gay and lesbian press faces is representing this diversity, which it has often failed to do, opting for a more homogenous identity. Fraser clarifies that even those subaltern counterpublics “with democratic and egalitarian intentions are not always above practicing their own modes of informal exclusion and marginalization” (1993).

Fraser goes on to describe how the resources for participation in the public sphere are “privately owned and operated for profit,” thus limiting access to marginalized groups. She also problematizes the influence of economic interests on the freedom of discourse by stating that the public sphere “is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations, a theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling. Thus, this concept of the public sphere permits us to keep in view the distinctions between state apparatuses, economic markets, and democratic associations, distinctions that are essential to democratic theory” (1993).

*Queer Zines and Performative Interventions*

Given the central importance of discourse and print media to the shaping of sexual identity, and the struggle for autonomous representation throughout gay and lesbian print history, as well as the intrusion of corporate marketing influences, I was inspired to perform a creative intervention in the form of a print publication that would provide a forum for alternate queer messages and seek alternatives to commercial methods of discursive representation and circulation. It was my goal to launch a publication that would not be moderated by the same representational restraints as commercial print and would allow for the expression of radical political perspectives. Having worked as a columnist for Montreal gay magazines, I have experienced a similar constraint on content to that described by the aforementioned scholars of gay and lesbian print, and I wished to see how individuals in my immediate queer community would respond to the creation of an independent zine. Since my project was an initial experimentation and I am an inexperienced editor, this intervention took place amongst a small group of friends and acquaintances, with a print run of 150 copies that were circulated within the Montreal queer community through a launch party. It was not my intention to measure any critical social change, but to participate in an existing practice of diversifying gay and lesbian print representations that is already undertaken by small circulation, underground queer presses.

Gay and lesbian presses’ traditional function is to provide the ability to speak with one’s own voice. As Gross remarks, “Ultimately, the most effective form of resistance to the hegemony of the mainstream is to speak for oneself, to create narratives and images that counter the accepted, oppressive, or inaccurate ones” (2001), and my publication seeks to facilitate this self-representational capacity. While the perspectives presented in the mainstream gay and lesbian press are produced by gay-identified individuals and therefore contribute to homosexual self-representation, it was my intention to provide a platform for voices not often heard in mainstream gay presses and to encourage a celebration of difference rather than an assimilative gay identity influenced by marketing interests.

When *the* homosexual counterpublic is discussed, it is often addressed as a monoculture, using the term *community,* however this fails to acknowledge diversity and fragmentation. It is not enough to simply resist assimilation; one must also acknowledge internal differences within homosexual counterpublics. By articulating the perspectives of a (sub)subculture or a (counter)counterpublic, my project intended to point out that there are multiple homosexual communities. Herein lies one of the central tensions involved in articulating publics; while wishing to give voice to a diversity of perspectives, I also aimed to coalesce a coherent counterpublic and to produce a publication with an intelligible identity.

Although, I have wielded a significant degree of editorial influence over the representations that were printed in my publication, there was an experimental, unpredictable character to my project, as it relied on contributors to provide content through their own visions of queer identity. It was my hope that internal differences would establish the publication as a place for debate, in fact I wanted to encourage the publication to become a place where contentions and conversations take place. Estelle Barrett makes an explicit connection to how research-creation work encourages dialog around issues of social justice and identity, as well as helps “give voice to subjugated perspectives” (2010), and, recognizing the history of fragmentation and exclusion within the history of the gay press, it was my intention that my project be approached through an ethos of inclusivity.

There is also an autoethnographic component to my research, as I have experience as a columnist for community gay and lesbian magazines, as well as a more personal connection to print. Laurel Richardson’s discussion of evocative writing and the narrative of the self informs how I incorporated my own subjectivity into my research, for, as she states, “knowing the self and knowing ‘about’ the subject are intertwined, partial, historical, local knowledges” (1998). In fact, the sharing of personal experience and subjectivity is one of the principal functions of the publication I produced, as I believe that the confession of personal narratives, especially those that are conventionally kept hidden but are commonly experienced, helps legitimize homosexual experiences for both writers and readers.

Recognizing that I would be working largely independently, with very little financial means or experience as an editor, I decided that working through the zine medium would be the most appropriate form for my project. Despite the influence of corporate advertising on gay and lesbian print media, the more radical energy of the gay and lesbian press did not altogether disappear but was revitalized in the mid 1980s when DIY queer zines began to emerge as an alternative to the perceived superficiality of mainstream gay and lesbian glossies. In 1985 Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones launched *J.D.s* in Toronto, and circulated 8 issues within Canada and internationally until 1991, inspiring a movement of queer zine production that continues to the present-day. Kotz establishes the incredible significance of *J.D.s*, remarking that it “was the first of its kind and is now considered an institution in queer ‘zine publishing” (1993).

Inspired by fanzines produced within the punk rock subculture, queer zines are nonprofessional, small-circulation, publications with little to no budget, that are often handmade, using cut and paste collage techniques, and reproduced using a photocopy machine. The editors of queer zines labour to provide an alternative to the commercialism of mainstream gay and lesbian publications, which, in the words of a Toronto zine called *BIMBOX,* are trying “to systematically render the entire international Lesbian and Gay population brain-dead” and contributing to “the complete lobotomization of our culture” (Noxzema 1993). Queer zines are constructed mostly by queer punks who “feel unrepresented in both predominantly straight punk zines and the liberal assimilationist gay and lesbian press” (Duncombe 1997). The emergence of these publications was partially a result of personal computers and new desktop publishing technologies that made self-publishing more accessible, and they “tend to have a format antithetical to the design and editorial style of conventional publications. They also reject political and aesthetic orthodoxies of all sorts, and have created a new forum for exploring perspectives not represented in straight, gay or feminist presses, or in the dominant culture at large” (Kotz 1993).

The low production costs and small-circulation of queer zines allows them to evade copyright regulations and the censorship of erotic content. One of the first scholars to write about fanzines, Fredric Wertham, remarks that they function “without any outside interference, without any control from above, without any censorship, without any supervision or manipulation” (1973). For this reason, queer zines recapture some of the more subversive, erotic elements traditionally associated with the gay and lesbian press that have been muted by commercialization.

Duncombe emphasizes the interactive nature of zines stating that the “medium of zines is not just a message to be received, but a model of participatory cultural production and organization to be acted upon. The message you get from zines is that you should not just be getting messages, you should be producing them as well” (1997). Editors of zines often invite their readers to produce their own zines, especially if they have conflicting perspectives, and zines frequently dialog with one another. Taking this interactivity into consideration, I decided to begin my work by consulting the principal Canadian queer zine titles of the 1980s and 1990s at the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives. This interaction with zine history is manifested as an article on Canadian queer zines, which appears in my own publication. However, although I intended to produce a zine that acknowledges its historical continuities and past precedents, it also draws from them to find ways to investigate print’s significance to the present. Given the gay and lesbian community’s unique relationship to print, I wanted to engage with this medium in order to uncover insights about its survival within the context of a digital era. Rather than compose a traditional academic observation, I opted to make a performative intervention that would seek out a viable and contemporary framework for sustainable non-commercial queer print media.

In the next chapter I will describe my archival encounter at the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives and discuss how consulting original queer zines influenced the formation of *Crooked*’s identity. I will also discuss my collaborative process and describe issues around representation and inclusion that arose, while also explaining *Crooked*’s subversive content, sexual representation, as well as its aesthetic and modes of production.

**CHAPTER 2:**

**From the Archives to the Press**

*An Emotive Exploration of Queer Zine Archives*

Because I could not locate sufficient secondary literature about queer zines, I had to establish alternate avenues through which I could familiarize myself with the medium’s characteristics, history and modes of production. Although there is an absence of scholarship concerning queer zines, Philip Aarons and Canadian visual artist AA Bronson have edited an encyclopedic catalogue, *Queer* Zines (2008), which succinctly documents over 120 of the most significant titles that emerged over the past 30 years in Europe and North America. I used this book to locate Canadian zine titles, which I searched for online on the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA) database of LGBT periodicals. These titles, however, have not been digitized so I made two trips to Toronto in May and October 2012 to the CLGA’s headquarters located in a heritage building just off of Toronto’s Church-Wellesley gay village. I was impressed to find that the CLGA holds a significant quantity of domestic and international zines. This is, however, not altogether surprising as the CLGA was established in 1973 by *The Body Politic*’s editorial committee, which recognized the importance of preserving print media in order to recover gay and lesbian history and experience (CLGA website).

I was attracted to the CLGA because of its phenomenal quantity of gay and lesbian periodicals, which have helped it become the second largest LGBT archives in the world (CLGA website). While consulting the original print holdings of queer zines, I continued to search the archives database for other Canadian queer zine titles referenced within the zines themselves, which finally expanded the body of work I studied to include fifteen titles that each circulated for varying durations of time between 1984 and 2001.

Although I had decided to work through a research-creation framework, I remained interested in studying gay and lesbian print history and managed to conserve this aspect of my research by composing an article on the origins of Canadian queer zines, which I included in my own publication. My project is an example of what Chapman and Sawchuk term “creation-as-research” (2012), as I have studied and worked through the zine medium in order to generate research from my creative process. My use of the zine medium has also allowed me to disseminate my findings in a more accessible form, approachable to audiences outside of academic institutions. This is of particular importance because my research focuses explicitly on accessible participation in discursive representation, and I do not want my audience to be limited by accessibility to higher education. Furthermore, because Canadians often look to the United States to shape their understanding of the gay rights movement, I wanted to circulate my findings to a broader public in order to raise awareness about an aspect of Canada’s remarkable gay and lesbian print history.

Although my article presents a more concrete manifestation of my encounter with the archive, I also consulted the zines to inform my creative decisions around style, content and aesthetic. As Chapman and Sawchuk point out, “it is important to acknowledge that any creation, even (and especially) creation that is pursued as a type of research in and of itself, involves an initial gathering together of material, ideas, concepts, collaborators, technologies, etc. in order to begin” (2012). My initial search for resources began with a review of creative precedents, which involved locating affinities within the archive and identifying with a collectivity of past voices and perspectives. In fact, recognizing my own attachments to queer punk culture, I developed a very intimate, emotive collaboration with the archive. As Ann Cvetkovich remarks, “because gay and lesbian history in particular is produced through memory as much as through documents, those in search of the past must construct an archive through the work of emotional investment” (2003). Not only because the histories of sexual minorities have been largely silenced, but also because sexuality in general has been viewed as something to be kept private, archives of sexuality require a certain degree of self-reflexive intuition in order to interpret artifacts. Because the only artifacts I had to consult were the zines themselves, I had to use my personal experiences, judgment and imagination in order to bridge the immaterial gaps that these objects could not articulate. This active imagining and sensing is crucial when there is little authoritative documentation to consult. For example, because many of the zines were written with a very cynical and performative antagonism, and often deliberately circulated misinformation, they required an emotive intuition to judge their degree of sincerity.

Through my archival research I developed a profound rapport with the zines, whose content echoed my grievances concerning the commercialization of mainstream gay and lesbian culture, as well as my negotiation of my often contentious commitments to the punk scene and the gay community. We also shared a similar taste for crass, subversive humour, as well as a stubborn devotion to print media. I was delighted to uncover how fundamental Canadian queer zines were to the establishment of the genre. Aside from being one of the most prominent queer zines, *J.D.s* had an intriguing history of censorship by the Canadian government, which echoed the more often cited struggles to circulate gay and lesbian print in Canada undertaken by *The Body Politic* and Little Sisters bookstore in Vancouver.

Having first written my article on queer zines with an academic vocabulary, I realized it would be more appropriate to use a language suited to my subject and audience. Laurel Richardson (1998) believes that academic projects often fail to connect with their audience because individual voices are suppressed, and that it is by self-reflexively incorporating oneself into one’s research that it becomes infused with emotive meaning. Due to my investment in queer print and the queer punk subculture, as well as the inevitable subjectivity of my analysis, I decided to frame my archival encounter as a first-person narrative. I therefore rewrote the article in a personal, colloquial voice, and this decision was later reinforced when I learned that one of the founders of the queer zine medium, Bruce LaBruce, once stated his opposition to their intellectualization: “‘queercore’ fanzines aren’t supposed to be catalogued and historicized and analyzed to death, for Christsake” (1995).

*Giving Crooked a Personality*

My initial uncertainty around style and voice pointed toward a larger problematic in the conceptualization of my publication: I had yet to articulate a coherent identity for my zine. Whereas Lisa Ben’s policy for the first American gay and lesbian periodical, *Vice Versa*, was to publish everything submitted (Ostertag 2006), the first Canadian tabloid, *GAY,* folded because “it never established a clear self-identity” and “never exhibited a particular sense of style” (McCleod 1996). Like Lisa Ben (an anagram for lesbian), I began with a nonspecific objective to create an inclusive platform for alternative queer representation, but I quickly realized that if my publication was to be of interest to any particular public, it would have to be customized to address that audience. As Nancy Fraser points out, “public spheres are not only arenas for the formation of discursive opinion; in addition, they are arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities … thereby simultaneously constructing and expressing one’s cultural identity through idiom and style” (1993). Although I knew that I wanted to produce a zine that confronts assimilationist expressions of gay and lesbian identity, I also had to recognize fragmentation within the homosexual counterpublic and address a more specific audience within it. In Stephen Dunne’s experimental work on queer zines, he demonstrates that zines’ interpellation of identity does not rely on “adopting a queer vs straight dichotomy to examine cultural representations. What zines do is fracture this dichotomy – and it’s not us versus them, but various competing versions of us” (1995). Through my archival research, and, more specifically, my struggle to find an appropriate voice through which to present my research, I began to formulate a decidedly, colloquial, confessional and provocative voice for my publication, which speaks to an alternative, countercultural segment of the gay community.

The title of my zine, *Crooked*, is intended to connote a celebration of queer deviance and nonconformity, not simply in distinction to the heterosexual, *straight*, but also as a celebration of queer transgression. I intended for this articulation of queer transgression to trace an implicit connection between *Crooked* and punk subculture. In a 1954 article, Jim Kepner states “homosexuals are natural rebels. In our society, only freak conditions, cowardice, or ignorance of his own nature would permit a homosexual any other alternative” (quoted in Kepner 1998), however, Bruce LaBruce argues that the “political radicalism and the pure anarchic melodrama that had once been the crowning glory of homosexual disenfranchisement” (1995) were subsumed by the punk subculture when gay and lesbian identity became increasingly sanitized of its more subversive elements.

While I intended to create a political zine that acknowledges and encourages discussion around queer community activism and social consciousness, I also wanted to establish an engaging platform for alternative arts and culture that would challenge the often humourless manner in which anti-oppression politics are often addressed by more militant elements of the queer community. Most notably I sought to produce a publication that was subversive and provocative and invited controversy rather than preoccupation with tastefulness. When Al Goldstein purged *The Advocate* of its more deviant elements, he celebrated this symbolic gesture of gay and lesbian assimilation by stating, “we are being desleazified” (quoted in Sender 2003), and it was my intention to return some of this ‘sleaze’ to gay and lesbian print. In addition to, and perhaps by consequence of this subversive style, I also wanted the content of my zine to be defined by an explicit candour, represented by outspoken, forthright and subjective commentary on contemporary queer community and experience. This remains consistent with the tradition of zine writing, which, as Wertham remarks, “usually shows great liveliness and a natural sincerity. Usually it is informal, personal and spontaneous” (1973). Aside from seeking this candour, I also recognized that my audience and collaborators would most likely be young, politically conscious, and predominantly local to Montreal, although I remained open to contributions from outside of Montreal.

However, despite attempts to refine my focus, Duncombe remarks, “the majority of zines are specialized, but only to the point that they communicate the range, however wide or narrow, that makes up the personal interests of the publisher” (1997). To some degree, I allowed my zine to emerge organically, navigated by my own intuition and tastes, which were often aligned with, and influenced by, those of the original zines I consulted, as well as the contributors I worked with.

While constructing *Crooked’s* identity, I often had the impression that I was forming a persona, which was both closely linked to my own identity and yet divergent in the sense that it demanded a hyperbolic, crude and performative expression of my thoughts and ideas. As Bruce LaBruce explains, when making zines “we invent ourselves on paper however we choose, create an ideal version of ourselves, or a monstrous one, give it a name and an identity, and drop it off at the post office, waiting patiently for it to acquire a life of its own” (1995). This sense of a publication’s semi-autonomous genesis speaks to how *Crooked* took shape to some extent organically, in spite of, and also in reaction to my influences on it. In fact, it drew out a style of writing from me that was more audacious and irreverent than I had originally accounted for, and it often took unforeseen turns in its creative production.

*Collaborative and Collective Subversions*

Despite my endeavours to provide *Crooked* with a clear and coherent identity, there was an unavoidably experimental nature to its creation, as it relied on collaboration, as well as my ability to intelligibly articulate its identity to others. Echoing my struggle with the article on queer zine history, when contacting contributors I initially had trouble reining in the academic vocabulary that I had been rehearsing for proposals and coursework. Potential contributors misinterpreted my project because I was using words such as ‘discourse’and ‘representation’ in order to describe it. In an attempt to be clearer about my intentions, I composed an official submission callout form in a more colloquial language, which I distributed electronically to potential contributors. Although the submission form contained a brief list of suggested content ideas, its main purpose was to establish a deadline, as I was nervous that contributors might be unreliable. Otherwise, my criteria for submissions remained rather broad. I asked for short pieces from 500 to 1000 words, as I thought this would keep my request manageable, and make it possible to publish more articles. I also specified that I was looking for “queer activism, rants, confessional autobiographic pieces, political opinion, erotic stories, unerotic stories, anything related to independent queer arts and culture, music/book reviews, articles about obscure aspects of queer history, creative writing, poetry, comic strips etc.” However, I remained aware that I was looking to create a platform for self-representation and wanted to be careful how I positioned myself in relation to the creative processes of others, and therefore intentionally left writers a certain degree of creative freedom. Nevertheless, nearly all the articles that were submitted came from individuals with whom I had discussed specific ideas for content. Rather than dictating particular assignments, this generation of ideas often took the form of a collaborative brainstorming that arose within the context of casual conversation. As Tillmann-Healy explains, “with friendship as method, a project’s issues emerge organically, in the ebb and flow of everyday life” (2003).

Although contributors were not professional writers, I did consciously target individuals who had some experience with creative or journalistic writing, and whom I hoped would enjoy contributing work, rather than see it as a burden. For the most part, I also contacted individuals with whom I had pre-existing friendships, hoping that our shared interests, political positions and senses of humour would produce a coherent publication, as well as solid work relationships. It was my hope that my closeness with collaborators, as well as the intimacy involved in small circulation publications, would elicit engaging, candid, unpretentious writing. As a frequently neurotic and frustrated writer myself, I made sure to communicate with authors throughout the development of their pieces in order to remind them that zine texts are often deliberately amateur and that they could be as casual and carefree with their writing as they liked.

Despite my initial apprehension about my collaborators’ reliability, I was impressed by their enthusiasm for the project, as well as the quantity and quality of relevant, publishable submissions I received. However, my job as an editor was far from over, as most texts required some copy-editing and syntactical restructuring. This demanded sober reflection around my editing philosophy, and whether I thought collaborators’ texts should exist as unadultered expressions or whether I should make textual adjustments. In the end I decided that minor changes to improve clarity would only contribute to the collaborative nature of the project.

I had committed to show each contributor the final version of their work before printing the zine, and in a couple of instances authors took issue with the alterations I had made. In these situations, I justified my changes, but ultimately left the final decision up to the author. While these occurrences revealed some minor disaccord, I believe that our pre-established friendships allowed us to negotiate disagreements amicably. As Tillmann-Healy explains, “if researchers do not maintain an ethic of friendship in their fieldwork practices and/or accounts, participants can sustain emotional damage” (2003). It was essential to cultivate constructive, respectful relationships, as each author was revealing a significant amount of vulnerability with their writing. I, for my part, required continuous feedback and support from contributors, which added another dimension to the collaborative nature of the project. Taking this support into account, as well as the amount of textual and visual content provided by contributors, it is not possible for me to claim complete ownership over *Crooked*. While Duncombe asserts that “zines for the most part are the expression and the product of an individual” (1997), *Crooked* is largely the product of collectivity. This is particularly important when considering that contributors worked with no compensation and were motivated simply by a commitment to the project itself.

After having collected submissions, it became clear that while the nature of the material I received was, to some degree, out of my control, certain absences and configurations of text reveal unintended representational exclusions. For example, while I had made a conscious effort to solicit a diversity of perspectives from the LGBT community, nearly all the submissions I received were written by white, cisgendered, gay men. Although I had originally approached my project focusing on the capacity of print media to unite queer counterpublics, my research into gay and lesbian print uncovered a history that was replete with division and exclusion. While my original objective was to tackle the historic racial and gender imbalances in the gay and lesbian press, I was apprehensive about succumbing to tokenism, and reducing individuals to their minority status by targeting specific identities. I did, however, deliberately approach women and people of colour and was excited when they showed interest in participating in my project. Nevertheless, I only received submissions from two women, one of whom is a person of colour. Just as I had anticipated, our pre-existing friendships elicited strong and intimate writing. However, I encountered an unexpected challenge when the only writer of colour made a reference in her piece to another culture, which I found inappropriate. This reference was a central metaphor to her piece and was understandable in the context of our relationship, but conflicted with my publication’s original goal of affirmative racial representation. While I suggested that we find a way to rework the article, my friend expressed that she was not entirely satisfied with her writing and would rather withdraw the piece altogether. This was a particularly revealing moment for me, as I had not intended to abide by perceived orthodoxies of political correctness, such as policing potentially offensive language, and yet recognized that I had certain boundaries and limitations around what I considered appropriate in the context of a printed publication. More specifically, I realized that while it was acceptable to reappropriate pejorative terms for gay and lesbian identity, it was not my place to print sensitive language that refers to other marginalized groups.

This incident ended up having a significant impact on the zine because I was left with only one article by a woman, which concerned her polyamourous marriage with a man. Although this was a relevant and interesting piece, I felt that it did not, by itself, provide adequate female representation, and so I contacted its author to let her know that I would not be able to publish it at this point in time as I had decided to make *Crooked* a gay male identified publication. My reasoning for this transition was that I believe it is better to be transparent and appeal to a specific audience than underrepresent identities in a failed attempt at inclusivity. While this transition made sense on several levels, it was troubling because it meant closing off participation to a large portion of voices in the queer community – not only of lesbians, but of all queers who do not identify as gay men. Behind this decision, however, there was a supposition that the issues of different segments of the queer community do not always run parallel. In fact, the history of gay and lesbian print publications reveals that they are frequently a space of conflict and disunity. Rob Teixeira claims that queer zines in particular counter “the myth of ‘all-for-one and one-for-all’ community … We're a long way from the pseudo-coherence of 70s mantras like: ‘gay united and strong’” (1999) However, this separatist hypothesis is not one I accept easily, or with any certainty, nor am I willing to allow the slightly arbitrary way *Crooked* came together to become the only evidence necessary to claim that divergent queer identities are irreconcilable in printed publications. For this reason I acknowledged the exclusivity of male content in my editor’s letter but asserted that in the future *Crooked* is “open to content from faggots of all genders,” leaving a window for greater representational diversity in the future.

One of the fundamental assumptions my project makes is that there remains a segment of the gay and lesbian community that wishes to be interpellated through provocative and transgressive representations of queer identity. Camp humour, for example, has been a strategy employed by the gay community to address systemic oppression. One particular American queer zine that arose during the onset of the AIDS epidemic demonstrates a particularly subversive mobilization of comedy to confront illness and death. *Diseased Pariah News* offered its readers paperweights fashioned from the ashes of the co-founder, Tom Shearer, who remained on the masthead as “the deaditor,” and it printed mock advertisements for an AIDS Barbie with the tagline “…and she thought math class was tough!” (quoted in Ostertag 2006). I believe a similar comedic, subversive energy is also behind the proliferation of the word *faggot* in *Crooked*. Its power as the most wounding, pejorative term used to shame gay men is undermined, reclaimed and transformed into a celebration of queer difference and rebelliousness. This disruption in the use of the word is similar to how the term *queer* was reappropriated, cleansed of nearly all its power to humiliate, and has even become a fixture of academic discourse. In fact, the term *faggot* has a history of reappropriation within the gay subculture, which is addressed in Larry Kramer’s 1978 novel, *Faggots*, and in a more contemporary and local context, the monthly queer dance party Faggity-Ass-Fridays, which has become an institution in Montreal queer nightlife. Just as I am not the first to reappropriate the term *faggot,* I can also not claim ownership of the term *fagazine*, which I encountered in several publications throughout my archival research. Nevertheless, I decided to borrow it for its subversive play on the connotations of commercialism associated with the word *magazine*.

Because it would be absurd to create a publication about sexual identity and then restrain discussion and representations of sex, it was important that *Crooked* be constituted as a space that welcomes erotic content. Katherine Sender points out how glossy gay magazines “limit the space available for debates about queer sexual practices, sexual radicalism, and the place of sex in readers’ identities” (2003), and I sought to avoid falling into this same predicament. In fact, considering the history of regulation surrounding homosexuality, I believe that frank and explicit representations of eroticism can be a form of resistance to discursive regimes that characterize homosexual sex as something that should not be made visible. As Tom Waugh claims in his historical research on gay male erotic photography, “the political dimensions of a network of individuals reaching out beyond isolation and fear through the communication and consummation of desire are critical” (1996). Taking into account the way sexuality is regulated through articulations of tastefulness in contemporary gay magazines, and the manner in which this effacement conceals the very acts that distinguish gay identity, I made a conscious effort to overcome my own inhibitions and include some erotic content in *Crooked*. Admittedly, it is still not an explicitly pornographic publication, however the boundaries between pornography and eroticism are nebulous and dependent upon individual viewers’ judgments. I anticipated that my assumed audience would be comfortable with erotic content and I therefore included photographic representations of erect penises, and anal-oral contact (rimming) as well as texts that explicitly discuss gay sex. Tom Waugh laments the commercial erasure of erotic content in homosexual print media, but offers some optimism, stating that “one might well be discouraged by the concomitant stymying of the surges of amateur and grass-roots erotic imagining that has been nurtured in every regime throughout our histories – were there not in every generation new pockets of grass roots eroticisms” (1996).

*Production of a Print Aesthetic*

As a writer, primarily focused on textual discursive representation, it was necessary for me to recognize that zines are also a highly visual medium. While I acknowledge that a literature exists on theories of design, I have chosen not to make this a significant aspect of my research. Nevertheless, it was necessary for me to develop an amateur design practice in order to create *Crooked*’s layout. Having very little experience in design, I required an aesthetic from which to base my work, and was reassured that zines celebrate a markedly amateur and unpolished presentation. As Dunne remarks, “zines, in their often random confluence of text and image … represent a deliberate act of Luddism, a happily random ‘fuck you’ to the overpowering technology of printing” (1995). However, this nonprofessionalism was not only an excuse for my own lack of design skills, I hoped that it would also communicate a certain degree of accessibility and invite future participation from individuals with a variety of skill levels. As Teal Triggs remarks, a zine’s visual language communicates the identity of producers and readers, as well as “suggests something about the assumed relationship between them” (2010), and, through a rough, unprofessional aesthetic I wished to base this relationship upon a permissive, casual accessibility.

While one of *Crooked*’s primary functions is to explore ways of keeping print media relevant in a digital era, its aesthetic to some degree references past print media. For example, the use of Courier as a font that approximates a typewriter, as well as torn and copied images, all cite production methods employed by other zine-makers. While one might argue that these aesthetics solidify the idea of print as a medium of the past, my process involved combining the tools of the recent past as well as the present in order to investigate print media’s future. In *The Medium is the Massage,* a book that celebrates print during a televisual era, Marshall McLuhan states*,* “when faced with a totally new situation, we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavour of the most recent past. We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future” (1967). Building on this idea, I believe that we are often more empowered when working with familiar tools and aesthetics rather than becoming overwrought with what is most fashionable at any given moment. Also, a cleaner and more modern aesthetic might have been read inappropriately as being associated with the polish of commercial publications. Although, retro and vintage aesthetics are currently fashionable and often reappropriated by commercial enterprises, the citation in my zine style is also a consequence of amateur production skills as well as an effect caused by low-budget black and white printing. However, DIY presentation, as an experimental play with a pastiche of available technologies and aesthetics remains useful for communicating political messages. As Crimp and Ralston explain, making reference to the graphics used by ACT UP, “what counts in activist art is its propaganda effect; stealing the procedures of other artists is part of the plan – if it works, we use it” (1990). This reappropriation of styles and images by activists involved in ACT UP was developed concurrently with queer zine makers’ practice of recycling images from other sources. In fact, most zines demonstrate a complete disregard for copyright issues, and not only use images from a wide range of sources, but also reprint content from other zines. This borrowing of material points to the practice’s capacity to disrupt consumer-capitalist models of ownership and profit, as well as the waste and overproduction that can result from continuously seeking what is current and fashionable. Although a significant portion of the images in *Crooked* are original content, I participated in this practice of borrowing and recycling in order to build my zine’s layout and graphic design.

Although cut and paste collages reproduced by Xeroxing are the conventional method of zine production, I decided to lay out my zine on a personal computer and have it printed at a copy shop. Schnapp remarks “undercurrents of unconventional print communication methods have produced astounding objects and nurtured rich subcultures. However, these idealized forms of production tend to allow only for limited distribution” (2012), and this limitation in circulation was part of my reasoning for not creating something more artisanal, such as a screen-printed zine. I was, however, still looking to create a more solid artifact that would encourage interest in print media as a physical, durable art object. The disposability and poor image quality of photocopied zines makes them less suited to satisfy our visually demanding contemporary culture. However, my conventional printing method did not challenge my ability to consider *Crooked* a zine, as zines are reproduced through a number of techniques and “aren’t even particularly technologically determined” (Dunne 1995).

Taking my zine to a printing shop raised a number of issues, which would factor into the sustainability of a small-circulation publication that is produced without advertising. Before I had any conception of what my printing costs might be, I had decided to make my zine larger than could be printed on a conventional legal or letter sized sheet of paper. This implied higher printing costs and meant that I was unable to find pink paper in my dimensions. Although ordering pink paper from the United States was a solution I pursued, this was going to significantly raise the cost of the zine, which would either have to be absorbed by myself or eventual readers. When a collaborator said he thought that using the colour pink to symbolize gay identity was an overstatement, I agreed. However this decision was certainly influenced by my finances.

While the copy shop’s original quote for 200 issues was within my budget and I was impressed with the first proof I had seen, when I went to my final printing the quality was downgraded and many of my images were indecipherable. The copy shop had been presenting my tests with a print quality that had an attractive opacity, but was missing from the lower-grade printing for which I had received my quote. I had to quickly decide whether to increase my production costs or decrease the production quality. Despite all my commitments to the accessible low production quality of zines, I had become attached to the more polished product that I had been presenting to collaborators. I ultimately decided to decrease my print run to 150 issues on the higher-grade printing, even though it had a slight gloss, which I found recalled the production quality of commercial gay and lesbian magazines. As Barnhurst remarks, “queer media put homosexuals in control of the means of cultural production, but the dangers include the pursuit of mainstream production values” (2007). Although my zine maintains an independent aesthetic and is still decidedly amateur and relatively affordable, my choice of printing implied limitations on its circulation and would have ramifications for how it might be sustainably funded.

In the following chapter I will discuss *Crooked*’s circulation and reception, reflect on several representational implications, and assess how it interacted with consumerism. I will also discuss possibilities for sustainable independent queer print production, reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of gay and lesbian print and digital media, and propose directions for gay and lesbian print’s future in a digital era.

**CHAPTER 3:**

**Circulation, Response and Possible Printed Futures**

*Circulation and Response*

As gay men and lesbians increasingly use digital media to meet one another through online dating and social networking sites, gay-identified locations where community print media is circulated, such as gay bars, bookstores and bathhouses, become less popular, weakening the connection between queer identity and particular urban spaces. Because gay bars and gay events have been so beneficial to the establishment of community and collectivity, I found it important to organize a launch party that would celebrate the manner in which print media’s material circulation nurtures encounters in public space. This event took place on March 28th 2013 as a collaborative celebration with the bi-monthly rock night Queer ASS Punk and also in conjunction with Radical Queer Semaine, an annual weeklong festival of queer events in Montreal.

In order to promote *Crooked*’s launch*,* I was invited to speak about my project on a local community radio station, and *Crooked* was also chosen to be part of a forthcoming zine exhibition at RATS 9, an art gallery located in downtown Montreal’s Belgo building. These were particularly interesting opportunities because they’ve allowed me to reach broader audiences outside of my own circle of acquaintances. As Michael Warner states, “a public is always in excess of its known social basis. It must be more than a list of one’s friends. It must include strangers” (2002). In order to reach out to these strangers, I have future plans to distribute *Crooked* through various local zine conventions, including The Anarchist Bookfair, Queer Between the Covers and Expozine.

Directly after collecting the 150 copies of *Crooked* that I had printed at a local copy centre, I ran into a friend who had recently been the editor for one of Montreal’s gay and lesbian community glossies. In a rather serendipitous turn of events, this friend proceeded to invite me to present a copy of *Crooked* to Bruce LaBruce, who happened to be in Montreal. The following day I met LaBruce, and, although our interaction was rather brief, I was able to give a copy of *Crooked* to the co-editor of *J.D.s,* which had been so fundamental to the development of queer zine culture, as well as *Crooked* more specifically*.*

*Crooked*’s launch party took place two weeks later at Katacombs, a downtown Montreal punk bar that holds occasional queer nights. I booked two punk bands with queer members to play the launch event, and *Crooked* was distributed at the door as part of the ‘pay-what-you-can’ entrance fee. Although there was no fixed price, there was a suggested donation of ten dollars for the show, which included a copy of *Crooked*. The launch party had over 200 people in attendance and 120 copies of *Crooked* were distributed throughout the night. Many people read parts of the zine on location and selections were read on stage by a drag queen who was the MC for the event.

Although the launch party was not the ideal place to receive detailed feedback, and I have not been able to do any reader-response research as part of my project, I had the impression that *Crooked* was well received by everyone that I spoke with. There was a marked appreciation for the aesthetic of the zine as well as enthusiasm that the project should continue further than this first issue. The cover image was particularly popular and readers responded well to the subversive identity of the publication, focusing primarily on the more political articles that addressed the precarious relationship between the queer community and the Montreal police force. However, aside from these few initial favourable responses, I have not received any in-depth comments regarding *Crooked*’s textual content, and I believe readers will need more time to engage with the zine before developing critical feedback.

Despite my lack of official reader-response research, I have gathered from the people that attended the launch event that there is a sufficiently large public of queer readers in Montreal to sustain a small-scale print publication*.* The network of contributors, venues, performers and audiences that were already in place to collaboratively organize a launch party suggests that a community exists that could support *Crooked*. Although this public remains fragmented and replete with subdivisions, I perceived a great deal of excitement about *Crooked*’s textual and visual content, as well as the launch party it occasioned. In fact, even people who do not identify as queer were interested in reading the zine, which made it clear that differences in identity do not necessarily demarcate the boundaries of identity-based print audiences.

Nevertheless, certain signs and signals are present in *Crooked* that resonate with queer audiences in particular. For example, the inclusion of images of drag queens, as well as the cover photo of a limp wrist, celebrate the effeminacy associated with homosexuality rather than present it as something to be repressed or ridiculed. Furthermore, the erotic imagery in *Crooked* legitimizes visual representation of homosexual sex, rather than characterize it as something that should be kept hidden and private. I have, however, created a publication that characterizes homosexuality as an essential, static identity category and provides a narrow representation of queer identity. Rob Cover argues, “by positing ‘homosexuality’ as non-heteronormativity’s only possible articulation” gay and lesbian print “marginalizes alternative ‘truths’ of sexuality, maintains the hetero/homo dyad and interpellates the non-heteronormative resource-seeker as lesbian or gay” (2002). In the future, I would like *Crooked* to have less rigid boundaries around representations of sexualities, as well as include voices from a greater spectrum of female and trans-identified queer individuals. Flipping through the pages of *Crooked* I remark a clear lack of racial diversity, and I believe it is essential that future issues contain representations –both visual and textual– that are produced by people of colour.

*Crooked* also appears within a distinctive linguistic community and its predominance of English-language texts positions it as a publication that is principally addressed to Montreal’s Anglophone minority. While I made a conscious effort to have at least one article in French, I could not afford to double my printing costs to create space for translated articles. In the future, however, I would like to include more French content, but, as long as *Crooked* remains a Montreal-based publication, I will continue to assume a bilingual readership and keep texts printed in their original language only.

*Crooked's Commercial Interactions*

While *Crooked* has been produced and distributed without the support of advertising, and has averted the representational restraints that advertisements can impose, it also involved a personal investment of several hundred dollars, and financial limitations affected decisions I made regarding its printing. Although print may be a relatively accessible medium, when dealing with even small circulations, the related expenses can become unaffordable, especially when shouldered by individuals with little financial resources. Alexandra Chasin explains “the fact that the market shapes the gay and lesbian press simply reflects the fact that publishing and distributing require money” (2000). While I began my project with an idealistic aversion to consumerism, it became indisputable that *Crooked* was a commodity and could not be produced or distributed without monetary exchange.

Taking its expenses into account, *Crooked* required certain business and marketing skills in order to ensure that it become a sustainable project. For example, the process of branding and promoting *Crooked* as a new, exciting and desirable product was, at times, similar to the advertising practices that I was seeking to distinguish myself from. I also had to be comfortable insisting on collecting money from friends and acquaintances, whom I may have just as easily given copies for free. In addition, I found myself not only calculating how I could reimburse my printing costs, but also gauging how profitable *Crooked*’s distribution could potentially become. Although the results of these calculations were never terribly promising, I was able to make a small profit from selling *Crooked*. The proceeds were not enough to pay contributors any significant amount, but they were enough to make me believe that *Crooked* could be considered a sustainable endeavour, as long as profits are invested into future printing, and writers remain passionate enough about the project to contribute free labour. Sadly, whether blogging or working unpaid internships, this free labour is a recurrent reality for many writers, even when working outside of small-scale independent publications. However, considering that *Crooked* is only in its experimental stages, I remain optimistic that future growth and remuneration for contributors is possible. It is, nevertheless, also important to acknowledge that there are other, nonmonetary rewards for participating in independent print projects, such as building portfolios, networking with colleagues, acquiring new employment opportunities and audiences for one’s work, as well as the enjoyment of working on a project one feels a connection to.

There are, however, undeniable monetary benefits to operating a more commercial publication. I would be very pleased, for example, if I were able to make a living off of *Crooked*, pay contributors for their work, as well as attain larger circulation numbers. Advertising revenue would also permit colour printing and experimentation with more developed aesthetics. Lisa Henderson (2008) uses the phrase “feeling costs money” to describe how commercial funding is often required to achieve the production qualities necessary to evoke certain audience responses, and through her concept of “queer relay” she suggests a less antagonistic understanding of the relationship between queer cultural workers and commercial entities than is espoused by much of the rhetoric of queer zine culture. Rather than perceiving a repression of creativity and radicalism by profit-seeking marketers, she describes a reciprocal exchange where the “hunger of commercial systems for subcultural energy and artistry” can nurture creative work, and “in which subcultures become the fantasy target of recognition and success and where dominant culture itself is necessarily *in play*, not at the mercy of subcultural forms but lifeless without them.” Rather than seeing marketers and creative workers in opposition, she sees each as directly informing and influencing the other. This is particularly evident from the manner that zine culture dialogs with and reappropriates elements of consumerism (Triggs 2010). Conversely, marketers have also looked to zine culture for inspiration. What Henderson refers to as a hunger for subcultural energy, Stephen Dunne (1995) describes as the cannibalization of underground zine production by commercial culture. However, instead of viewing these interactions as confrontational, Henderson proposes we understand them as a relay, where ideas are passed back and forth, encouraged, expanded upon, critiqued, and discarded through the practical struggles of everyday cultural life, which, inevitably take place in an arena influenced by consumerism. Henderson explains that the world of market relations is a reality that cultural workers must accept as this is “how most of us live –and need to live– most of the time.”

Despite my reservations about the commercialization of gay and lesbian media, I am not altogether opposed to print publications attracting a clientele of advertisers, as long as these enterprises do not interfere with discursive representation, as well as maintain ethical business practices. It is unclear, however, whether a progressive body of advertisers exists that would be attracted to a transgressive publication such as *Crooked*. One example of such sponsorship occurred when the hugely successful queer zine *BUTT* acquired the lucrative support of the chain clothing store American Apparel, which not only provided advertising revenue but also distributed the zine in its stores throughout North America and Europe. Despite this corporate partnership, *BUTT* retains erotic, provocative content that appeals to subcultural queer youth, suggesting that symbiotic relationships can be achieved when queer publications do business with companies that wish to reach alternative readerships. After all, it is no secret that many companies seek to reach young, urban, countercultural demographics.

Commercialization is a complex phenomena that can refer to a number of marketing practices, some homogenizing and restrictive, and others constructive and permissive. While, profit must not be prioritized in such a manner that it is able to depoliticize editorial content or efface particular articulations of LGBT identity, commercial revenue can facilitate the proliferation of a diversity of representations and discourses. As Henderson argues, it is altogether possible to maintain creative autonomy while also strategically accessing the commercial resources necessary to conduct ones’ work and ensure that it is seen by larger audiences. In any case, there is no stark binary between independent and commercial print projects, but rather the convergence of subjectivities brought together through collaborative work. Henderson proposes that queer subculture and commercialization are “not two groups but contiguous cultural spaces whose borders are open and whose inhabitants are sometimes locals and other times guests, with both states in formation and transition” (2008). This vision permits greater flexibility for subcultural production, which need no longer be restricted by low-budget tools and anxieties about selling out, but rather supported by access to resources necessary for disseminating ambitious work to broader audiences.

*Advantages and Disadvantages of Print and Digital*

Although anxieties around print’s survival in an era of emerging digital technologies has encouraged a rather antagonistic understanding of the relationship between print and digital media, it is erroneous to view them in opposition. Print and digital are not competing forces but complimentary tools, each with benefits and drawbacks. Rather than argue that one medium is inherently superior to another, it would be more productive to acknowledge the unique capabilities of each. Electronic communication, for example, is generally more affordable to produce than print. However, while the cost of printing and distribution has led many publications to focus on reaching audiences through websites, this does not mean that digital media evade issues around funding. In fact, digital media require an immense investment on the part of audiences and readers, as expensive technologies, such as computers and Internet connections, are required to receive and participate in online discourse. Stephen Dunne remarks that “access to technology is a class and power issue” (1995), pointing to how economically disadvantaged individuals are often excluded from access to digital communication.

In a more specifically gay context, digital communication allows manufacturers of electronic technology, as well as telecommunication companies, to profit off of gay men and lesbians’ dependence on media for locating community. Furthermore, as gay communities dedicate unremunerated time and effort to developing content for social networking platforms, they simultaneously build advertising audiences that produce profit for shareholders of websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr rather than support community media.

Online social media platforms also have particular modes of mediating discourse, such as encouraging brief, undeveloped textual communication. Because of the endless possibilities and hypermediacy of Internet navigation (Bolter & Grusin 2000), readers of online representations are easily distracted, which prioritizes communication through visual language, rather than the precision of thorough, elaborated texts. The images shared on certain social networking sites are also frequently censored, enforcing limitations around sexual representation. In fact, the surveillance of online discourse is another reason why electronic communication can be problematic for certain individuals, such as those who do not wish to disclose their sexualities, or those who do not want their online activity to be used to create consumer profiles.

While print has been distributed in gay villages and bars, requiring readers to leave the isolation of their homes and interact in local, gay-identified locations, the Internet has facilitated communication across greater geographical distances. While this has created more globalized gay and lesbian online networks, it can also impact the investment individuals have in their local gay and lesbian communities. Furthermore, because digital communication is instantaneous and constant it does not accumulate the same energy behind a specific release date in the same manner that print does. This makes digital media less conducive to events such as launch parties that encourage physical and local interaction, which is particularly important when considering that LGBT political battles are usually region-specific and require mobilization on a localized level.

Although print media has particular benefits for the gay and lesbian community, there are also irrefutable advantages to digital communication, which expose some of print media’s inadequacies. Aside from the fact that digital media can reach large, geographically diverse audiences with comparatively smaller financial investment, print cannot react with the same immediacy as digital media. For example, several articles in *Crooked* were slightly anachronistic at the time of its release. Articles that addressed the 2012 Quebec student protests in the past tense appeared untimely, as conflict between students and the Montreal police force had recently recommenced. While Internet forums were active with responses to recent developments in the student movement, *Crooked*’s discussions must have appeared outdated in comparison.

However, while conducting my archival research at the CLGA, I was struck by a distinct advantage of print as I consulted gay and lesbian print media’s history through physical, tangible artifacts. Several of the more recent zines I researched had websites in addition to print distribution, but their URLs were all dead because the sites were no longer maintained. The ephemerality of online communication means it is less adequately equipped to preserve gay and lesbian discourse, which complicates research such as my own investigation into histories of sexuality and intimacy. Printed documents, on the other hand, remain in archives, ready to be consulted in order to recover gay and lesbian histories and experiences.

Alarmist forecasts of print’s imminent death have less traction when recognizing that paper and ink are unlikely to vanish altogether anytime soon. Print and digital need not be placed in opposition, and digital media need not be perceived as a threat to print, as our current media landscape already provides many examples of compatible co-existence between them. For instance, the Queer Zine Archive Project is an online website that celebrates printed zines by scanning them and distributing them online to broader audiences that need no longer travel to particular archives to access queer zine history. Such projects do not replace queer print but function collaboratively to exploit the benefits of both print and digital. There is clearly room in our contemporary society for a diversity of communication technologies, in fact this diversity encourages interaction between media, proposing new possibilities while providing due recognition to the benefits provided by earlier forms.

*Conclusion: Queer Print’s Crooked Future*

While print may not have the same centrality to the circulation of gay and lesbian counterdiscourses that it once did, it offers particular advantages to the development of localized, autonomous queer communities and provides a unique preservation of gay and lesbian collective memory. Although it is difficult to predict the future of gay and lesbian print, I believe it is safe to say that it has one. The collective and collaborative energy behind *Crooked*’s development, circulation and consumption provides evidence of excitement around the contemporary development of alternative queer presses. It remains to be seen whether this excitement will be sustained for the production of further issues, however I am committed to pursuing this endeavour beyond my research-creation intervention. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that periodicals do no last forever and that valuable work can be done with short circulation spans. In fact, many of the gay and lesbian presses of the past operated for relatively short periods of time and yet had a significant impact on the development of particular gay and lesbian communities. *J.D.s*, for example, only circulated eight issues but established an entirely new genre of queer print production. However, regardless of the duration of any one particular print project, the continued emergence of queer publications in a digital era contributes to a longer narrative of gay and lesbian print production that forges continuities between past precedents and future media landscapes.

While commercialization remains an omnipresent force that can moderate the formation of sexual identity, it can also propose partnerships that permit representational autonomy and allow gay and lesbian print to reach larger audiences. Rather than view subcultural workers and consumerism in a perpetually antagonistic confrontation, it is best to acknowledge the dialog and exchange that occurs between them. While a number of decisions and practices can free queer print media from advertising constraints, certain business and marketing practices are necessary sustain an independent press within the inevitable and encompassing framework of consumerism and market relations. If production values and circulation sizes are kept low, an intimate, small-scale press is possible that is sustained by personal investments, reader purchasing, and unpaid labour. While this system of independent print production has limitations, it can facilitate the development of subversive platforms for the circulation of distinct and diverse queer counterdiscourses. It allows for heterogeneous articulations of queer difference and political radicalism that acknowledge diversity and fragmentation, and resist assimilative representations. Through unrestrained confessions of sexual subjectivity, empowering, sex-positive representations of gay and lesbian identity take shape.

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