

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Seventies Sociality: Activist Publishers and the Digital Commonplacing of New Knowledge

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The historiography of gay liberation publishing offers much to the digital humanities, especially if read through Peter Stallybrass' argument that 'reading is a technology of inventorying information to make it reusable.' He suggests 'commonplacing' to make clear that every individual's thoughts are informed by others' voices. This paper asks how we might best go about this commonplacing work using linked data, building on the DIY practices of gay liberationists.

Keywords: methods; TEI; linked data; publishing; gay liberation

As information travels through gatherings, through books, through laws, through letters, through the material traces that make up the archives, it is the methods of collection, dissemination, and citation that give it significance – working out just how that information came to be set down is the historiographer's job. In the digital humanities we have the opportunity to intervene in how that material is set down, translated, and circulated in and for the digital realm. We should intervene, engage, and create in digital spaces, not simply because it is our obligation as scholars to share our findings in whichever form is most appropriate to our intended audiences, but because we can and do help make critical reflection on data creation processes the norm. This is a critical intervention, since data's trustworthiness is based, or at least should be based, on its modes of creation, collection, and aggregation. What follows is an outline of both the data curation and aggregation practices of the Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada (LGLC) project, and more crucially, the publication history of the material that underpins the project. This paper introduces some of the open social knowledge creation and dissemination practices of Canadian gay liberations and concludes with reflections on the LGLC project's experiments in enriching those cultural artifacts through linked data using digital humanities methods.

The Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada (LGLC) project is engaged in thinking through the history of the gay liberation movement to better understand its social scholarship. Our aim is to present material from the archival records in a number of formats, building on Implementing New Knowledge Environments' (INKE) pioneering iterative prototyping methods, outlined below and elsewhere, to provide tools to study how members of social networks (in this case liberationist networks) developed and mobilized information. The LGLC project, co-directed by Constance Crompton (University of Ottawa) and Michelle Schwartz (Ryerson University), comprises a TEI- and database-driven chronology of the gay liberation movement in Canada, covering the period from the formation of the first Canadian homophile associations in 1964 to the start of the AIDS crisis in 1981. The project textbase is made up of 35,000 records of poetry readings, legislative changes, murders, arrests, book launches, and celebrations as well as records about people, places, and publications—the material foundations of gay rights social knowledge in Canada. If, as Stéfán Sinclair, Stan Ruecker, and Milena Radzikowska have argued (2013), humanities scholars' central research-based imperative is to enrich cultural artifacts through interpretation and analysis, what can we learn about how to engage with social texts from the social practices that produced them?

The work presented here builds on the scholarship that Cole Mash, Raymond Siemens, and Constance Crompton reported on in *Scholarly Research Communication* (2015), 'Playing Well with Others: The Social Edition and Computational Collaboration.' That particular article outlined the Social Edition of the Devonshire Manuscript team's foray into linked data, adding RDFa (Resource Description Framework in Attributes) to

the edition's HTML as a way of making the networks described in our biographies computationally tractable. The LGLC project is building on the methodology pioneered by the Social Edition of the Devonshire Manuscript research team, that of using distinctly social digital humanities methods to enrich, critique, and collaborate on the developing of new knowledge about and through socially produced materials from the historical record.

While developing the LGLC database, the project team has revisited Ed Folsom's 'Database as Genre: The Epic Transformation of Archives,' published in the *PMLA* in 2007 and the work and the responses to it published in the *PMLA*. There was, as Jerome McGann (2007) pointed out, some slippage in Folsom's thinking about databases, particularly in the conflation of databases and TEI—an argument that Folsom rebuts describing the term database as a 'metaphor, a base onto which we put things that are given (data)' (Reply, 2007, 1608). The LGLC project does not use the term database in a metaphorical way at all; we use several primary source and born digital, TEI encoded documents which we have, in recent years, transformed into a number of formats—including Cypher, the input and query language for Neo4j, a graph, as opposed to relational, database. Of most interest to us for the purposes of this paper is Peter Stallybrass' (2007) response to Folsom, 'Against Thinking,' in which he entreats the readers to remember the Renaissance tradition of 'commonplacings': 'reading is a technology of inventorying information to make it reusable' and that 'Renaissance readers and writers followed the example of the bee,' that is, taking what is 'sweetest' from each flower in order to produce wonderful honey (1582). Defining originality as 'another name for repeating other people's ideas without knowing that you're doing so,' Stallybrass dismisses original thoughts as unnecessary and impossible (1582). Instead, he suggests commonplacing to combat thinking, arguing that every individual's thoughts are informed by others' voices, that is, by what they have read and heard: 'Learning requires imitation and inspiration, which today are marginalized by a concept of originality that produces as its inevitable double the specter of plagiarism, a specter rooted in the fear that we might have more to learn from others than from ourselves' (1584). It has been helpful for us to use the 'example of the bee' to work out what was sweetest about each account from the primary source material that makes up the records through which we are trying to trace gay liberationist intellectual history. Attention to who these metaphorical bees were, and the conditions that created the liberationist journals, is key here.

Gay Liberationist DIY Publishing Practices

Gay liberationist methods and goals differed significantly from the gay rights movements that followed. Predicated on unapologetic rejection of mainstream heterosexual norms, liberationists insisted not only on change (as opposed to assimilation), but also on visibility. As is documented here and elsewhere, liberationists "pioneered new forms of consciousness raising, created a vibrant print culture, won legal reforms, and developed successful strategies for supporting survivors of assault. That said, the movement itself was not without internal schisms and debate: gay men who focused on their own sexual libertarianism could be blind to gender-based power imbalances, and lesbian groups, often finding themselves at odds with both the gay men's liberation and women's liberation movements, splintered off to form their own organizations centered on distinct sets of demands" (Crompton and Schwartz, n.d.).

Publishing and distributing new knowledge was at the heart of the gay liberation movement. There is a long history of gay and lesbian self-publishing, since queer Canadians have not been able to count on Canadian publishers, no matter how radical, to tell liberationist stories. The LGLC project draws on a hundreds of such publications. Significantly, the publication at the very heart of the LGLC project is *The Body Politic*, a Toronto-based periodical that ran from 1971 to 1987, which was founded on this desire for open dissemination of liberationist politics.

The Body Politic has its roots in a magazine called *Guerilla*. *Guerilla* was a radical, underground, counterculture magazine aimed at the working class. It was not what one might now call a queer magazine, but it was open to gay issues and involvement—and indeed, the magazine shared an address with the Toronto Gay Action group. The relationship between the Toronto Gay Action and the magazine was not, however, always a happy one. *Guerilla* would report on gay liberationist activity, but it edited and editorialized rather heavily. For example, in August 1971 a rally was held in support of the brief 'We Demand,' which called for changes in the sections of the Canadian Criminal Code that criminalized gay people. The rally was organized by Toronto Gay Action and, shortly after the protest, Jearld Moldenhauer submitted a piece covering the event to *Guerilla*. This piece was published but with heavy edits, which made it clear to Toronto Gay Action members that even a magazine like *Guerilla* would alter, or worse, censor, gay voices. Moldenhauer remarked: 'When we saw that even *Guerilla* had changed things, we realized we needed our own voice' (quoted in Bébout 1971, n.p.). The following September, Moldenhauer announced at a Toronto Gay Action meeting that

he would hold a gathering at his home to discuss the formation of a gay newspaper. On October 28, 1971, 5,000 copies of the first issue of *The Body Politic* went on sale (McLeod 1996, 82).

By 1975 it became apparent that *The Body Politic* was a large enough venture to warrant incorporation, and so the Pink Triangle Press, the current publisher of *Xtra*, Canada's gay magazine, was born. In 1977 with the purchase of a Compugraphic 4 for \$35,000, *The Body Politic* also took control of its own typesetting. Rick Bébout remarked that it 'was the first time that marginal publications like *The Body Politic* could afford—even at these prices—to own and control technically advanced means of production' (1971, n.p.). This was important because those running the magazine could now control the design of their publication and ensure that it was presented as they intended. To help finance the move to own more of the publication chain, they also started PinkType, a gay typesetting collective. PinkType offered typesetting services to other radical publications, ensuring that they too could circulate the tenets of gay liberation. The genesis of PinkType and *The Body Politic* is mirrored in the founding narratives of other feminist, gay, and lesbian periodicals in Canada and the United States, including *Le Berdache* (Montreal), *GO Info* (Ottawa), *The Gazette* (Atlantic Canada), *Christopher Street* (New York), *Tangents* (Los Angeles), as well as presses, such as The Feminist Press (New York), Press Gang (Vancouver), Innana (Toronto), Arsenal Pulp Press (Vancouver), and Women's Press (Toronto); presses founded by collectives and consciousness-raising groups working to connect networks of activists, to build community, and to create social knowledge.

The growth of the feminist, gay, and lesbian press required certain technological know-how: feminist and gay movements relied on the competency of activists themselves. For example, PinkType drew on the skills of activist Amy Gottlieb to actually set type (and to answer the phones). Without her, *The Body Politic* and other radical publications such as the *Lesbian Organization of Toronto Newsletter* would not exist, leaving no cultural artifacts for the enrichment Sinclair, Ruecker, and Radzikowska call for.

Digital Humanities Publishing and Commonplacing Practices

There are several technologies in the digital humanities that offer an analog to the Compugraphic 4 and other typesetting tools used by the gay liberation press. The most obvious analog, of course, is the Text Encoding Initiative, or TEI: a language, to our minds, that is ready to be used to generate linked data, to improve the sociality of texts, connect networks, to build community, and, of course, to create social knowledge—to gather all that is sweetest, as Stallybrass would say. Linked data is emerging as the sweetest way to connect information and annotations about texts, people, and events. For developers of TEI-based projects, like those who started the Social Edition of the Devonshire manuscript, or for Michelle Schwartz and Constance Crompton when they embarked on the LGLC project, linked data was much-desired but nonessential. RDF, the XML-based linked data format was an added output that would be nice to have, but that was not critical to ultimate success of the projects. The recent catalyzation of interest in linked open data in the context of TEI (including the genesis of projects like the Canadian Research Writing Collaboratory and the recent revitalization of digital humanities linked data special interest groups) is, however, a promising sign of our field's engagement with linked data, and our readiness to join international efforts to produce and publish linked data based on the resources we already publish and the skills we already have (Ciotti and Tomasi 2016; Huber et al. 2014; Pattuelli et al. 2013; Lehmann et al. 2012; Shadbolt et al. 2012; Hellmann et al. 2014).

As John Simpson and Susan Brown pointed out at the 2014 INKE conference, linked data only makes up 1% of the web, and much of that 1% is used for commercial rather than scholarly purposes (Simpson and Brown 2014). The conversion of existing digital humanities data into linked data would offer humanities scholars an opportunity to intervene in the semantic web as it is being built. It allows the power of the semantic web to be harnessed for more than just commercial purposes. The semantic web could be used instead to offer rich and readily accessible information about the research topic of the liberal arts: the human record. The creation and exposure of linked data from the vast number of existing authoritative TEI projects could enable scholars to embrace linked cultural data at scale. But what is the path to success? We suspect that there is much to learn from feminist, gay, and lesbian publishers of the 1970s. The LGLC project has started to map the networks of queer activists, organizations, and publications (see **Figures 1** and **2**) to help gauge the effect of self-publishing networks, and is embarking on conversion of these networks so that they can be modelled in RDF.

Despite calls in the digital humanities for TEI-linked data compatibility (Simpson and Brown 2014; Ciotti and Tomasi 2016), scholars have yet to develop best practices for creating linked data from richly encoded TEI resources. For many projects, the production of linked data is an ancillary goal—one that would be gratifying to achieve, but that is secondary to the encoding itself, or one that is only necessary to facilitate aggregation. We propose the development of XSLT-backed tools to convert and connect otherwise incommensurable data

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