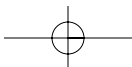
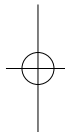
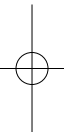
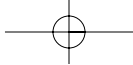


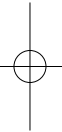
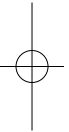
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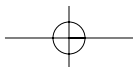
TECHNO-SEXUAL
LANDSCAPES:
Changing Relations between
Technology and Sexuality

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FA^B



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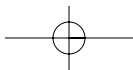
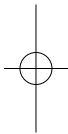
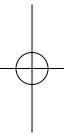
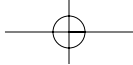
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INTRODUCTION

Although for some time individually surrounded by considerable interest, until recently sexuality and technology have been seen in the social sciences as two distinct and unrelated realms. Despite the fact that considerable interest has been raised by the proximity of sexuality and technology in popular culture, such as in science fiction and film, the social sciences barely appear to have made the same connection. This has meant that the ways in which technology has produced or configured sexuality, how technology has become sexualised and how sexuality has in turn configured technology in society and history have largely remained unexplored to date.

However, what is now accepted in sociology and social studies of science is that technology as a fundamental human practice forms an intimate relation with all other human spheres of activity. Technology is thus understood as an integral and indispensable part of cultural meanings and practices. Therefore, technology, rather than existing in isolation as some a priori set of techniques, tools and machines, comes about through social and political processes. It is deeply connected to these processes and made possible by them. But does it follow that there is some kind of crossover between technology and sexuality, and if there is, how do we approach it, taking into account the culturally specific notions that are attached to them both? It is this possible crossover that this book explores. In setting ourselves such a task, we are aware that the study of technology and sexuality together, despite their association in the mass media today, might look somewhat extravagant or overly adventurous. How, then, do we trace such a relation over historical time?¹

While a discussion of the relations between sexuality and tech-

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nology could no doubt begin with an analysis of the association between men and 'high tech', women and car adverts or the technologies of reproduction, we wish to take a less 'obvious' route and one whose central preoccupation is grounded in historical analysis. Such a project does not solely rely upon sex having taken place but instead seeks to show how the possibility or impossibility of sexual meanings informs and is informed by everyday practices and experiences over time. This less obvious route grows out of the very difficulty of thinking about sexuality and technology as related phenomena with all their cultural and material meanings. It entails an analysis of why talking about technology and sexuality in combination has become mandatory today, with the advent of electronic chat rooms, the treatment of AIDS and the increasing recourse to 'artificial' insemination.

In the light of these considerations, we have posed ourselves two related objectives. Firstly, we are guided by an inquiry into what appears to be an absence, that is, the attempt to understand any relationship between technology and sexuality historically. Secondly, and deriving from our first objective, we are invited to think about how this relationship's latent presence may inform present social dynamics and lived experience.

In our attempt to move between these two principal aims, we are constantly reminded how intractable and elusive such relations may well be. Nevertheless, it would be naïve, at best partial, to sustain that the little attention these relations have raised in most of social sciences and humanities results mainly from their intangible nature. The constant feeling experienced in our attempt to come to grips with techno-sexual relations was the difficulty of determining with any degree of precision the object of study and of framing it within the dominant trends in the social sciences. In our view, this lack of framework should be understood in the light of the social and moral resistance such a project faces. We hope our inquiry will allow us to evaluate the present-day imperative to submit our sexuality to some kind of technological mediation, whether to the internet or the screening of our future children in the context of the Human Genome Age.

The silence or the almost inexistent work on the study of the relations between sexuality and technology historically turned

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out, however, to be highly significant. This silence led us to ask, in the first stages of the project, a number of basic preliminary questions about the elusive nature of our subjects of study. Should we understand technological practices and devices as an effect of wider socio-economic processes or, on the contrary, should we take them seriously as topics of interest themselves? How does the examination of the relations between technology and sexuality open up new possibilities for analyses concerned with materiality? To what extent can the tools of the sociologist and historian help us to perform such a task? And, how do we write about technology and sexuality without essentialising them over time?

In asking such questions, and considering that this book constitutes little more than an outline of some possible avenues and debates that could be explored, in what follows we concentrate on a number of case studies which are drawn from specific historical moments. The approaches followed in these case studies draw on a broad range of disciplines and analytic frameworks, principally using the resources of cultural studies and genealogical analysis. As we have already stated, we are convinced that a key tool is one which is often absent in studies on gender and sexuality, and more generally, in the constructionist turn which prevails in the social sciences: an explicit and far-ranging historical vision.

In this incipient history, with all its pitfalls and doubts that we will share with the reader as we progress, we would argue that the actual process of bringing the materiality of technology and sexuality to the centre of social analyses entails new strategic interpretations.

But such high hopes must be tempered by the knowledge that technology and sexuality have been configured differently across time, place and social circumstance, making our task more complex as we try to focus on the elusive nature of our subjects of inquiry. Any relationship between technology and sexuality will therefore 'mean' different things and have different effects according to their changing conditions. In this discontinuous web of relations what is of most interest, we feel, are the difficulties which arise in the pinpointing of multiple relations which emanate from our two areas. We must be aware, then, of the

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dangers of collapsing any kind of historical sense by invoking a presentism which projects an imaginary historical relationship backwards in time to satisfy our own research objectives.

Such a problem represents, of course, the beauty and the beast of historical analysis. Such an analysis must navigate between creating something at the historian's whim and unearthing a relation which existed, albeit in different, discontinuous and shifting forms, over long periods of time. Throughout this book, therefore, we argue that the pitfalls of an empiricist or essentialist history can be partly offset by reflecting upon the wider conditions of production of our narratives and the disciplinary relations which make them possible. This process of 'objectifying' the conditions of knowledge through historical inquiry may help us to reflect critically on their production.

Further, we are keen that such a project should also retrieve and bring into our accounts of the present the struggles and tensions of the past in order to illuminate life today. By retrieving the tensions and memories which surround the contested nature of techno-sexual relations into our accounts of the present, we would hope to provide the basis for inquiring into how links between specialist and local, discontinuous or non-authorised knowledge, as well as between alternative techno-sexual accounts and practices, were established. Such an exploration helps us to understand the present configuration of relations between technology and sexuality, and may enable us to reflect critically on our own present and future.

This book is not, however, an attempt to construct a comprehensive picture of the incidence of techno-sexual relations in the western world. Instead, it focuses on specific places and spaces where these relations can be discerned together with their effects on daily life. It is in these sites that new or recurring modes of living, technologies and forms of subjectification appear. What are these sites?

When we first began to examine these matters we were surprised to see that there were traces between technology and sexuality in places such as medieval mills, monasteries and, later, trains. These relations appeared to be contested ones even though they became key aspects of social, technical and quotidian life. We wondered what the possible relation between them was, if any,

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and why we should come across these relations and think of them in these terms in the present day. This confirmed for us that while our examples are separated by several centuries, they are connected by some kind of discontinuous process, and they have something to say about the way we think of technology and sexuality in the present.

Departing from this kind of historical perspective we will try to see how far, for example, the material aspect of technologies was important for the creation and growth of the private sphere in western societies, and therefore the care or management of the self. We will ask how in modern times material practices and techniques fill the collective imaginary with the mediating role of trains in transient love affairs. Why has the relationship between women and technology been used in the marketing of 'high tech' products and what does this say about the relationship between women and reproductive technologies? Why do new sexual and leisure communities form along the lines of old transportation routes, such as canals and waterfronts? What are the patterns found in the different social settings that have displaced any association between technology and sexuality to the margins of the legal or accorded them a censurable or condemned nature?

These kinds of questions oblige us to employ an analytical sensibility which permits what we might call a prospective and retrospective analysis of seemingly unlikely connections between technology and sexuality. What we are hoping to show, finally, is how the possibility or impossibility of sex informs and is informed by technology over time and how their associations in different historical and social settings have been and are indicative of wider struggles and contested relations.

In order to embark on this project we identify three principal 'analytical moments' which this book passes through: medieval times; the urbanised and industrial nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the West; and the future, or a number of possible futures. Our intention, therefore, is to provide by our last chapter an historical and material reflection on the present in which some of us now live. Does this present, saturated by the internet, cyberspace and the return of biological determinism have anything to do with technology and sexuality in past times?

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In Chapter One we begin by examining a set of concerns arising from the crossover of technology and sexuality and its historical resonances. We focus on how the inflammatory or censurable relationship between sexuality and the material has been present in the popular culture of recent times. In particular, we examine the associations made between technology and sexuality in the 1973 novel *Crash* by J.G. Ballard that was made into a film by director David Cronenberg in 1995. This film seemed to encapsulate the highly problematic association – in terms of morality and in terms of understanding the film’s cultural significance – between technology and sexuality in everyday life in the present with a view to the future. The slippage between the novel’s present and the ‘nightmarish’ future depicted in the film exemplifies how such a relationship between technology and sexuality may shift over time.

Following our discussion of *Crash* we examine the work of some authors who have discussed the inter-relations between the development of specialised techniques and technologies, material conditions and devices, and culture over time. We examine some aspects of material life in past historical times, including the highly technified and sexual divisions in monastic culture. We explore the way the material and the sexual became integrated as new forms of techniques as precursors of new orders to come.

In Chapter Two, this dynamic legacy of the medieval period is explored in greater detail. We ask how a number of spaces and materials were highly regulated but also particularly productive in the sense that new techniques and forms of socialisation were in fusion or being formed. These were also places where sharp lines began to be drawn around the permissible and the sanctioned, and the sacred and the profane. In this light we also look at how dissident theories of philosophy, materiality and nature had some connection with heretical religious movements such as that of the Cathars in southwestern France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These dissidences emerged at the time of internal and external pressure on the Church from dissident religious movements and Islam, in particular.

Other paradigmatic examples of such tensions are noted in the development of restrictions in the movements between the sexes in the monasteries, by the construction of physical walls

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to separate them and, in a more everyday scenario, around the medieval mill that came to be a site for all kinds of transgressive behaviour, including the sexual.

Transgressive communities (the Cathars) and places (the mills) functioned as landscapes for the exploration of the sexual and technical limits of the medieval period. Chapter Three approaches related questions but at the dawn of a globalised world with its emerging 'techniques'. What were the techniques used to embrace the distance and diversity which the new world entailed? Upon which figures and resources did these techniques draw? Why did techniques and knowledge considered even at that time as magical, heretical or even satanic (such as crystal ball-gazing) become common practice among the new mercantile class? And which 'inner' others were incited as a repository for the management of these differences and distances? This Chapter draws on what might seem to be unrelated connections between far away others (native American cultures, knowledges, sexualities) and familiar others (the Saracens, Cathars, and heretical scientists) by focusing on the witch as a paradigmatic example where these socio-economic and techno-cultural transformations were embedded and prefigured.

The witch, combining knowledge about metals, the ability to move large distances and having been accused of 'deviant' sexual practices, becomes a repository figure for the establishing of new colonial and socio-economic orders. The witch, we suggest, becomes a kind of 'technology' herself, not just in her ability to fly, but in another dual sense. The witch incited a plethora of regulatory techniques used by the Church (the Inquisition and the *Malleus Maleficarum*). The witch was also, paradoxically, once the witch-craze was extinguished, incorporated into the new horizons for western knowledge and geographies.

In Chapter Four we return to the motif of moving technologies by examining how such concerns were reflected in another period of internal crisis or great change for Western culture: the continuing industrial, urban and transport revolution in the nineteenth century. In this period the spaces where technology was present were even further expanded to the extent that everyday life became increasingly 'technologised'. If in the medieval period technology was seen and used in specific locations, in the nineteenth century it was democratised and expanded. This

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‘generalisation’ of technology brought with it, in turn, the need to manage such a change in the light of the emergence of new gendered and sexual subjectivities.

Following on from the importance we gave to medieval debates on motion and exchange, Chapter Four takes the example of the train as one way in which some of these medieval connotations once again surfaced in later centuries: in its movement through the city, its affording of new social and class relations, its association with the diabolic and with (often ‘illicit’) sexual acts. If techniques became the vehicle for expressing anxieties about social and sexual orders in monasteries in the early first millennium, the technology of movement encapsulated in the train in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries became another site for the articulation of mental and physical disease and danger, on the one hand, and sexual possibility on the other within the urban economy of capitalism.

The purpose of our final chapter is to reflect on the relationships between the three analytical moments identified above. We carry forward some of the historical connotations around sexuality, technology and materiality in the medieval period in order to see how the concerns and representations of those times, together with the productive possibilities acknowledged in transportation technologies of the kind found in witchcraft and the train, are recuperated in the current vogue of cyberspace, the information world and visual technologies such as video games and the desire for the enhancement or even loss of the body in those aspiring to ‘post-humanity’.

In this fifth chapter we also take the opportunity to reflect upon the strategic use of the term ‘techno-sexuality’ that we have made throughout this book. What might, therefore, be the connection between medieval monasteries, witches and trains and the realm of sexuality? How does the management of sexuality and socio-economic relations in the sixteenth century across distances find resonance in cyberspace? We emphasise that this term is more a device for understanding how the relations between technology, culture and sexuality were materialised in specific historical situations. We also discuss how, in the present day, the material, the ‘spiritual’ and the sexual are intertwined and mediated by technology in ways which have some resonance

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in the past, only to be combined in 'new' ways. By understanding the connections between technology and sexuality in a long-term perspective we invite the reader to reconsider relations often brushed aside, or devalued for their connection with 'low', popular or quotidian culture, practices and spaces. Acknowledging the uncomfortable social fact of 'techno-sexuality' as a quotidian experience allows us to recuperate a range of often discounted or forgotten social actors, movements and landscapes.