

MODELED BODIES: BIOPOLITICS, GENDER, AND FUTURITIES
IN DIGITAL FASHION MEDIA

by

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To Those Who Have Guided Me

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This thesis uses an analysis of Condé Nast’s app Vogue Runway to locate the construction and dissemination of idealized bodies within digital and platformed media. Tracing the interwoven histories of medicalized quantification practices and queer subjectivity, this thesis links biopolitical regimes to digitality and contends that rigidly gendered and sexed norms are propagated and metricized through fashion aesthetics. A Deleuzian framework enables this reading and foregrounds the imbrication of control and corporate marketing practices that subtends mediated fashion imagery. To combat this serpentine control, I put forth a queer analytic that combines reparative methods as theorized by Eve Sedgwick and José Esteban Muñoz. These strategies look to futurity as a source for political economic and socio-cultural praxis. Ultimately this thesis seeks to ground contemporary media practices within a historical framework and promulgate generative methodologies for reclaiming the potential of expressive fashion media.

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CHAPTER 1

QUEER AS CODE

A biopolitical reading of Vogue Runway foregrounds intertwined histories of medicalized sexuality and digitality. By weaving together these thematic areas, I bind the production of modern gender and sexuality to digital media objects and show that Vogue Runway is implicitly coded with rigidly gendered and sexed bodies. Central to this task is a yoking of Foucauldian medical lineages surrounding the queer body to the theorization of quantum technologies and marginalized cultures by scholars like Jacqueline Wernimont and Jessica Johnson. Close attention must be paid to these subjects because the proliferation of quantifying practices surrounding queer lives and their surfacing in interfaces like Vogue Runway are not isolated developments. I locate and connect these practices within the app to contend that quantum and visual media, and the construction of queerness, are coextensive, and these linkages provide a foundation for understanding the subjective histories of digital interfaces and fashion industry aesthetics. This argument follows Kara Keeling's provocation in *Queer OS* that "the materiality, rhetorics, forms, and ontologies of new media readily lend themselves to a theoretical encounter with queer theory [and] might enliven and enrich both film and media studies and queer theory, thus deepening the capacity of each to attend to the sociopolitical registers of contemporary life" (152). Contextualizing expressive media like Vogue Runway within biopolitical histories of the quantified queer body, moreover, illustrates how entities like Condé Nast embed algorithmic and platformed media logics within cultural production for the purposes of capital accrual.

Queer theory, in Eve Sedgwick's view, promotes the "open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning" cohering around diverse gendered and sexed subjects (*Tendencies* 8). As an academic discipline, it emerged through scholarly engagement with the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the early 1990s and a desire to dismantle the reactionary socio-cultural, political, and economic frameworks dominating American life under the Reagan administration. Against this backdrop of medical and political crisis, scholars like Judith Butler, Teresa de Lauretis, and Eve Sedgwick used psychoanalytic and deconstructionist models of philosophy, semiotics, and textual analysis to interpret the complex conceptual entanglements produced by nonnormative bodies and sexualities. Important scholarly and analytic work produced at the outset of this academic turn included Butler's theory of gender performativity and Sedgwick's formulation of homosocial relationality. Butler's argument in "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" (1990) that gender is discursively produced and performed in a compulsory manner became particularly central to critiques of cisgenderism, a term for bodies where the gender identity matches the biological sex assigned to them at birth. These early academic dealings with same-sex desire and transformative bodies resided firmly in humanities-based enclaves like Literature and Film departments and drew heavily upon European philosophers like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.

Foucault vitalizes queer theoretical projects for a number of reasons. His conception of produced and medicalized subjectivity remains foundational for the field in its depiction of bodies trapped within circuits of political power and revelation of deeply intentional discursive practices surrounding sexuality. The most notable examples of this thematic emphasis are *Madness and Civilization* (1961), his multi-volume work *History of Sexuality* (1976-1984), and

Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth Century French Hermaphrodite (1980). Taken together, these works outline Foucault's interest in theorizing the medico-juridical contexts responsible for the emergence of modern sexuality and subtend much of queer studies. I explicitly foreground Foucault in this discussion of queerness and digital media because his works directly engage questions regarding medicine, bodies, and power, and this potent cocktail produces data as a contested figure within queer histories.

Foucault's *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* is a starting point for understanding the imbrication of digitality and queer lives. Interested in tracing formulations of power, Foucault charts institutional shifts in the governance of bodies and citizens from techniques of discipline to more abstract discursive arenas. Previously, these disciplinary forms of control were codified in the direct policing of bodies and knowledge through penal, legal, educational, and administrative means.¹ These protocols for disciplining subjects and reinforcing particular power relations occurred primarily during the transition to industrial modes of political-economic authority. The state, for Foucault, "had to have methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern" (*Sexuality* 141). Here Foucault hints at the "smoothing" out of governance by state and political-economic authorities through the careful orchestration of optimization using technologies that regulate the body. Chief among these technologies of optimization was sexuality.

¹ Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* (1975) provides a more in-depth account of these disciplinary regimes. While both are concerned with the production and maintenance of power, *Discipline and Punish* concentrates more fully on the top-down structures characterizing these politico-juridical institutions and their effects than *History of Sexuality*.

A Foucauldian view of sexed bodies and sexuality reveals their productive potential for power relations. For him, the West understands human sexuality through the practice of *scientia sexualis* as opposed to *ars erotica*. *Ars erotica* signals a discourse in which the truth about sex is primarily derived from pleasure and it is “understood as a practice and accumulated as experience.” This understanding of sexual practice as artful experience stands in contradistinction to *scientia sexualis*, which seeks to divine sex through “procedures” that uncover sexual truth through forms of knowledge-power. Emblematic of this Western practice of *scientia sexualis* is the confessional booth, where one speaks of sexuality in specific and knowable ways (*Sexuality* 57-58). This insight into the West’s method of discovering the truth about sex, typified by the confessional booth and the discursive field produced by statements regarding sexuality, creates the basis for Foucault’s “repressive hypothesis.” Rather than seeing Victorian Britain’s discussions of sexuality through the prism of censure or denial, Foucault sees them as generative mechanisms. This hypothesis, in other words, views Victorian attitudes towards sexuality through the lens of revelatory science—discursive utterance as the engine for producing power through sexual science.

Sexuality, thus, is an essential technology for power relations and governance in the West. Because sexuality is “useful for the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies,” it is “endowed with the greatest instrumentality” (*Sexuality* 103). This instrumentalization of sex and sexuality is central to any number of individual and population-level management strategies, and it is harnessed in the West through the power of confession and conversation. This technology of sexual discourse that Foucault envisions reinforced population-level political, economic, and statist imperatives

through the compelling of sexual behavior at the individual level. Sexual imperatives included the “hysterization of women’s bodies,” “pedgagoziation of children’s sex,” “socialization of procreative behavior,” and “psychiatrization of perverse pleasure” (*Sexuality* 104-105). These practices, as Foucault saw them, ensured modern and emerging nations managed population levels effectively and stabilized population-level rates like fertility by creating norms for sexual behaviors. This productive capacity of sex for political-economic purposes, to reiterate, took shape through the making-known and “norming” of sexuality and sexual practices rather than their repression.

A result of this situated construction of Victorian sexuality was the pathologization and criminalization of certain sexual behaviors and bodies. Biopower and biopolitics, as theorized by Foucault, supported statist directives through norms that privileged certain bodies and marked others as deviant. Same-sex attraction and sexual behavior were filtered through this biopolitical lens and placed in opposition to heterosexuality to maintain discrete categories of accepted sexual behavior. One “corrective technology” used within the construction of sexual discourse to shore up political and economic imperatives was the medicalization of queerness. This was accomplished through what Foucault terms the “psychiatrization of perverse pleasure,” and it entailed the division of sexuality into separate biological and psychological instincts whereby “a clinical analysis [could be made] made of all the forms of anomalies by which it could be afflicted.” After analysis, sex was “assigned a role of normalization or pathologization with respect to all behavior” and corrective measures were sought (105). Here Foucault details how Victorian sexual discourse produced anomalies through the reification of sexual norms and the implication of medical industries for its larger biopolitical project. Talking about sexuality

through terms like deviation and normality created power differentials that ensured individuals were disciplined in accordance with political-economic objectives. He also makes explicit the modern development of queerness and same-sex attraction as medicalized phenomena requiring corrective treatment.

The psychiatrization of sexual behavior and subsequent ordering of subjects and behaviors into discursive categories of normality and deviance makes clear the productive power of sexual relations. Hilary Malatino, in their work on trans and intersex histories, does an excellent job of summarizing this portion of Foucault's project. They contend that, "[He] is pinpointing...the ostensible Victorian-era birth of massive sexual repression [that] was roughly contemporaneous with the burgeoning of large-scale medicoscientific research regarding the constitution of sexual difference," and this signals a "growing preoccupation with sexuality and the increasing reterritorialization² of bodies in relation to these sexual knowledges" (*Queer Embodiment* 35). As nations increasingly required population-level strategies for continued growth and operation, medical-scientific and psychiatric establishments constructed categories of sexual difference to produce desired forms of sexuality. In order to achieve this, disciplining correctives like sexual therapies were introduced into medical protocol to ensure heterosexual coupling and reproduction. Thus, Malatino states, "sexual knowledges" created by Foucault's *scientia sexualis* led to both biological and discursive changes to bodies through medical procedures, tests, and therapies.

² Here Malatino is referring to the concept of territorialization discussed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980).

Psychological testing and psychometry were key techniques in post-war America. Displaying Foucauldian elements of Victorian scientia sexualis, I see these tests as also making clear the role of quantification in the medicalization of queer sexualities. With the involvement of medicine in biopolitical productions of statehood, fertility and heterosexual coupling became the objects through which “perverse” sexualities were foregrounded. Psychiatry, sex differences, and “sex research” gained cultural and political prominence in this drive to standardize sexual coupling for the so-called health of the nation, and one method used to measure sexual productivity was standardized testing. These standardized tests, according to Jennifer Terry, were viewed as superior to the subjective methods of psychoanalysis and clinical psychiatry because they “emphasized the virtues of scientifically controlled data gathering and statistical quantification” (*American Obsession* 168). Objectivity and its supposed rigor, in other words, became deeply connected to sexuality and pleasure through data and quantification. “Psychometry,” continues Terry, “offered what individual clinical histories could not by revealing correlations, norms, averages, and rates or prevalence...[that] could bring to light significant deviation” (16). Terry’s Foucauldian lens on American queer histories emphasizes the prevailing view of quantification and medicalization as bearers of truth in the biopolitical project of measuring and correcting deviation.

Deviation also became the means by which norms were developed, and the diagnostic “Masculinity and Femininity” test was integral to this endeavor during the 1950s. This standardized questionnaire, developed by Lewis Terman and Catherine Cox Miles, acquired information about its takers and used multiple-choice questions to measure emotions, ethics, interests, and opinions. Also measured were body morphologies, behaviors, and attitudes. Taken

together, these diagnostic categories purported to measure masculinity and femininity using objective and quantitative techniques that, in effect, concretized constructed homologies among bodies, genders, and sexualities. A high masculinity score, for example, was equated with above-average intelligence, merit, and superior adjustment, whereas a high intelligence score in females indicated abnormalities.

Terry identifies two important ideas circulating within the M-F test. It was “a means to gather data about the differences between typical men and women [and] note undesirable trends which social engineering could correct,” and, more importantly, “it was used most often to identify individuals who deviated from norms” by signaling queer sexualities (Terry 170). This second point underscores the idea that individuals lacking essentialized one-one connections between morphology and gender were seen as deviant. An adolescent boy that was “the small, slender type” and “did not enjoy aggressive leadership, energetic activity, warfare, adventure, outdoor sports, science, or mechanical things” was labeled a “passive homosexual male” with “introverted [and] psychoneurotic” tendencies (Terry 172). Cultural and gendered biases were thus implicitly coded within these quantitative and “objective” standardizations, and they concretized articulations between body and gender. Deviations from normative ideological conceptions of “man” and “woman” in 1950s America disrupted these tidy articulations between body and gender and were labeled “queer.” The way individuals presented and appeared to others, therefore, became implicated in the larger biopolitical project to highlight “undesirable” sexualities for adjustment.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), published in 1952, was another technique used for the quantification of queerness. Developed by the American

Psychiatric Association to classify a range of pathologized modes of being, the DSM was used as a textbook by clinicians and researchers to approach and ostensibly “treat” these pathologies. “Homosexuality” was one such entry in the DSM, and its inclusion typifies the biopolitical approach to managing deviant sexuality for the purposes of cisgenderism and heterosexual reproduction through the identification and treatment of “perverse” pleasures.³ Abram Lewis, in “‘We Are Certain of Our Own Insanity’: Antipsychiatry and the Gay Liberation Movement, 1968-1980,” makes clear that “moving to more precise diagnostic criteria” in the DSM produced a reliance on data for the purposes of sexuality management and strengthened the bonds among medicine, authority, queerness, and quantification.

Data extracted by practices like clinical diagnoses and psychometry is also the crucial link connecting these histories of medicine and sexuality to digital interfaces. My linking of queer bodies and lives to digitality through the fulcrum of quantum media finds kinship in the intersectional critiques of data provided by scholars like Jacqueline Wernimont and Jessica Johnson. In analyzing quantum media in *Numbered Lives*, Wernimont is specifically interested in understanding how “poetic processes (becomings) and material products are entangled” (8). This interplay between becomings and material products occurs in and alongside quantum media and mediation, and Wernimont routes this analysis through nonnormative subjects to discover how universalizing paradigms take shape in digital media. Like Wernimont, Johnson looks at data through the lens of nonnormative subjects in “Markup Bodies: Black [Life] Studies and Slavery

³ Scholars like Regina Kunzel have critiqued the debates surrounding the pathologization and eventual removal of “homosexuality” from the DSM in 1972 through disability and “mad studies” frameworks. Kunzel, for example, problematizes the LGBT community’s “effort to distance [themselves] so vociferously from people positioned as ‘patients’” (319).

[Death] Studies at the Digital Crossroads” to understand how digitized media contain submerged and troubling histories. She centers her critique of quantum media in the idea of black digital practice, which foregrounds the violent relational histories of slavery and counting but advocates for humane and intentional digital praxis (Johnson 66). She accomplishes this by interrogating “the stakes underlying data’s implicit claim to stability or objectivity,” a move that successfully argues the point that nonnormative bodies are enmeshed in the quantifying practices which underpin data and digitality.

Johnson’s argument is central to my thesis because it traces the twined histories of minoritized people and quantification practices to reveal the subjective nature of digital practice. Johnson sees quantum media as inherently enmeshed with enslaved peoples because counting practices like the “One-Drop Rule” informed their everyday lives and have inevitably crystallized within digital culture. She clarifies this by stating, “The brutality of black codes, the rise of Atlantic slaving, and everyday violence reproduce themselves in digital architecture” (Johnson 58). Historical quantification practices, for Johnson, create reality-warping effects in contemporary digital practice that cannot be ignored. To combat this imbrication of quantification and violence, Johnson offers “black digital practice [as] the interface by which black freedom struggles [can] challenge reproduction of black death and commodification [by] countering the presumed neutrality of the digital” (59). Here Johnson offers a model of correction and world-building that views “the interface” as a political object capable of change.

Viewing diverse sexualities and data through Johnson’s theoretical framework brings clarity to histories of medicine, queerness, and digitality. While I do not want to flatten Johnson’s argument, this essay follows in her footsteps by contending that historical quantification

practices, including psychometry tests, blood counts, gender binaries, and disciplining of asexuality and polyamory, have produced inequities that are “coded” into contemporary digital practice. Something as foundational to digital practice as the informatic language of “zero-one,” for example, depends upon the concretization of binaries, and binaries have historically been used to construct and discipline queer identities. The quantifying of queerness, in other words, mediates our contemporary digital moment and has material effects. A Foucauldian understanding of sexuality, moreover, foregrounds biopolitical and quantum-based attempts to “adjust” nonnormative sexual desires and bodies for political-economic purposes, a task accomplished through the bringing of certain sexualities under the purview of medical authorities and the creation of discourses related to pathological deviance. Harnessing sexuality for its productive power entailed the “norming” of heterosexual coupling for the purposes of reproduction and the casting of gender as a “one-one” ratio between biology and cultural role. These norms have been reinforced through a variety of techniques, including psychometric tests and clinical diagnoses. These methods, moreover, depend upon and produce quantitative and statistical measurements in the form of data. Taking after Johnson, the pathologization of queer subjects is thus invariably tied to the production of data, and digital culture, built upon this data, inevitably contains fraught queer histories.

Laying a Foucauldian foundation for the analysis of Vogue Runway also frames the operation of power within digital culture and interfaces. Sex and gender, for Foucault, undergird the productive capacities of discursive fields and point to the complex networks at work in the management of populations for political and economic purposes. “Deviant” and “perverse” sexualities are essential to the dialectical casting of other sexualities as normative and the

subsequent creation of asymmetrical power relations. Using arguments for the intersectional critique of data allows me to indicate the imbrication of asymmetrical power relations and digitality within socio-technical objects like Vogue Runway and illustrate how a visual analysis works to reveal the deeply embedded infrastructural inequities in our expressive digital media. To echo Keeling, looking at digital fashion media through the lens of queer theory allows me to draw out the historical circumstances hiding beneath the app's glossy surface and use them to illuminate our current moment. Vogue Runway may attempt to conceal the biopolitical histories firmly entrenched within its machinery and aesthetics, but it is nevertheless deeply tied to medicalized histories of gender, sexuality, and the construction of ideal bodies.

CHAPTER 2

DELEUZE, VOGUE RUNWAY, AND THE IDEAL FASHION BODY

This section undertakes a visual analysis of Vogue Runway’s interface and images to understand the aesthetic operations of an organized and regulated infrastructure. Building from the Foucauldian theoretical frame offered in the first section, I expand my argument that Vogue Runway contains socio-political histories buttressing political economic and population-level imperatives related to gender and sexuality to account for shifts to control-based societies. This is accomplished through an encounter with Deleuzian theory, specifically his seminal essay “Postscript on the Societies of Control” (1990), to understand control and its implications for aesthetic choices in Vogue Runway. The theoretical frame I employ here casts Deleuzian societies of control as working in tandem with compulsory performances of gender in corporate fashion media to concretize normed bodies. These normed bodies, moreover, can be considered biopolitical bodies: young, able-bodied, white, and cisgendered, they typify the cisgenderism and heterosexual imperatives crucial to industry and nation in biopolitics. This frame doesn’t quite view Deleuzian and Foucauldian principles as starkly different; rather, it interweaves the two in order to draw forth the nuances of Vogue Runway’s operational and visual mechanisms. I also situate this frame within broader currents of biopolitics and platformed digital culture as theorized by Allison Hearn and Sarah Banet-Weiser. The interplay between infrastructure and visuality present in Condé Nast’s app is well-served by this analysis, which highlights the tightly bound circuit between surface and depth in glossy corporatized objects and reveals the serpentine nature of contemporary power networks. Power is still bound to an ideal gendered body

emblematic of biopolitical projects, and Vogue Runway's use of platform logics, cloaked in a haze of high-wattage fashion imagery, heightens the visibility of this controlled body.

Deleuze's "Postscript on the Societies of Control," in its illumination of the shifting nature of power regimes and their representations, provides the backbone for a visual analysis of Vogue Runway. Central to his essay is the Foucauldian concept of disciplinary societies and their organization as "vast spaces of enclosure" (Deleuze 3). These spaces of enclosure, including the school, barracks, prison, and factory, operated according to a singular set of logics: the concentration, distribution, ordering, and composition of forces and bodies for the purposes of production (Deleuze 3). Power, in this rendering, works as a "heavy" force in a top-down model. A factory manager or teacher, for example, is responsible for disciplining students or workers through a variety of techniques for the purposes of making similar each body, and ensuring coordination and productivity. Spaces of enclosure in disciplinary societies of the eighteenth through twentieth centuries also included the family unit, which utilized discourses of sex (including the medicalization of "deviance") to adjust bodies to cisgendered, heterosexual coupling. Each of these spaces of enclosure had the responsibility of creating structures that were monumental in nature and capable of the sustained production of goods central to industrial markets. But, as Deleuze offers, Foucault was keen in his perception that power regimes mutate, and a shift from industrialized, disciplinary societies and economies to those marked by decentralization and fluidity occurred in the late twentieth century.

Deleuze labels these protean regimes of power "societies of control." Marked by "ultrapid forms of free-floating control," these new societies represent a shift away from static, top-down power to a more insidious and gaseous form that traps bodies and subjects in never-

ending patterns (4). Corporations like Condé Nast emblemize these societies of control. Where spaces of enclosure such as the factory, a symbol of Foucauldian discipline, acted as “molds,” corporations act as “modulations,” like “a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other” (Deleuze 4). This chameleon-like capacity to change form, for the exertion of control, as conditions change can be seen in Condé Nast’s adaptation to changing markets. *Vogue*, throughout much of the twentieth century, existed only in material form as a perennial print publication. With the rise of digital media alongside the corporation, *Vogue* has shifted from a material object to a “brand,” encompassing websites, YouTube videos, e-commerce stores, and podcasts. A more concrete illustration of this snaking of control through the creation of limitless content and imagery can be summarized thusly: once one finished reading their monthly *Vogue*, they were finished. In societies of control, one is, as Deleuze says, never “finished with anything” (5). Once one puts down their monthly *Vogue* magazine in our contemporary moment, they can continue exploring Condé Nast’s *Vogue*-themed world that is rife with audio, visuals, fabrics, and language.

A Deleuzian conception of biopolitical power, here understood as control, highlights these world-building marketing techniques. In the never-ending modulation of bodies produced and required for societies of control, the individual/mass binary representative of disciplinary societies gives way to “dividuals” and “masses, samples, data, markets, and ‘banks’” (5). Deleuze envisions this shift as the move from gold as the financial standard within disciplinary societies to free-floating rates of exchange within societies of control. Individuals—now dividuals—are locked within a monetary system that undulates and oozes at any given moment,

never remaining static or heavy.⁴ This change in financial arrangement prefigures a change from the heavy “capitalism of production” to an amorphous capitalism of “services” that seeks to transform production rather than specialize it. It is capitalism, in other words that is no longer concerned about the garment being produced but rather about its immaterial capacities.⁵ Marketing, for Deleuze, is thus the engine and “soul” for these flexible control societies because it stands in for and triggers the transformation of the product rather than its specialization (6).

Looking at the layout and structure of Vogue Runway’s central archive for fashion show images gives one a glimpse of the Deleuzian marketing logics at play. The app’s “landing page” consists of symmetrically arranged tiles that cascade down the screen, with the latest runway shows appearing towards the top. The runway show images are created from designer presentations, including both corporate-owned fashion businesses like Louis Vuitton and independently owned brands like Rick Owens. Fashion presentations are uploaded in near real-time, which creates a further cascade effect when checking the app during presentation-heavy periods like “fashion weeks.” When a user checks the landing page, shows that recently appeared towards the top might have receded down the screen within a matter of hours.

These tiled thumbnails lead to pages that are divided into “looks” from the runway show. These “looks” pages can be scrolled through like the main landing page, and “looks” images can number to nearly one hundred. On any of these pages, one can utilize the “search” function at the bottom of the screen. The search icon guides the user to a screen divided into two tabs:

⁴ I borrow the term “heavy” from Zygmunt Bauman, who theorizes a similar shift in capitalism from “solid” to “liquid” operations. Both Bauman and Deleuze are invested in this conceptual shift from fixity to modulation that is characteristic of late-twentieth century economies. See Bauman’s *Liquid Modernity* (2000).

⁵ We see the apex of this emphasis on transformation in the contemporary “attention” economies.

“Designers” and “Seasons.” Clicking on the “Seasons” tab leads to a page that lists calendar years and runway shows beneath them. The first four entries under “2019,” for example, has “Fall 2020 Menswear,” “Pre-Fall 2020,” “Pre-Fall 2020 Menswear,” and “Spring 2020 Menswear.” Clicking on the “Designers” tab leads to a page where designers featured in this centralized archive of fashion shows are alphabetized. Touching any of these designers’ names brings users to yet another page where the runway presentations for the designer are archived.

This summative description gives a picture of the innumerable fashion show presentations and images that undulate throughout the app at any given moment. While fixity exists at an instantaneous level—at the moment you check for a particular show, for a particular image—these glamorous images ripple down the screen and disappear from view as more fashion shows are launched and images catalogued. This cascading of future images creates innumerable chances for corporations to ensnare viewers of the app within profit schemes that predicate on the promise of the future. Individuals, in other words, become bound to the promises of these futures and primed for consistent consumption. “Control is short-term and of rapid rates of turnover,” Deleuze offers, “but also continuous and without limit” (6). This vision of a control society is explicitly on display in Vogue Runway, with its ever-expanding repository of marketing images that steadily marches forward, limited only by a lull in the fashion calendar. Moreover, this limitless expansion of images within the app serves to unmoor garments or brands from any sense of meaning. Garments cannot be touched, held, or worn by using the app; rather, the app serves to transform these fashion companies and their creations through unbounded and streamed updates that both broadcast the future and cast the company’s wares in

whichever light is deemed most salable.⁶ This betting on salable futures mimics Deleuze's contention that societies of control operate through free-floating rates of exchange, or futures, rather than the solid weight of specialized products.

Highly produced marketing images are thus the central feature of Vogue Runway's operational paradigm, and they quietly train subjects and users to exist in a constant state of flux. The long-held idea of fashion "trends" no longer functions in an app like Vogue Runway because the trend itself is constant updating. Importantly, there is a contradistinction to be made here between "newness" and updating: newness is the by-product of this constant state of update. While Deleuze does not specifically make this distinction, he does gesture toward it while describing the logics of the control society. "Perpetual training" and "limitless postponement" are key concepts for the control society that speak to this sense of constant change, this "leaving one in order to enter into the other" (Deleuze 5). And this leaving of one for the other is a marker of change that I find just as important as the newness it brings with it. The newness, of course, works perfectly for an industry founded on consumption, but it is the very act of creating an environment of flux and limitless postponement that places both the corporations documented by Vogue Runway and Condé Nast itself within a Deleuzian framework. Control snakes through Vogue Runway's marketing imagery by presenting images of bodies and garments perpetually inching towards an unknown, but perfected, future. This perfect future hearkens back to

⁶ Fashion shows typically present garments that will be available in-store several months later. Merchants attend these shows and order any number of garments based upon the samples presented. In this sense, merchants are betting upon "futures." The garments presented during presentations are singles, and there is no guarantee that orders can or will be fulfilled, much less delivered on time.

Foucauldian biopolitics, where the harnessing of bodies for industrial and statist purposes takes shape through the crystallization of bodily norms.

A Deleuzian framework thus highlights bodies in perpetual modes of flux and foregrounds, paradoxically, issues of stasis. Subjects in a society of control must adjust to biopolitical and corporate imperatives delivered through a marketing apparatus in order to stay connected to networks of power, and these bodies do this through perpetual states of training, updating, and attunement to the future. Vogue Runway typifies this course of action with its future- and market-oriented images that depict different bodies in different garments, images that appear, float, and drop from view in the app. What remain constant throughout the images are the bodies bearing the garments. This can be seen explicitly in the repetition of models, from the popular Gigi Hadid to lesser-known individuals like Marc Forne. It also can be seen in the morphological repetition and norming of “model” bodies, namely those that are tall, white, cisgender, and slim. Thus, on the one hand, there exists marketing machinery that predicated on ceaseless production of imagery, and, on the other hand, there emerges a static representation of biopolitical bodies. These two ideas—the Deleuzian modality of constant change and the Foucauldian body in Vogue Runway’s images—are necessary conditions for the creation of ideal bodies through repetition.

Judith Butler’s theoretical framework of gender performance works well here for understanding the construction of ideal bodies within the app. Deleuze’s late-twentieth century model of control is a re-envisioning of biopower, but, where Foucault’s paradigm explicitly deals with issues of sexuality, his does not, and I see this as an opportunity to link theories of gendered and sexed bodily norms with a Deleuzian frame. His emphasis on the perpetual training and

repetitive perfecting of bodies, while generalized, squares with Butler's contention in "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" that gender and sexuality are "always in the act of elaborating [themselves]" (129). Butler's essay is concerned with queer cultural practices of drag and deploys a deconstructive analytic to argue that gender, sex, and sexuality are effects of deeply ingrained cultural, political, and economic performances. Cisgenderism and heterosexuality, for Butler, should be seen as "performatively produced fabrications" that take shape through spatio-temporal repetition (133). Put differently, bodies are trained nearly from birth to perform identities given to them through the social sphere, and these bodies become imprinted with hegemonic social practices like cisgenderism and heterosexuality through repeat performances. These bodies, moreover, exist in a semiotic chain; once they are "normed" to cisgender and heterosexual standards, they perpetuate these standards through continued performance and naturalize what are otherwise constructed assemblages of gender and sexuality. An ossification occurs, one that has the peculiar effect of making the social category of cisgendered heterosexuality a biological truth from birth.

I use Butler's model of compulsory cisgenderism to bridge Foucault with Deleuze and ascribe performativity to the bodies on display in Vogue Runway's marketing imagery. Each "fashion week" produces hundreds, perhaps thousands, of images that are transmitted and centralized for user consumption by the app. Each of these images, further, centers a body within the photographic frame. This photographic style does not change, and there are no images of clothes without a body. In other words, garments are not depicted as stand-alone, specialized objects but rather as inextricably tied to bodies. And these bodies, from season to season, from year to year, appear much the same: young, white, cisgendered. It is through the repetition of

these images, available through Vogue Runway, that the body in fashion gains coherence as a norm. This is the marriage of Butler to Foucault: the creation of gendered and sexed norms in Vogue Runway images through repetitive showings that gain material force. Mapping Deleuze onto this equation enables us to see how the undulating, perpetual updating of corporate-produced images in the app serves to reify this ideal body by using it in each new wave of images. This is the paradoxical stasis I referred to earlier, where one body emerges amidst the noise of thousands. Each updated image of a young, white, cisgendered individual wearing new clothing serves to “lock” the ideal body in place, and control is gained through an ever-increasing web of similarity.⁷ This theoretical frame I offer, where Deleuzian control works in tandem with a performative model of gender construction that concretizes biopolitical bodies through the cycling of fashion imagery, also gestures to the deployment of Butlerian performativity in the service of capital.

The construction and dissemination of endlessly similar bodies within Vogue Runway also speaks to concerns around its emerging links to media platforms and the increased visibility of biopolitical ideologies. The app has recently included a “My Shows” tab that allows users to save, store, and display “favorite” images through their Facebook page. In doing so, Vogue Runway users are encouraged to portray their fashion interests and preferences through corporate-produced images that are displayed on Facebook’s “platform.” In “The Politics of ‘platforms’,” Terry Gillespie identifies media platforms as socio-technical and ideological

⁷ Alexander Galloway’s *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization* (2004) and Wendy Hui Kyong Chun’s *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (2016) similarly engage with a thematic involving perpetuity and stasis. This essay, however, attempts to work through these interlocking ideas with an emphasis on gender, sex, and sexuality. Thus I emphasize the work of Butler and Foucault at the exclusion of overt engagement with Chun and Galloway.

objects that appear “raised, level, and accessible” but in reality contain asymmetrical political economic valences similar to traditional media objects like photography and film (350-351). These media companies are thus “online content-hosting intermediaries” that, like publishing and broadcasting entities, make choices about images, organizing principles, monetization mechanisms, and prohibitions that are “real and substantive interventions into public discourse” (Gillespie 359). Platforms, in other words, are never neutral, and this can be seen in the innumerable controversies surrounding decisions made by Facebook.

The aforementioned Vogue Runway-Facebook partnership requires users to consume corporate marketing images and make visible their preferences. In order to use the “My Shows” tab on Vogue Runway, consumers of the app must first create an account on Facebook if one does not exist. Afterwards, Vogue Runway users “bookmark” single images or entire shows on the app, which are subsequently—and nearly immediately—displayed on the Facebook page connected to the Vogue Runway user’s account. This process involves a positioning of one’s self on Facebook through the deployment of images found on Vogue Runway, and the images, moreover, accrue a status-bearing function through their display on Facebook that is layered on their original function on Vogue Runway. The process, in other words, encourages users to consume imagery produced for profit by fashion companies and self-express fashion preferences through platform media.⁸

This self-expression through corporate imagery, moreover, is intimately tied to the logics of platform metrics. Allison Hearn and Sarah Banet-Weiser’s work on glamour, platform media,

⁸ A number of theorists have analyzed the performance of self through arts-based media, including surveillance scholars Mark Andrejevic (*Reality TV* 2004) and Shoshana Zuboff (“Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization” 2015).

and metrics in “The Beguiling: Glamour in/as Platformed Cultural Production” illuminates the contemporary digital moment in which consumption and display have been articulated to datafication and bodies. Turning to the complex entanglement among popular feminism, Instagram, and empowerment, Hearn and Banet-Weiser critique the idea that “the coveted likes, retweets, friend, and follower counts that annotate all kinds of platforms self-expression” are able to “fully satiate our desire for social acceptance or truly reveal what lies at the core of our being” (7). The mediated performance of self on platforms like Facebook and Instagram, for Hearn and Banet-Weiser, symbolizes a politico-social culture dependent on quantification linked to corporate economic imperatives and negates the structural and ideological critiques central to feminism. By citing corporate economic imperatives, Hearn and Banet-Weiser refer to the attention economy endemic to digital culture where profit is produced through online behavior linked to advertising and marketing. Quantification through likes is thus central to Hearn and Banet-Weiser’s critique, and the display of a Vogue Runway’s fashion preferences on Facebook typifies their argument. Put differently, using the “My Shows” feature on Vogue Runway inevitably caters to an economic system constructed by platform media companies that denudes it of a genuine potential for community.

Building on Hearn and Banet-Weiser’s research, I link the performance of self through profitable images to biopolitics and platform metrics. These authors assert “the perpetual quest” for more “likes” characteristic of platform-based self-expression serves a disciplinary function, whereby individuals seeking social influence through metrics are slowly acculturated to norms that prove effective for garnering “likes” (8). The Foucauldian disciplinary function of platform metrics, where users learn which constructed behaviors increase positive feedback, thus serves to

perpetuate power relations through the reinforcement of normed behaviors. This policing of self-expression reproduces ideal biopolitical bodies, and, in the case of Vogue Runway, underscores the cisgendered “model” body’s role in corporate marketing imagery as a productive node for power. When a user of the app employs the “My Shows” function to “favorite” a Versace runway show image, in other words, the typically white, cisgendered model occupying much of the image appears on the user’s linked Facebook page. Inhering within this process is a multiplication; the audience of Vogue Runway users is much smaller than that of Facebook, so a Vogue Runway image displayed on Facebook potentially receives a much larger pool of viewers. The tightly constructed fashion body thus gains a wider audience, and the disciplining and norming ideal can be perpetuated at the platform level.

The use of platformed fashion imagery to increase visibility for normed bodies demonstrates the quiet, multiplicative nature of control in our contemporary digital moment. Deleuze, in describing the logics of control-based societies, uses the corporation, rather than the factory, to symbolize a government that utilizes fluctuation. The corporation, with its rapid rates of turnover and perpetual change, is, thus, “a spirit [and] a gas” that saturates the environment. These logics are emblemized by the ever-expanding, ever-increasing number of runway images that display different garments over time but create biopolitical control through the casting of an ideal body as the centerpiece. Moreover, with the rise of platform-based media that function similarly to broadcast intermediaries, control and its protean mechanisms—ideal bodies in corporate marketing imagery displayed on the app—find new outlets for rapid reproduction and proliferation. The innumerable images created by fashion companies and disseminated through Vogue Runway, put differently, are refracted and multiplied through the prism of Facebook

when a user elects to use the “My Shows” feature for self-expression. This phenomenon occurs quietly, and without much fanfare, at the level of handheld devices and a seemingly innocuous app. This context, however, makes clear the vapor-like nature of control: it saturates, multiplies, and constricts.

This section has looked at the construction and transmission of sexed bodies within Vogue Runway and its platform counterparts. Building from a Foucauldian paradigm that interweaves normed bodies and power, I chart the theoretical shift from enclosed mechanisms of power to fluid, amorphous spaces of control. Within this theoretical frame, I see Vogue Runway’s fluctuating, perpetual cycle of corporate imagery as an example of Deleuzian control that, paradoxically, creates Foucauldian stasis. The stasis created by this endless cycling and recycling of “updated” images, moreover, resonates with Judith Butler’s conceptions regarding gender performativity and allows me foreground the constructed cisgender body as a static ideal heavily represented within Vogue Runway’s centralized archive. With the “My Shows” feature of Vogue Runway, app users select images from this centralized archive and transmit them to Facebook for the purposes of self-expression. The dissemination of corporate-produced runway images through platformed media, masked under the rubric of user self-expression, creates a multiplicative process where ideal cisgendered bodies on display to a concentrated base of app users are now given platform-level exposure and audiences. Normed “model” bodies thus reach heightened levels of visibility and participate in the politics of undulating, limitless societies of control.

CHAPTER 3

QUEER FUTURES

This section looks at the affordances and constraints of futurity as an interpretive strategy for Vogue Runway. Previously I cast the app as a socio-technical object that articulates quantification practices to fashion media and frames cisgender bodies as ideal constructions. These constructed imaginings of the ideal body, moreover, undergo a heightening of visibility when channeled through platformed media. This process centralizes around the future-oriented images produced by fashion companies that are stored and displayed within the app, and these images, as I see them, participate in a politics of power and control whereby undulating visions of future profitable creations coalesce around static bodies marked by rigid cisgenderism. Culturally and economically, in other words, these marketing images use the future as a source of profit and control. But, returning to Deleuze, we can also see the future as perpetually fluctuating, and this instability has the potential to problematize tidy deterministic analyses of Vogue Runway. Re-envisioning the future as a method for experiencing the present moment and re-fashioning contemporary modes of being by looking to the future have rich lineages within queer scholarship, and these strategies of interpretation foreground the complex and intertwined futurities presented by the Condé Nast app. Using reparative hermeneutics for the images of futurity contained within Vogue Runway thus lets us re-imagine social relations and understand, in sharper relief, hopeful correctives for the app's images of biopolitical bodies.

Before turning to queer strategies for recuperating the images on display within Vogue Runway, I will trace the contours of surveillance capitalism to generate an example of the exploitative potential of futurity. Shoshana Zuboff indicates these extractive capabilities through

her theorization of surveillance capitalism and “Big Other,” which describes a framework wherein companies depend upon user attention for the generation of assets, money, and behavioral control (“Big Other” 2015). Mark Andrejevic looks to behavioral control as a sinister offspring of surveillance capitalism, and this interest occupies the intersection of arts-based media and subject modification. In his estimation, surveillant subjects labor immaterially with artistic objects of interest, and the data this labor produces is later repackaged and sold to these same users in the form of “new” content (*Reality TV* 2004). Weaving these theoretical strands together creates a picture of Vogue Runway’s potential—and illegible—political-economic model: corporate-owned and produced marketing images are delivered to Vogue Runway users, and the data accrued through user interaction with the images is utilized by these same corporations to create garments that spur interest and consumption. This feedback cycle depends upon the future for its continued survival, as future images signal future consumption and data accrual.

There are other ways to “read the future” in Vogue Runway, and I turn to queer conceptions of time for their generative methodologies. Time is a persistent and potent node in queer theoretical projects. Foucault highlights this construct through his staging of power, biopolitical norms, and the emerging nation-state, arguing that a nation concretizes “normal” bodies to ensure reproductive cycles that secure its future. Queer theory itself formalized as an academic discipline when futures were actively being destroyed by the AIDS epidemic and political administrations exhibited biopolitical policies categorizing queer futures as less worthy of protection than those of others. Contemporary theorists, freed from the urgent concerns of the AIDS crisis, have delved into a number of time-oriented projects: Sarah Ahmed understands

temporality as both a “straightening” device and potential haven for queer subjects (*Queer Phenomenology* 2006); Elizabeth Freeman argues for queer ways of being that resist chrononormativity, or the monolithic construction of time that ensures human bodies are optimized for maximal productivity (*Time Binds* 2010); and Alexis Lothian analyzes mediated fictions for their queer possibilities (*Old Futures* 2018). These authors, as but a sample, indicate the sustained engagement with temporality and futurity in queer theory that acts as both palliative and provocation to deadening, mechanizing, and domesticating conceptions of time.

Eve Sedgwick’s exploration of queer time through reparative readings provides the basis for seeing beyond Vogue Runway’s constrictive visualization of idealized cisgender bodies. Her famous essay, “Paranoid Reading, Reparative Reading,” gathers form around a binary comprised of suspicious, paranoid textual readings and those less concerned with exposure or revelation (*Touching Feeling* 2003). For Sedgwick, critical theory has a history of being chiefly concerned with theory designed to “demystify” or expose structural inequity or violence. Within the ecosystem of knowledge production, this “hermeneutics of suspicion” maintains a strong presence and ostensibly serves to guard readers against negative affect; at its worst, it eliminates surprise, exploration, and hope. Paranoid theoretical frameworks are, of course, essential to critical understandings of objects and structures, but Sedgwick sees “the anticipation of pain” in much contemporary theory as just one tool available for knowledge production (*Touching Feeling* 138). To correct for this affective imbalance, Sedgwick offers reparative readings that see objects of criticism as pleasurable, aesthetic, and ameliorative (*Touching Feeling* 144). This reading technique works to infuse the present moment with a sense of openness, or, put differently, it engenders a sense of wonder for those oriented toward the future because it

acknowledges that, while openness can allow for painful experiences, it can also allow for pleasurable ones.

Seeing wondrous potential in alternative readings of Vogue Runway's future-based fashion imagery illustrates Sedgwick's contention that reparative models take seriously minoritarian culture. An important aspect of Sedgwick's critique of paranoid readings centers around the supposed increase in the visibility of violence created by prognosticating optical regimes focused on transparency. But these Enlightenment logics assume that revelatory readings will "surprise or disturb, never mind motivate" viewers, and, furthermore, they cast viewers as naïve receivers of dominant culture (*Touching Feeling* 141). To assume that viewers of Vogue Runway are shocked by "gender representations [that] are artificial" imputes a lack of critical thought to users that is, at best, innocent, and, at worst, condescending (*Touching Feeling* 141).⁹ Seeing Vogue Runway, in other words, as only capable of making visible and transmissible idealized bodies underplays the app's potential. This socio-technical determinism, while present, cannot wholly be the picture, and users of different cultural contexts are essential to reading pleasure into these highly gendered, future-oriented fashion images.

This insistence on a queer reading of Vogue Runway highlights the pleasure of the "here and now" and resists the paranoid optic that limits the future to one, and only one, possibility. As Sedgwick contends, a queer reading that de-emphasizes paranoia and singular, concrete future-casting leaves us "in a vastly better position to do justice to a wealth of characteristic, culturally central practices, any of which can well be called reparative, that emerge from queer experience

⁹ One example of this degrading assumption is, ironically, the queer community's tendency to cast rural subjects and spaces as less sophisticated than their counterparts in metropolitan areas. Jack Halberstam theorizes this "metronormativity" in *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005).

but become invisible or illegible under a paranoid optic” (*Touching Feeling* 147). Readings that foreground the cultural practices surrounding the reception and use of fashion images, in other words, are as dialectically necessary—perhaps even preferred amidst the prevalence of paranoid readings—to the ecology of knowledge production as those singularly exposing structural violence and inequity. I see a doubled logic occurring within a queer reading of the app, where revelation of the idealization and transmission of rigidly sexed and gendered bodies borne through a paranoid optic also bears the potential for finding new forms of association precisely because of this bodily fixity. This dialecticism, where both paranoid and reparative positions become legible through the other, is also an essential part of queer subjectivity because queerness, per Foucault, was constructed against crystalline notions of biopolitical norms.

Turning back to Butler’s notion of gender performativity is one method for finding pleasure within Vogue Runway. The compulsory repetition of gender norms constructs and emphasizes singular castings of gender but also reveals gender’s instability, and this instability can be seen in cultural practices like drag and cross-dressing. Susan Stryker defines the practice of cross-dressing as “the practice of wearing gender atypical clothing” that has multiple valences: “Besides being a way to resist or move away from assigned social gender, it could be a theatrical practice (either comic or dramatic), [or] part of fashion and politics (such as the practice of women’s wearing pants first was)” (*Transgender History* 17-18). An image archived on Vogue Runway from American designer Thom Browne’s Fall 2020 Ready-To-Wear show highlights the complex cultural practices of gender performativity and cross-dressing. Two models, appearing side-by-side, wear identical “looks.” These looks consists of mountain boots, high-waisted and body-skimming flannel skirts with side-slits cut to reveal their legs, fitted

oxford-cloth shirts, ties, and broad-shouldered, but fitted, dinner jackets. The models are not readily gendered, but there are certain codings—an “Adam’s apple,” hair on legs, broad shoulders—that lead viewers to assume one is more conservatively masculinized than the other, who has hairless legs and is smaller in stature. That both models are wearing identical garments is important here, for the image reads as a cisgendered man wearing a high-waisted skirt, replete with a side-slit, and the coded female as wearing a tie and dinner jacket. The normative semiotic chains, seen in this image as skirt/female and dinner jacket/male, are broken to produce new associations that queer normative meanings of both garments and gender. The image thus presents performativity and cross-dressing as central components of the complex entanglement among gender, morphology, and clothing. A paranoid optic might view this interplay among clothing, gender, and meaning as an attempt to deploy fluctuation and performativity in the service of capital, but a reparative reading highlights queer usage of garments to disrupt hegemonic understandings. There’s a pleasure in reading the image this way, for it smartly uses clothing to put forth a Butlerian vision of clothing and gender performance.

Gypsy Sport, another label featured on the app, similarly employs cross-dressing as a medium for addressing the intersection of bodies and clothing. Featuring solely models of color, the marketing images depict a variety of masculinized and feminized models wearing gender atypical clothing that typifies a queer approach to fashion. One masculinized model wears a khaki-colored shift dress; a more feminized model, on the other hand, wears an oversized Hawaiian shirt and loose, knee-length denim shorts. These images read as queer because they eschew culturally prominent associations between clothing and gender in favor of atypical approaches to clothing presentation that both depend upon and subvert norms for the fashioned

and biopolitical body. The biopolitical body is important for both Thom Browne and Gypsy Sport because the potency in their images lies in the undoing of gender-typical norms created through discourse that positions cisgenderism as an aspect of the idealized body.

The interplay in these images between idealized bodies and subversion underscores the, at times, necessary existence of biopolitical norms for the production of queer pleasure. A common misreading of Judith Butler is the summation that “gender does not exist.” While this is an understandable, if misguided, reception of Butler’s work, it misses a crucial point that Butler makes: gender *is* real, inasmuch that it is a commonly understood feature of a collective reality. It is real, and it has real consequences.¹⁰ But rather than being a concrete feature, one that is unmovable and rigid, it gains material force primarily through the socially conditioned and repetitive performances necessary for its maintenance and continuance. Foucault, while not explicitly engaged with gender, similarly sees habituated bodies as a result of socially imposed strictures. Constituted as such, there are innumerable in-between spaces, as Jack Halberstam puts it, for queer theory to un-know and un-do bodily habits (*The Queer Art of Failure 2*). Cross-dressing and gender atypical clothing practices are two avenues for this methodical undoing and unknowing, and they gather force as discrete actions through the undoing and forgetting of biopolitical norms. Importantly, eroticism does not have to inhere within these practices; rather, it is the act of using clothing for purposes that queer existing bodily hegemonies that gives them a pleasurable resonance.

¹⁰ I hope it is not necessary to point out the ubiquity of gender-based hierarchies and consequences. It is particularly important, on the other hand, to point out the “reality” of gender for trans and intersex-identified persons. Hilary Malatino and Susan Stryker, among others, do an excellent job of articulating these considerations of gender, which are often left out of queer projects.

The images constructed by Thom Browne and Gypsy Sport use the future as a method for re-envisioning the present. As runway shows, these spectacles showcase singular garments that have yet to enter the production-delivery-consumption cycle, and, as images of the future, they depict strategies for inhabiting clothing that create a pleasurable queer valence in the present. In both cases, they depend upon, respond to, and transform biopolitical norms created through idealized images that condition bodies to inhabit present spatio-temporal landscapes in a rigid and constrictive manner. Vogue Runway users may take these images, though they inhabit the future, as an impetus for exploration of the present; they can perform reparative readings of biopolitical norms and work to create space for queer cultural practices. But queer pleasure through engagement with the future also takes shape through what José Esteban Muñoz terms “an insistence on something else, something better, something dawning” (*Cruising Utopia* 189). While this interpretive strategy is, to a degree, aligned with Sedgwick’s reparative methodology, it resists re-casting the present as capacious for utopian impulses and instead uses “critical dissatisfaction with the present” to advocate for the socio-political and relational potentialities of the future (189).¹¹

I see Muñoz’s theorization of a queer utopian future as a useful tool for imagining the associative capacities of Vogue Runway, and I also see it as complementary to Sedgwick’s hermeneutic strategy. Both Sedgwick and Muñoz turn away from readings that operate solely within a paranoid regime of knowledge production or do not offer ameliorative strategies. Muñoz sees these as recurrent themes throughout queer theory, born, as they were, through

¹¹ Muñoz acknowledges this correlation, stating that “[utopian] readings are aligned with what Segwick would call reparative hermeneutics” (12).

psychoanalytic and deconstructive philosophies. From these early theoretical seeds, queer theory cultivated a sense of antiutopianism and negative positionality to the future. “Antiutopianism in queer studies,” as Muñoz offers, “is more often than not intertwined with antirelationality [and] has led many scholars to an impasse wherein they cannot see futurity for the life of them” (12). Muñoz contends that an inability to find potential in the future might, and often does, manifest itself in paranoid and anti-utopian readings of it. This is where anti-relationality, or the queer impulse to singularity and negativity, arises.¹² Muñoz’s reparative strategy declines this theoretical stance in favor of one that takes seriously the promise of an egalitarian future, one that recognizes the potential for socio-political action inspired by its utopian promises.

Analyzing the Thom Browne and Gypsy Sport images through a Muñozian lens brings forth their generative energies. Both shows feature cross-dressing and gender atypical clothing as strategies for creating queer resonance within an industry dominated by aggressively masculinized and feminized bodily registers. Using the reparative model put forth by Sedgwick, these images work as potent sources for creating pleasure in the present; they enable us to feel a sense of hope and vitality that permeates our current circumstances. With a Muñozian analytic, however, these images of what-is-to-come are cast as utopian impulses capable of producing action that changes the stifling cisgenderism characterizing the present. The gender-atypicism of these two fashion presentations “[signals] a refusal of mastery and an insistence on process and becoming” that, under a Muñozian optic, allows viewers of the image to “imagine and eventually

¹² To be clear, “negativity” here is used as an adjective connoting the deconstructive analytic. Muñoz acknowledges the affordances of this theoretical strategy, noting that “the antirelational approach assisted in dismantling an anticritical understanding of queer community.” He also admits “the antirelational thesis energizes [his] argument in key ways” (10-11).

act on queer desires” (105-106). This discontentment with the present—the refusal to sustain perfected adherence to hegemonic biopolitical norms—allows images of future utopias to be the catalysts for social action in the present. This can manifest itself in multiple ways: one may, for example, see these images and cast off the confinements of socially prescribed gender. Just as importantly, however, is the idea that these utopian images of fashion allow viewers to understand that others see the same or similar futures. They serve as conduits for “knowing and feeling other people,” and these modalities create relationality through communal knowledge and action (*Cruising Utopia* 113). Using a Muñozian reparative strategy might also queer the process of metricization performed through the “My Shows” feature of Vogue Runway. By “liking,” transmitting, and amplifying the reach of images resistant to hegemonic ideals, users of the app take action in the present to turn sideways the smooth functioning of control society mechanisms.

While Muñoz and Sedgwick conceive of their relationship to the present differently, I see them as both offering equally important methods for imagining alternative biopolitical futures. The theoretical framework I employed earlier in this thesis emphasized the mixture of control and biopolitics endemic to the visual and operational paradigms within Vogue Runway. These biopolitical bodies on display in Vogue Runway also work through Deleuzian infixity and fluctuation, and this instability creates an opening for reparative readings to offer resistance to the industrialized and normed imperatives of the app. Muñoz’s critical dissatisfaction with the present compels him to theorize the use of utopian futures for organizing socio-political action that creates change. Seeing trans or intersex bodies in Vogue Runway images, for him, would be an important representational move because it opens pathways for these queer individuals and

communities to imagine their present circumstances differently. Utopian futures that remove the toxicity of cisgendered biopolitical imperatives, moreover, effect changes for the present. They move the needle, in other words, from virtuality to actuality. Sedgwick paves a road to this actuality. Her avoidance of paranoid optics allows a glimpse of pleasure in the present that leads to the exploration, hope, and surprise necessary for actualizing political and social change, and combining their approaches is an important step for constructing a queer reparative methodology that recuperates the affective, political, and social potential of Vogue Runway images. This section has focused on these queer approaches to futurity as a way to counter deterministic interpretations of Vogue Runway. Although there are ethical considerations around algorithmic culture and surveillance capitalism, which function largely in and through futurity, I have advocated for the possibilities of surprise, hope, and inspiration within these speculative images. Letting go of a paranoid view of the future can allow us to experience these images with both more pleasure in the present and an eye toward active measures to create a better future.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alex Remington was born in Arlington, Texas. He completed his Bachelor of Arts in Art History at the University of Southern California in 2018. During the Fall of 2018, he began studying for his MA at the School for Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication at The University of Texas at Dallas.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Alex Remington

Research Interests

Critical media studies; identity and power; queer and surveillance theories; fashion media and industries

Education

M.A. University of Texas at Dallas

Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication

Expected Spring 2020 (current GPA: 3.95)

B.A. University of Southern California

Art History

2018

Academic and Relevant Employment

- Teaching Assistant. University of Texas at Dallas.
- Research and Production Member. Public Interactives Research Lab.
- Intern. Dallas Art Fair.
- Research Associate. Numbria.
--Executed extensive research and analysis in academic, legislative, and educational technology sectors for a startup company building a portfolio-based grading application.
- Writer. *The Daily Trojan*. University of Southern California.

Publications/Presentations

- *Queer Diaries as Transdigital Machines*. Digital Frontiers. Accepted.
- *Touching Histories*. Collaboration between Richardson Symphony Orchestra and UT-D School of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication.

Awards

- HASTAC Scholar. Fellowship.
- Teaching Assistanship. Tuition Reduction. School of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication. University of Texas at Dallas.
- Annenberg Scholar. Merit-Based Tuition Reduction. Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. University of Southern California.

Teaching Experience

- Digital Content Design. TA. Laura Imaoka. Spring 2020.
- Introduction to TechnoCulture. Discussion Section Leader. Dean Anne Balsamo. Fall 2019, Spring 2019.
- Digital Video Production I. TA. Sharon Hewitt. Fall 2018.
- Digital Video Production II. TA. Sharon Hewitt. Fall 2018.

Service

- Graduate Student Advisory Council. School of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication. University of Texas at Dallas.
--Secretary (2018-2020)
- Annenberg Ambassadors. Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. University of Southern California.

--President (2005-2006)

Affiliations/Memberships

- HASTAC
- Scholar (2019-2021)
- College Art Association

Writing

- Site 131. Nonprofit Contemporary Arts Foundation.
2016-2018

--Produced collateral and coordinated coverage of gallery with local and state publications.

--Essayist for *Unexpected* exhibition. Spring 2017.

Fundraising and Business Development

- Site 131. Nonprofit Contemporary Arts Foundation.
2016-2018

--Worked with a small team to organize, plan, and execute annual fundraisers. (First fundraiser netted 50K.)

--Coordinated marketing and branding initiatives.

Skills, Languages, and Community Engagement

- Spanish. Reading knowledge.
- Well-versed in emerging and established media.
- Complex research and information synthesis using information management systems and databases; advanced presentation of information through multiple formats.
- Software: Adobe Creative Suite, WordPress, Photoshop, Google-based applications, research aggregates, CMS software, Premiere Pro, Microsoft applications