

**HERE AND QUEER IN VANCOUVER: QUEER POETRY, SMALL PRESSES, AND
LESBIAN AND GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENTS**

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LESBIAN AND GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENTS

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Abstract

As LGBTQ2+ activists reflect upon the beginnings of lesbian and gay liberation movements, this dissertation brings histories about Canadian queer activism into dialogue with Canadian literary studies examining small presses' cultural activism. Though queer historians have begun to recognize the importance of queer literature to lesbian and gay liberation movements, this dissertation's analysis of Vancouver's *blewointment* press and Press Gang Publishers investigates how these presses influenced queer counterpublics. By examining how these small presses generated queer-friendly collectives, produced radical poetry, and developed do-it-yourself methods of circulating their works, I demonstrate how *blewointment* press and Press Gang contributed to the advancement of lesbian and gay liberation movements in Vancouver.

This dissertation builds on a recent body of scholarship that has identified how small presses engendered spaces for community building as well as radical research and literary production. Moreover, it responds to a nascent body of scholarship that has hinted at the importance of *blewointment* press and Press Gang Publishers to gay and lesbian liberation movements, respectively. To do so, this research project asks: how and to what extent did the presses contribute to lesbian and gay liberation movements? Though doing so was dangerous, why did these collectives embrace the stigma tied to queer forms of sexuality by producing radical queer poetry? In what ways did these small presses reach their readers and how were they affected by these works? What are these small presses' legacies?

By drawing on LGBTQ studies, queer theory, and feminist theory as well as by focusing on the concept of the "public," this project examines the presses' works, archival records, and oral histories to argue that they contributed to lesbian and gay liberation movements and to the

formation of queer counterpublics and reading communities in Vancouver. Moreover, since scholars have critiqued these movements for being historically dominated by white, middle-class, men, I consider how *blewointment* and *Press Gang* might reflect and challenge these movements' limitations. Overall, this project brings attention to Vancouver's earlier queer cultural activism to reignite debate about these small presses' ongoing importance for current LGBTQ2+ activists.

Lay Summary

This dissertation examines the intersection between Vancouver's small presses, queer poetry, and lesbian and gay liberation movements. While it draws attention to how *blewointment* press (1962-1983) published queer poetry that contributed to gay liberation movements, it also looks at how *Press Gang Publishers* (1974-1989) contributed to lesbian-feminist liberation movements. In exploring the ways that these presses created queer-friendly creative communities, published queer poetry, circulated it to queer readers, and influenced them in positive ways, this dissertation brings attention to the importance of small presses to Vancouver's liberation movements. However, it also uncovers some of the limitations of the presses' social justice initiatives. Overall, the aim of this dissertation is to highlight the importance of small presses' queer cultural activism to the advancement of social justice for lesbians and gay men living in Vancouver during the second half of the twentieth century.

Preface

This dissertation is the original and independent work of the author, Mathieu Aubin. This dissertation contains material from interviews that were approved by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board (UBC BREB Number H16-01375). The reproduction of a concrete poem by bill bissett (Illustration 1) has been reprinted with the permission of bill bissett.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to LGBTQ2+ communities, whose histories deserve to be heard and remembered

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Here Remains Queer

In 2017, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau formally apologized for the Canadian government's purging of homosexuals from the public service and the military, promising advancements in the expunging of records for people affected by the Canadian State's surveillance and regulation of queer people (Harris).¹ This apology came more than half a century after the Canadian state first explicitly constructed homosexuals as criminals and national threats (Kinsman and Gentile 44). As Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile demonstrate, during the Cold War, the Canadian government purged homosexuals from the public service and army, especially between the late 1960s and the early 1980s. While the Cold War's primary agenda was to fight for the protection and promotion of capitalism, it also fought "for normality and against political, gender, and sexual deviance" (23). To do so, the Canadian government proliferated discourses that constructed homosexuals as having a "character weakness" (75), which the State argued made homosexuals liable to blackmail and a national security risk, to rationalize the State's surveillance of this group of people. This tactic benefited from psychological discourses that pathologized homosexuality, engaged with and sustained homophobic values that criminalized homosexuals, and supported religious values dismissing alternate sexualities (T. Warner 46-47, 100). However, queer people generated several strategies to liberate themselves from this oppression. For instance, the 1960s saw the development of homophile organizations, whose social justice efforts to normalize homosexuality contributed to the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1969 (43-46), in Vancouver,

¹ Here and throughout this dissertation, I use the term "queer" as an encompassing term that represents radical forms of sexuality and aesthetic production that challenge heteronormative social and cultural values. However, when need be, I provide nuance when I address specific identities across the LGBTQ2IA+ spectrum, which intersect with other identity categories (e.g., ethnicity, class, and gender), because the term "queer" can be both useful *and* limiting for an analysis of the slipperiness between gendered and sexualized identities.

Toronto, and Montréal. Yet queer people were still persecuted by more conservative segments of the public, such as “fundamentalist and other conservative Christian forces” (46-47), that supported heterosexist values. For this reason, as early as the 1970s, lesbian and gay liberation activists protested issues like queer people’s lack of human rights, homophobic policies, censorship, and the AIDS crisis.

As an extension to these challenges, cultural activists developed creative forms of resistance, such as the establishment of alternate social spaces in which queer writers could meet, work together, and produce books that reflected radical values to address and thwart this violence. Recent studies documenting these activities demonstrate that, as lesbian and gay liberation movements developed in cities across Canada, queer people in Canada’s major cities published and circulated queer art to resist their oppression (McLeod viii-ix). These cultural practices were influenced by major socio-political changes, such as the decriminalization of homosexuality, which led to a queer cultural production boom in cities such as Montréal, Toronto, and Vancouver (McLeod 48, 50, 51). However, because this art highlighted the experiences of queer people, challenged norms of respectability, and created affinity groups between queer publishing collectives and readers, these practices also faced resistance from more conservative segments of the public. For example, in 1974, a box of queer publications being sent to England from Canada by Ian Young, Toronto writer and editor of the small press Catalyst Press, “was seized and burned by British Customs Officers” (McLeod 164). Similarly, major media outlets, such as *La Presse* (Montréal), *The Toronto Star* (Toronto), and *The Vancouver Sun* (Vancouver), refused to publish ads promoting queer initiatives (145, 150, 188). This tension between the advancement of liberation efforts and conservative backlash highlights what was at stake for lesbian and gay liberation activists: challenging the erasure of queer lives by homophobic institutions. It also demonstrates that the work completed by small

presses' collectives significantly influenced the public and posed a threat to heteronormative social standards.

Currently, Toronto's queer activism has been widely documented (T. Warner ix), but research examining activities in Vancouver remains in a nascent stage. A growing body of work on Vancouver has begun to examine the radical work completed within the city's artistic communities. As Gregory Betts and Julia Polyck-O'Neill indicate in their introduction to the special issue of *Canadian Literature* "The Concepts of Vancouver," "[i]n the years after the first editorial period of *Tish* [1961-63], Vancouver was suddenly awash in transdisciplinary experimentation, particularly the (con)fusion of the literary and visual arts" (6). For instance, the city saw a boom of growth in multiple experimental small presses and literary communities during the second half of the twentieth century with the appearance of Arsenal Pulp Press, Douglas & McIntyre, New Star Books, TISH, and Talonbooks. In 1962, Vancouver's blewointment collective began as an editorial group working on *blewointment* magazine, which pushed the boundaries of aesthetics by fusing literature with visual arts. It also challenged social standards by publishing works that reflected anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, and anti-capitalist values. For instance, in 1967, the magazine collective challenged homophobic values by publishing an issue that motivated its readers to purchase an anthology of d.a. Levy's poems, which were deemed obscene, to raise funds for his legal defense (bissett "Project Bring Cleveland"). In 1973, the magazine published the *what isint tantrik special* (1973), containing feminist works, like Gwen Hauser's "What Did the Underground Ever Do For Women," that critiqued sexism within Vancouver's counterculture. The magazine collective also published communist and socialist poets and, in 1972, it published the anti-capitalist special issue *poverty issew*. This magazine issue protests the exploitative nature of capitalism with the inclusion of poems like bill bissett's "at peace w each othr ther is," which critiques the extraction of natural resources for profit and proposes a utopic vision in which "peopul work togethr for no profit" (37) and "are

free” (37). Similarly, in 1974, Press Gang became a women-only collective that printed materials for political organizations and published radical-feminist and lesbian-feminist texts, aiming to reach both counter-cultural and mainstream readers. For example, in 1984, Press Gang published *Still Sane*, which addressed the pathologization and incarceration of lesbians, an issue largely overlooked by the women’s movement, to make it visible and to provide resources that aided victims, such as a “Political Art Resources” section discussing poetry’s political potential. They also published *An Account to Settle: The Story of the United Bank Workers (SORWUC)* (1979), which documents the history of “a group of women bank workers [who] decided to organize their workplace” (*The Bank Book Collective*) and encourages readers to take control of the means of production. In short, Vancouver’s blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers were at the cutting edge of lesbian and gay cultural activism, while advancing critiques of sexism and capitalism.

1.2 Publishing Cutting Edge Ideas on a Smaller Scale

To what extent did Vancouver’s blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers influence Canada’s lesbian and gay liberation movement? Although scholarship on the press remains limited, scholars, including Carl Peters, Gregory Betts, and derek beaulieu, have examined the work of blewointment’s editor bill bissett and shown that his sexuality is important to his creative practices. For instance, Peters indicates that bissett’s work composes an “explosion of excess” (17) and “bissett’s whole art is the assemblage of ... erotic sites” (39). Similarly, Betts and beaulieu’s afterword to their edition of bissett’s *RUSH: what fuckan theory a study uv langwage* emphasizes that there is no separation between bissett’s aesthetic project and his sexuality as they participate in a “multi-conscious approach” (116). These scholars assert that sexuality is integral to bissett’s aesthetic practices; however, they do not examine how sexuality may play an important role in bissett’s work with blewointment press. For instance, how might the press, which functioned as an extension of bissett’s aesthetic, also fit within this larger project? In *In Search of Blew*, Betts gives

some indices of *blewointment* magazine's radical work. As Betts demonstrates, bissett "published hippies, feminists, red-power advocates, socialists, communists, environmentalists, and anyone else who wanted to be heard in that dynamic community" (8). This dissertation expands upon this body of work by examining more closely the role that sexuality played in bissett's editorial praxis to suggest that sexual liberation was an integral aspect of his art and cultural activism.

Scholarship examining Press Gang Publishers shows that the press challenged heterosexism within North American society and culture. Specifically, Alisa Margaret Klinger argues that Press Gang "provided lesbians with unparalleled opportunities and forums for their self-expression" (27). Similarly, Christine Kim argues that Press Gang produced a forum "that encouraged dialogue and conflict among women" (309) and facilitated a more intersectional space that was not widely available at the time (309). Nevertheless, as Linda Christine Fox shows in her examination of the press's contributions to lesbian publications, Press Gang published the majority of lesbian content in Canada between 1963-2003, and she points out that the press's 1995-1996 publication run represents the highest concentration of published material (109). While Fox is right that Press Gang published a large portion of Canadian lesbian works, she focuses on the press's last phase. My work expands her scope by looking at an earlier phase of the press (1974-1989) to ask: how did the press benefit from and contribute to the early stages of lesbian liberation movements in Vancouver? This dissertation builds on this body of knowledge by considering how this radical socio-cultural space contributed to the development of discourses in lesbian movements that facilitated the self-organization of queer counterpublics. In so doing, I demonstrate the ways the press influenced lesbian readers, while creating the potential for greater social justice.

To better understand the radical work completed by small presses in Canada, my dissertation turns to previous literary studies that examine the relationship between Canadian presses and radical cultural production. For instance, Stephen Cain's dissertation *Imprinting Identities: An examination*

of the Emergence and Developing Identities of Coach House Press and House of Anansi Press informs this project's research questions and methodology. By tracing the public reception of publications by Anansi Press and Coach House Press, as documented in newspapers, magazines, and paratextual materials, Cain considers how Anansi and Coach House contributed to the formation of competing national socio-cultural identities. As Cain's analysis of discourses that contextualize publications and respond to them demonstrates, the reception of small presses' publications contributes to competing narratives about Canada's socio-cultural identities (14). Like Cain's work, this dissertation questions the ways in which Vancouver's small presses contributed to the formation of reading communities that did not identify with more conservative publics' values. For example, while many newspapers at the beginning of lesbian and gay liberation movements refused to publish content promoting queer activities, some newspapers were more generous to small presses publishing queer content. Specifically, *The Globe and Mail* was willing to promote publications by blewointment press as early as 1969, and it circulated a defence of the Canada Council, which John Fraser, MP (Conservative, Vancouver South) had attacked for funding the publication of blewointment press materials that he deemed to be "trash" (Tallman, Lang, and Mandel 7). These newspaper publications provide insight into a small portion of the public response to these small presses' actions. Cain's research questions and methodology inform my research of public discourses that contribute to the construction of radical reading publics in Vancouver.

Similarly, Dora Karen Wolf's dissertation *Cultural Politics and the English-Canadian Small Press Movement: Three Case Studies* investigates the relationship between feminist small presses, Canadian literary production, and public reception. Wolf argues that Prince Edward Island's gynergy was a feminist press that was "committed to unprofitable books" (99) for the sake of creating "resources for lesbians and feminists" (99). To demonstrate this press's socio-historical importance, Wolf uses first-hand accounts by readers to trace people's responses to these works. In her use of

interviews, Wolf examines how readers' testimonials about their experiences reading small presses' works helped shape the presses' discourses as they contributed to the development of alternate ways of conceptualizing culture and politics in Canada (14). This dissertation builds on Wolf's work by investigating similar matters in Vancouver and asking the following questions: how did queer people in Vancouver contribute to the development of non-dominant centres of production and how do readers' testimonies shed light upon these presses' influence? In my analysis, I suggest that blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers contributed to the creation of queer nodes of production in Vancouver that spurred the formation of radical reading communities. In so doing, this project not only extends Wolf's work but also contributes to new ways of understanding the reader's role in relation to the small press by focusing on their agency as they self-organized and actively interacted with the presses to advance cultural and social concerns.

This dissertation suggests that blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers not only functioned as centres for cultural activism but also produced radical works that disseminated what we would now deem intersectional perspectives and values, which were not prevalent at the time. Specifically, these small presses overcame a wide array of social boundaries by circulating discourses that created affinities between different groups who experienced social oppression because of their sexual, gendered, racial, and economic identities. For example, blewointment press published works by Daniel David Moses (i.e. *Delicate Bodies*), a Delaware gay writer from the Six Nations of the Grand River, Bertrand Lachance (i.e. *Tes Rivières T'attendent*), a Québécois, gay poet, and Gwen Hauser (i.e. *Hands Get Lonely Sometimes*), a Toronto, lesbian poet. By publishing and joining these discourses from diverging communities, blewointment press functioned as a nexus for radical ideas from communities that may not have otherwise interacted. Similarly, Press Gang Publishers was grounded in anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, anti-racist, and the press sought to publish the work of women in general. While they were a predominantly white collective, they printed

political materials for women of colour and published their first book by a two-spirited First Nations woman in 1988 (*Not Vanishing* by Menominee poet Chrystos). Through these cultural activities, the two small presses' contributors gained agency by publishing radical texts that overcame social divides and formed collaborative communities with other cultural activists.

1.3 How to Analyze Small Presses' Queer Materials

This study extends research on *blewointment* and Press Gang by considering how these presses influenced lesbian and gay liberation movements' early phases and how they remain important for contemporary queer activism. I examine how small presses, such as Vancouver's *blewointment* press and Press Gang Publishers, developed aesthetic spaces of social resistance through the production and circulation of a "poetics of sexual disgust." In doing so, I address how and to what extent the production, circulation, and reception of this poetics influenced members of Canada's lesbian and gay liberation movements and its wider communities. I question how the organization of these presses facilitated the production and circulation of radical aesthetics and created the potential for queer resistance. While I address the presses' production of queer material, I also evaluate how these works affected readers, contributed to the self-organization of queer counterpublics, and provoked homophobic backlash. To be exact, I trace different responses to these works to determine the ways in which queer people embraced this aesthetic and to consider how the period's ideological, political, and religious roots led to prejudicial backlash. While my dissertation focuses on the two presses' unique traits, I also draw connections between them to better understand their junctions and disjunctions, as they both worked to redress the oppression of lesbian and gay people, such as censorship, the incarceration of queer people, physical violence, and persecution. Finally, I question the ongoing legacy of *blewointment* press and Press Gang Publishers to determine how members of diverging publics continue to remember them and contest their histories as part of Canada's queer history. In doing so, I aim to demonstrate why and to what extent these two presses

and their publications contributed to the city's lesbian and gay liberation movements. To do so, this project deploys an interdisciplinary research model, merging close readings, archival research, and interviews.

In theorizing *blewointment* press and Press Gang Publishers as intersectional spaces of resistance, I examine how their communities, predominantly composed of queer people, generated alternate social formations. Though lesbians and gay men were ostracized within a homophobic society and had to fight for safe social spaces, *blewointment* and Press Gang provided their collectives unparalleled opportunities to work together. To theorize these social spaces, I engage closely with Sara Ahmed's concept of a "queer phenomenology." As Ahmed argues, "lesbian bonds can involve orientations that are about shared struggles, common grounds, and mutual aspirations, as bonds that are created through the lived experiences of being 'off line' and 'out of line'" (103). That is, when queer people, such as lesbians, form bonds that deviate from heterosexual ways of socializing, they generate alternate possible social formations that are grounded in their "shared struggles, common grounds, and mutual aspirations." In the case of *blewointment* and Press Gang, these small presses' collectives were formed through shared anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, and anti-racist values. Through their collective values, these queer people could work together, produce radical works, engender intimate bonds, and ultimately create spaces of their own in which they had control over the means of production. For this reason, I argue that these small presses functioned as queer social nexuses facilitating the formation of alternative queer cultural activist communities in which the presses' collaborators could create a space grounded in their values.

To develop my concept of a poetics of sexual disgust, I engage with queer and feminist theoretical studies examining stigma and disgust. First, I suggest that a poetics of sexual disgust makes discourses that articulate homosexual desire and ways of living visible on the page as a means of embracing the stigma attached to homosexuality. To do so, I engage with queer theorist Michael

Warner's concept of the "stigmaphile" (43) which he develops in *The Trouble with Normal* (1999). In this work, Warner expresses concern for the gay movement in America and argues that it has been co-opted and normalized by a heteronormative society through heterosexual institutions and mechanisms of power (e.g., marriage). Arguing against this trend, Warner develops a queer ethics of being "stigmaphile" and contends that homosexuals, who have been stigmatized based on their identity (28), should develop an "alternative realm [in which they] learn to value the very things the rest of the world despises" (43). By engaging with Warner's concept of the "stigmaphile," I suggest that poets writing works that form a poetics of sexual disgust embrace the stigma attached to homosexuality and homoerotic desire as a positive way of living and as a rejection of the closeting of homosexuality. Second, I suggest that, as their works make homosexuality visible on the page, these poems also examine and challenge homophobic social norms that pathologically construct homosexuals as disgusting. I engage with feminist theorist Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* (2005), which examines the critical potential of non-canonical affects such as "disgust" (332). Ngai argues that disgust can be deployed as an affective literary strategy "not so much [to] solve the dilemma of social powerlessness [but to] diagnose it powerfully" (353). Similar to Ngai's concept of "disgust," I suggest that a poetics of sexual disgust is able to examine the pathologization of homosexuality through its content and to provoke affective responses of strong sexual desire from homosexual readers and responses of disgust from homophobic readers. Warner's concept of the "stigmaphile" and Ngai's concept of "disgust" are instrumental for developing my concept of a poetics of sexual disgust because they examine how the pathologization of marginalized groups (homosexuals and women) is cultivated through a heteronormative culture and society. By engaging with their works, I theorize a poetics of sexual disgust as a powerful literary tool that demonstrates both the importance of embracing homosexuality and the significance of critically examining how homosexuality is regulated through responses of disgust.

This poetics, as I will show, embraces homosexual stigma and critiques homophobic responses by experimenting with radical poetic forms and by producing radical sexual discourses. This aesthetics, I suggest, borrowed from earlier modernist aesthetic practices, while engaging with radical discourses from ongoing gay and lesbian liberation movements. Specifically, while some poems merged experimental poetic forms, such as dirty concrete poetry and sculptural poetry, with radical content, others challenged more traditional poetic forms, such as the lyric, by transforming it and deploying it to thwart homophobic masculinist values. For instance, Bertrand Lachance's dirty concrete poem "cum in a tree," published by blewointment press, exemplifies the former as it superimposes the word "cum" (1) several times to produce a build-up of libidinal poetic material that disrupts boundaries of respectability. Similarly, Press Gang's publication of photographs of Sheila Gilhooly and Persimmon Blackbridge's sculptural exhibition "Still Sane" documents the torture experienced by Gilhooly as she was incarcerated in a psychiatric institution and tortured with shock treatment. "Double Phoenix" by Menominee poet Chrystos, also published by Press Gang, exemplifies the latter as a lyrical poem that uses sexual language, such as the phrase "my vulva shivers" (5), to portray two women's romantic relationship and two-spirit desire. Albeit the phrase uses a medical term such as "vulva," it derives its abjection from its use as a descriptor of queer desire outside of the clinical context. These poems imagine an alternate social reality in which "the closet" of sexual shame is thwarted in a deterritorialized poetic space transformed by radical discourses that contribute to new ways of understanding sexuality. Thus, this poetics, through its embrace of homosexual stigma and examination of institutions and practices that pathologize homosexuals, challenges homophobic and masculinist values that closet homosexuality.

As I examine the influence of this poetics, I theorize how these presses contributed to the reproduction of readers as revolutionary reading subjects that formed intersectional queer counterpublics and reading communities. Recent research demonstrates that, while revolutionary

poetry's content produces an awareness of ongoing social issues, its dialogue is, more importantly, conducive to the reproduction of revolutionary subjects who challenge a homophobic public. As Stephen Collis argues in his study of the relationship between poetry and social revolutions, "poetry is not so much productive (of revolution) as it is potentially reproductive (of the revolutionary subject)" (10). For Collis, the process of sharing poetry facilitates the reproduction of these subjects, who form affinity groups working towards a revolution. That is, the revolutionary potential of sharing and circulating radical poems is not found in its content but in its potential to be circulated and to create affinities amongst larger groups of people. I engage with Collis's theory by claiming that there should not be a hierarchy between the production and circulation of radical poems. Instead, the revolutionary potential of a poetics of sexual disgust, composed of new sexual discourses, is fulfilled when it encourages readers to identify with them and self-organize. To better understand the reproductive influence of radical queer art, I engage with Michael Warner's concept of "queer counterpublics" (*Publics and Counterpublics* 18). As Warner argues, stigmaphiles, people who embraced their stigma as queer people, developed counterpublics via the circulation of discourses that redeployed society's disgust for non-normative sexualities (*The Trouble with Normal* 178; "Publics and Counterpublics" 420, 422). Extending Warner's work, I suggest that publishing a poetics of sexual disgust facilitated the formation of counterpublics that challenged a state of public surveillance via the publication and circulation of radical discourses. That is to say, by producing and circulating these works, they developed counterpublics that celebrated their stigma and dismissed villainizing social and legal discourses. Though Warner focuses on the relationships between strangers ("Publics and Counterpublics" 417), my research also considers how counterpublics may, in some instances, transform into communities as strangers form more personal relationships, develop reading and activist communities, become acquainted with members of the press, and, at times, join these writing collectives. In these instances, the relationship between

readers changes because readers are no longer strangers who form a counterpublic but instead become part of a reading community and possibly part of the press's creative community. I argue that these presses' circulation of this poetics of sexual disgust develops counterpublics as well as communities that embrace a mode of connectedness that overcomes homophobic, sexist, racial, cultural, and economic boundaries based on a queer sexual sameness. Also, I consider how queer counterpublics and reading communities may challenge queer oppression by producing and responding to a discourse that embraces their stigmatized identity and ignores hegemonic protocols of sexual respectability.

My findings result from close readings of the press's publications, analyses of archival materials, and the production of oral histories with members of the presses and their readers. In many ways, I am indebted to the gifts of members of *blewointment* press and Press Gang Publishers, who provided me rare copies of the presses' publications, their insights into archival materials, as well as their time as they shared with me their oral histories. Without their support, this project would not have been possible. My engagement with archival material is informed by Cain's work. As mentioned earlier, Cain's dissertation, which addresses the production and reception of material by Canadian small presses *Coach House* and *Anansi Press*, offers one model for my work. Much like Cain's study, which examines publications' paratexts and reviews to contextualize their contributions to a Canadian literary movement, my research engages with rare materials, such as original publications, correspondence, reviews, and promotional materials. I work closely with a large set of rare *blewointment* press materials given to me by *bissett*, materials housed at the Clara Thomas Special Collections at York, and Press Gang Publishers materials found in the Simon Fraser University Special Collections. These archival documents were instrumental in determining the personal relationships and politics at the presses, the press's publishing activities, the methods deployed by the presses to circulate their works, and the variety of readers' responses to the works.

Whereas I had the privilege of researching materials at the Clara Thomas Special Collections with the support of a Kent Haworth archival fellowship and had almost *carte blanche* from Bissett to use his materials, my access to materials at SFU was initially restricted by a rigorous ethics application. Once I was granted permission to access the materials, I had to work within the parameters established by the archivists, who reviewed my use of Press Gang materials to ensure that I preserved the anonymity of some members of the collectives, which I did by using the pseudonym “Author #.” Although it is important to protect the privacy rights of collective members, this rigorous process establishes certain silences, which I flag within this dissertation. My work with archival materials is integral to this dissertation’s examination of the presses’ contributions to lesbian and gay liberation movements.

While these archives functioned predominantly as repositories of the past that created the opportunity for new understandings about earlier queer cultural activisms, oral histories offered retrospective re-readings that explored how activists’ earlier lived experiences continue to inform their lives today. To produce these oral histories, I relied upon a snowballing approach, which encourages members of the presses or readers to recruit potential interviewees from their social networks, to develop my collection of oral histories. For instance, Canadian lesbian-feminist poet Erin Mouré connected me with members of Press Gang. After completing interviews, some members of the collective would connect me with other members of the presses and emphasize the importance of speaking with them to ensure that I gain a more complete understanding of the press’s history (Paula; Lynn Personal interview; Norma). This practice reflects the press’s earlier values of equitable representation. That is, these cultural activists emphasized the importance of consulting as many members of the collective as possible to gain a better understanding of a variety of experiences. Though I would have preferred speaking with more members of the collectives, many members were unable to meet with me because of their current health condition, highlighting the

importance of recording ageing cultural activists' oral histories. To protect the confidentiality of the presses' collective members as well as readers of the works, the interviewees consented to being given a pseudonym. To determine their pseudonym, I have used Baby Name Voyager, which allowed me to input the first letter of the person's name into a name generator. The generator then suggested other common first names for people born during the same period as the interviewees. In so doing, I preserve the person's confidentiality, while also referring to them with real names rather than "interviewee 001," which would remove their subjectivity.

When recording oral histories with members of the presses, I performed the role of cross-generational activist by actively renewing attention about these cultural activists' experiences and increasing visibility for their earlier lived experiences. To produce and record these oral histories, I performed a queer close listening of their oral histories with the objective of empowering the members of the presses through a reciprocal social transformation. Queer close listening entails listening to how LGBTQ2+ people interpret and articulate their lives, use queer-coded language, inflect their voices, connect with the interviewer, and destabilize dominant narratives about identity and community. Moreover, this practice entails paying attention to queer affect as it is expressed through the person's discussions of culture, intimacy, friendship, politics, and sexuality, as well as their tone, speed, volume, and silences. When I recorded these narrators' oral histories, I was highly aware of the historical ways that recording technologies have been deployed to surveil queer people, especially during the Cold War (Davidson, *Ghostlier Demarcations* 199-203). To challenge these tactics, I used recording technology with the written consent of the narrators, encrypted their content, and guaranteed in writing that the narrators would be consulted about any possible future use of the recordings beyond this dissertation, thereby protecting their privacy to the best of my abilities. When working with gay men and lesbians, I worked towards disrupting social hierarchies and producing space for open dialogue. To ethically produce these oral histories, I aimed to create trust between me

and the speaker and enable us to engage in a dialogue that was informed by my position as someone who has also been sexually marginalized. In doing so, I intended to create an ethical meeting space in which the gender and sexual power hierarchies that construct our society could hopefully be suspended or, at the very least, challenged for the length of the interview. Also, I conceptualized the space of dialogue as an opportunity for reciprocal transformation in which we could witness each other. Of course, these dialogical interviews were informed by my investigation of the intersection between small presses and lesbian and gay liberation movements, but more importantly, they were centered on the experiences of the interviewees. For instance, I followed Kristina Minister's recommendation that interviewers should actively practice "nonverbal communication" (38) through nods as well as vocally support the interviewee by uttering "uh huh" (38) because as Minister argues, "[t]his kind of work does not interrupt narrators; it supports them" (38). Also, I acted as an active translator guiding the narratives, welcoming digressions and unexpected surprises, and provided new ways of interpreting these members' personal stories and experiences. For instance, one member of Press Gang mentioned that my interest and research questions allowed her to think of some of the publications differently (Norma). Similarly, two members of *blewointment*, on separate occasions, were excited when I filled in gaps of histories about the presses that they had forgotten (Ben; Bernard). As a whole, I worked towards performing a practice of queer close listening grounded in ethical principles and reciprocal transformation that generated this dissertation's oral histories.

While my archival methods enable me to study rare and archived materials, this qualitative approach is used to provide first-hand accounts of these presses' influence upon queer people and lesbian and gay liberation movements. Wolf's dissertation offers a methodological lead for my project as it employs interviews to trace the official discourses surrounding Canadian small presses to identify how they functioned within a Canadian literary field of production (14). Like Wolf, I

suggest that interviews enable me to identify the way that readers responded to the presses' discourses, but I focus on queer people's responses rather than on those of the general Canadian literary field. Also, my project is deeply influenced by Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile's *The Canadian War on Queers*, as it merges queer theory with interviews. As Kinsman and Gentile assert, queer theory is useful for examining texts, but first-hand accounts help demonstrate the lived experiences of the people involved in the movement (14). First-hand accounts produced through my research project address subjective experiences involved in producing, circulating, and reading these works. My questions for producers included: in what ways did poetry enable you to address issues affecting alternate forms of sexuality, how did the small press enable you to publish your poetry, what relationships were fostered by the small press, and where did you promote your work? Similarly, my questions for readers included: when and why were you reading these works, how did these works affect you then, and how do they affect you now? As a whole, I deploy my theoretical, archival, and qualitative approaches to consider the intersection between the production, circulation, and reception of this poetics of sexual disgust and lesbian and gay liberation movements.

1.4 Research and Writing as Cultural Activism

This dissertation is guided by the following question: how and to what extent did blowointment press and Press Gang Publishers influence Vancouver's lesbian and gay liberation movements? The project's findings, which document the relationship between a poetics of sexual disgust, the small press, and lesbian and gay liberation movements, are historically informed by an often-erased queer history, theoretically influenced by queer and feminist theories, and reached via an interdisciplinary methodology. These findings are organized in the following four chapters. Chapter two, "Here and Queer on the West Coast: Small Presses as Generative and Productive Sites of Queer Cultural Activism," examines the development of small presses on North America's west coast that published radical sexual poetry. The chapter also situates this cultural development as a

phenomenon that grew from loci that were especially conducive to queer activism and queer cultural practices, such as raising awareness about dissident forms of sexual expression and political organizing in San Francisco and Vancouver. Chapter 3, “blewointment press and Queer Cultural Activism (1962-1983),” focuses on blewointment press’s ability to produce and circulate radical discourses that contributed to the early stages of lesbian and gay activism. Chapter 4, “Press Gang Publishers and Lesbian-Feminist Cultural Activism (1974-1989),” examines how Press Gang Publishers grew from a need for more lesbian spaces and generated a creative space that existed apart from androcentric gay communities and heteronormative women’s movements. The final chapter, “The Legacy of blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers (1983-2019),” examines blewointment press’s and Press Gang Publishers’s legacies to explore how their cultural activities may continue to resonate today. As a whole, each chapter focuses on the production, circulation, and reception of a poetics of sexual disgust to determine to what extent Vancouver’s presses intersected with Canada’s lesbian and gay liberation movements.

“Here and Queer on the West Coast: Small Presses as Generative and Productive Sites of Queer Cultural Activism” theorizes my concept of the small press as both a generative and productive space for queer cultural activism. Specifically, I examine how small presses on North America’s west coast developed alongside political organizations in cities such as San Francisco and Vancouver. With a focus on City Lights, the Women’s Press Collective, and Talonbooks, I will demonstrate that these presses generated queer collectives in which artists had the opportunity to meet, collaborate, and create radical artistic communities that refused to be repressed by a homophobic symbolic order. In turn, I demonstrate that these collectives produced radical literature that disseminated discourses that challenged homophobic values. Specifically, I posit and theorize that the poetry that these small presses produced formed what I call a “poetics of sexual disgust.” This aesthetics joins abject content with experimental poetic forms, such as concrete, visual, and

sound poetry. Furthermore, this aesthetic engages with ongoing radical discourses of sexuality to produce poetry that embraces a social disgust imposed onto it by an overwhelmingly homophobic public. While this dissertation focuses on *blewointment* and Press Gang, this aesthetic is not unique to them. For this reason, I point to specific examples outside these presses to demonstrate the larger stakes of producing this type of aesthetic. Specifically, I examine works by poets such as Allen Ginsberg, Robin Blaser, and Pat Parker. Though not all poets were working on North America's west coast, they either influenced, contributed to, or benefited from these spaces of queer activism and cultural production. Also, I examine the work completed by San Francisco's City Lights Books and Vancouver's Talonbooks. City Lights was charged for publishing obscene literature when it published Ginsberg's *Howl* (1957), a collection of Beat poems containing homosexual content. This event, as I argue, is an important antecedent for *blewointment* press and Press Gang Publishers as it highlights some of the homophobic responses that this type of work may receive in a North American context. Moreover, this event is comparable to the experiences that *blewointment* press's editor Bill Bissett, who published many works with Talonbooks, and Bertrand Lachance faced as their work was debated in the House of Commons and deemed pornographic. As a whole, this chapter will examine how small presses on North America's west coast were both generative and productive of queer cultural activism.

"*blewointment* press and Queer Cultural Activism (1962-1983)" examines how *blewointment* press's production and circulation of a poetics of sexual disgust enabled the press to engage with and contribute to burgeoning lesbian and gay liberation movements from the 1960s to the early 1980s. Specifically, I extend John Barton's finding that *blewointment* press played an important role in publishing several gay poets (21-22) by developing a more comprehensive understanding of these publications' importance to liberation movements at the time. For instance, *blewointment* press's *blewointment* magazine began in part as an effort to address issues of sexual exclusivity to "let

everyone in” (Avison).² This mandate shares an affinity with 1960s liberation movements, whose homophile organizations, such as Vancouver’s Association of Social Knowledge (ASK), sought to produce greater knowledge and understanding about sexual variations. While I emphasize the press and liberation movements’ shared affinities, this chapter considers how the press may have shifted away from some of the movements’ more problematic aspects, especially since it has been critiqued for privileging upper-class, white, male bodies (T. Warner 78, 80). Moreover, *blewointment* press published not only Anglo-Canadian men and women but also Indigenous and Québécois poets, which arguably led to the generation of a more intersectional space of resistance that overcame cultural, linguistic, and national boundaries. Also, I evaluate where these works were being circulated, such as poetry readings, and in what ways they helped form counterpublics and reading communities. For instance, Canada’s major liberation publication *The Body Politic* often promoted *blewointment*’s publications and extensively discussed the legal issues it faced. As a whole, this chapter addresses the relationship between *blewointment* press’s aesthetics and ongoing lesbian and gay liberation movements’ protests and discourses.

Similarly, “Press Gang Publishers and Lesbian-Feminist Cultural Activism (1974-1989)” evaluates how Press Gang’s cultural activities contributed to lesbian-feminist activism. Unlike *blewointment* press, which focused on all writers, Press Gang’s writing collective focused on “the political implications of [their] role as women/workers in a capitalist society” (Jankola *Jody Said*). In my examination of the press’s publishing of a poetics of sexual disgust, I respond to Pauline Butling’s and Susan Rudy’s call for a more comprehensive study of the press as part of a revised feminist history of women’s artistic labour (153). Specifically, I analyze how the press’s desire to form a women-only collective in 1974 coincides with the development of lesbian separatist groups

² Though this quotation is from Margaret Avison, the passage opens *blewointment* volume three number one, thus framing the remainder of the work, and reflects the collective’s goal of publishing marginalized artists, including sexually marginalized writers.

that created a social space for lesbians outside of male dominated gay communities (T. Warner 80-81). I consider how this press's ideological focus shapes this aesthetic, where it was circulated, and who was reading it. For instance, the poetry of Chrystos and Beth Jankola published by Press Gang addresses women's experiences, producing discourses that work beyond the confines of men's interests and makes women's experiences visible on the page. The press published this type of aesthetic in several monographs as well as in group-based inter-media projects. Although Press Gang's publishing house lasted until 2002, this chapter limits itself to the press's second phase before it split into two new projects in 1989. Moreover, I trace the press's readership by questioning who was reading these works, why they were reading them, and how they helped address issues that were important to women. In doing so, I seek to identify poetry's importance to the press's objectives of developing social and cultural spaces for lesbians.

In my final chapter "The Legacy of blowointment press and Press Gang Publishers (1983-2019)," I examine blowointment press and Press Gang Publishers's legacies to explore how they are remembered today. While scholarship, such as Don McLeod's *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada*, has helped reassert these presses' importance to liberation movements, I seek to better understand how earlier lesbian and gay cultural activism remains important for current queer activism. For instance, the "Timeline of Lesbian Milestones in BC" by the Canadian queer magazine *Xtra* included Press Gang Publishers's formation in 1974, noting that it was a "feminist publishing and printing collective, with a distinctly lesbian sensibility" (Quirk-e Art and Writing Group). While this type of comment does not speak specifically about my project's studied aesthetic, it provides some insight into how the press remains important today. This chapter further questions how members of the presses remember their earlier cultural activities, how the presses' works continue to be circulated today, and how the presses are remembered. By answering these questions, I not only speak to the presses' earlier significance but also explore some of their shortcomings.

As a whole, this project brings together Vancouver's cultural and lesbian and gay histories to demonstrate how small presses' queer cultural activities influenced lesbian and gay liberation movements. I demonstrate that poetry, as a circulating discourse, participated in the development of radical discourses that were deemed obscene and threatening, as they revolutionized public perspectives about sexuality. Vancouver's small presses *blewointment press* and *Press Gang Publishers* were spaces of subversive organization that joined social constituents affected by sexual, racial, gendered, economical, and cultural oppression. That is, they created alternate social possibilities for marginalized people to produce radical aesthetics, such as a poetics of sexual disgust. While disgust has historically been cultivated by an oppressive social regime to regulate and erase queer forms of sexuality, this dissertation demonstrates how stigma has been embraced and redeployed to challenge a homophobic society that isolates individuals. By publishing works that created affinities between marginalized people, these presses overcame the isolation they felt within a predominantly heteronormative society. The presses' collectives, their queer counterpublics, and their reading communities were galvanized to self-organize and work towards achieving social justice. Thus, I contend that small presses were essential cultural activist nodes within Vancouver's lesbian and gay liberation movements.

While my project contributes to Canadian literary and queer studies, it does not romanticize the presses' contributions or their influence. Instead, it considers the importance of tension between the presses' contributors, accounts for the presses' limited circulation, and works towards avoiding a romanticization of their influence on lesbian and gay liberation movements. For instance, since tensions in lesbian and gay liberation movements sometimes existed between gay men and lesbians, I consider in what ways these ideological differences were reflected in the presses. Also, while my project recognizes how other aesthetic forms (e.g., novels) also participated in the production of radical discourses that influenced this poetics, it does not focus on them. Instead, I examine instances

of works forming a poetics of sexual disgust. In spite of these limitations, my project seeks to develop a more comprehensive cultural history of the relationship between this aesthetic and queer activism. In building this comprehensive study of previous queer cultural practices, this project is also forward looking as it seeks to better understand the relationship between social justice and literature. As queer people continue to resist persistent forms of oppression, such as homophobia, racism, and colonization, this dissertation sheds light upon the severity of homophobic with our current social climate. For instance, the erasure of Indigenous Peoples' queer experiences, Islamophobia, and transnational forms of homophobia and surveillance persist in new ways that are tied to a long history of systemic queer public oppression. In spite of these problems, recent self-determination movements by Indigenous Peoples, Black Lives Matter protests, and March on Pride events show that we should not despair. Rather, this project, as a form of historical activism, sheds light upon the history of creative tactics that have been deployed to resist these forms of oppression. For this reason, this dissertation contributes to current queer activism by drawing attention to and analyzing the contributions of ageing cultural activists.

1.5 Situating Myself: Who Am I?

In her 1992 essay "The Problem of Speaking for Others," Linda Alcoff argues, "In speaking for myself, I (momentarily) create my self—just as much as when I speak for others I create their selves—in the sense that I create a public, discursive self, which will in most cases have an effect on the self-experienced as interiority" (10). I read this article in a feminist cultural theory course in my third year of my undergraduate studies as an English Language and Literature major at Brock University. I remain marked by Alcoff's work eight years later as an academic who writes about marginalized peoples' histories. I have turned to it multiple times as a way of situating myself when speaking about others, especially people with less privilege, and so it is fitting that I once again turn to it here as I situate myself in relation to this project. My "public, discursive self" is that of a French

Canadian, middle-class, cisgendered male, who does not identify as heterosexual. I approach this project from the standpoint of someone who grew up in a predominantly white and conservative town and was the only one in his group of friends to come out as “not straight.” As someone who is out of line, I am not surprised that in 2012 I gravitated towards bissett’s poetry when I had the opportunity to work as a research assistant on a project that indexed his correspondence with bpNichol. As a research assistant, I wondered early on, why is bissett’s queer art and poetry so interesting to me, and am I the only one to feel an immediate affection towards his work? This initial set of questions encouraged me to move to Kelowna, British Columbia to pursue a PhD in 2014, and I moved from Kelowna to Vancouver, British Columbia poised to pursue my socio-cultural inquiry in 2016. What follows is the result of many years of research, exploration, relationship building, and self-reflexivity. For now, I hope that I have given you, my reader, a better sense of my public discursive self.

Chapter 2: Here and Queer on the West Coast: Small Presses as Generative and Productive

Sites of Queer Cultural Activism

[T]he principle of ‘enclosure’ is neither constant, nor indispensable, nor sufficient in disciplinary machinery. This machinery works space in a much more flexible and detailed way. It does this first of all on the principle of elementary location or *partitioning*. Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual.

--Michel Foucault *Discipline and Punish* 143

Community-based and themselves always in process, [small presses] have sustained the social/material/discursive nexus that enables radicality

--Pauline Butling *Writing in Our Time* 41

2.1 Background

During the second half of the twentieth century, small presses located on North America’s west coast generated radical social spaces for queer artists and readers, while providing the material means to publish queer texts. While the Canadian and U.S. governments waged a Cold War against homosexuals (Kinsman and Gentile 87), presses in cities such as San Francisco (e.g., City Lights), Oakland (e.g., the Women’s Press Collective), and Vancouver (e.g., Talonbooks) worked in parallel with and at the intersection of lesbian and gay liberation movements. Specifically, these presses generated opportunities for gay and lesbian artists to meet, support each other, and engage in cultural activism. For instance, at City Lights Bookstore, gay poets and readers had the opportunity to meet each other in a public space, while engaging with queer literature (Susko 153). At the Women’s Press Collective, lesbian-feminist cultural activists such as Judy Grahn and Pat Parker generated a women-only cultural space in which they could advance their values and establish their lesbian-

feminist terms for cultural production (Woodwoman 61). In so doing, these small presses generated lesbian and gay social justice efforts by creating the material means for the growth and reproduction of queer social spaces, and the production of radical modernist poetry that made homosexuality visible on the page. For instance, they published books of poetry by lesbian and gay poets like Bill Bissett, Allen Ginsberg, Judy Grahn, and Pat Parker, whose work contains verses that promote lesbianism such as “women-loving-women” (Grahn) and argue that internalized homophobia is “fukan dumb” (Bissett “Caut in yet” 27). These publications produced radical sexual discourses that intersected with similar discourses stemming from gay and lesbian liberation organizations on the west coast.³ As I will argue throughout this chapter, small presses that welcomed queer people were generative and productive of lesbian and gay activism during the second half of the twentieth century.

To better understand the importance of this literary movement, it is necessary to consider modernism’s dominant heteronormative socio-cultural values at the time. As scholars have argued, modernism sought to establish new aesthetic principles by unsettling defined lines and challenging the status quo, consequently engendering an “abrupt change of direction, a realignment of thought” (Bradbury and McFarlane 40). For instance, modernists attempted to address issues that arose from the industrial revolution, such as the mass commodification of art. However, they also implemented new aesthetic principles that privileged conservative, homophobic, heterosexist, and androcentric ideologies, which intensified as modern society increasingly codified queer forms of sexuality as abnormal (Higgins 10; Williams 88; Foucault *The History of Sexuality* 37). Within the Anglo-American, British, and South African context, homophobia was prevalent amongst modernists such as Roy Campbell, Wyndham Lewis, George Orwell, Edith Sitwell, and Ezra Pound (Higgins 10;

³ See political organizations such as San Francisco’s Daughters of Bilitis, Oakland’s Gay Women’s Liberation Group, and Vancouver’s GATE.

Woods 182; Stanfield 85). In the Canadian context, some modernists, such as John Sutherland, outed and verbally attacked homosexual writers. Specifically, in a 1943 issue of *First Statement*, John Sutherland outed Patrick Anderson in his review of his poetry in the rival magazine *Preview*. Sutherland's critique argues that Anderson's poetry is a depiction of "some sexual experience of a kind not normal" (4) that "signif[ies] the falsity of the poet's medium and his habitual distortion of content" (4). This homophobic criticism, as Canadian queer scholar Peter Dickinson indicates, stems from Sutherland's belief that Anderson's poetry may pervert its readers and as a result represents a form of "un-Canadian-ness" (72). As Sutherland's homophobic critique highlights, while modernism challenged the status quo by establishing new aesthetic and social ideals, the movement reasserted homophobic values. Despite the realignment of thought within modernism, many modernists writers remained deeply skeptical of homosexual writers to the point of outing them to undermine their work.

However, as scholars have demonstrated, small presses in North America have been hotbeds for radical cultural production. As they have pointed out, small presses often promote anti-capitalist values and countercultural research, while some focus on fighting sexism. Specifically, these collectives challenged a capitalist logic embedded in book production and offered opportunities for radical cultural production (Burnham 9; Jones 22; Shearer 221). In the Canadian context, small presses were essential to the generation of literary communities that completed poetic research and experimented with work in progress (Butling 33; 34; 37-38). Yet scholars have also been skeptical of the social progressivism of some of these small presses. As Pauline Butling, Susan Rudy, and Dean Irvine point out, within these communities, women and other marginalized people played an important but complicated role because, while they contributed often invisible forms of labour that were essential to publishing activities, they were recognized more tangentially or not recognized at all (Butling and Rudy 31, 35; Irvine 19). For this reason, some female cultural activists developed

small presses of their own in which they could assert their own values (Voyce 163-164). Whereas these scholars demonstrate the radical work completed by small-press collectives, I extend their research to demonstrate how small presses, such as City Lights, Talonbooks, and the Women's Press Collective, worked against the grain of homophobia present within literary collectives and society at the time by making their concerns more central to their publishing activities.

Throughout this chapter, I will theorize and historicize the development of queer-friendly small presses as generative and productive spaces for lesbian and gay social justice efforts. Specifically, I will argue that radical poets working within these small presses contributed to the formation of queer communities on North America's West Coast, while developing radical sexual discourses. Small presses became social spaces in which artists and readers could meet, collaborate, and produce radical works together. Specifically, poets working in cities on North America's West Coast, such as San Francisco and Vancouver, came into contact with and benefited from discourses stemming from proto and contemporary lesbian and gay liberation movements during the 1950s-80s. These poets' works transformed modernist aesthetics, merged them with protests of oppressive sexual conditions, and vocalized the queer experiences of gays and lesbians. Ultimately, I will contend that a closer examination of these poets' cultural activism shows that they were part of a growing movement of artists and small press communities that contributed to the advancement of lesbian and gay liberation discourses on North America's West Coast.

2.2 Small Presses as Generative of Queer Communities

During the mid-twentieth century, the RCMP, the FBI, and the CIA began to surveil, document, and regulate homosexuals living in North America during the 1950s (Kinsman and Gentile 133, 149, 160), while homophobic artists outed homosexual artists (e.g., Sutherland outing Anderson). However, as I will argue throughout this section, the more progressive social climate of port cities on North America's West Coast enabled queer people to openly embrace their sexual

orientations, which led to artists in this area generating radical collectives that challenged these anti-queer tactics. Here, I use the word “generating” because of its allusions to the power of and ability to reproduce. Artists working within queer-friendly small presses had the power of reproducing queer forms of collaboration, friendship, support, and allyship, which, as I will show, were similar to initiatives by members of gay networks and political organizations during the 1950s to 1980s. By focusing on San Francisco’s City Lights, Oakland’s Women’s Press, and Vancouver’s Talonbooks as examples, I will examine how they supported each other against anti-queer and homophobic tactics. Though they were not all explicitly lesbian or gay, these small presses generated opportunities for queer collaboration and community formation. Yet, some gender hierarchies still existed within mixed collectives, which motivated some women to create small presses of their own (Voyce 163). Overall, throughout this section, I aim to show that, whereas some modernists promoted homophobic values, members of queer-friendly small presses on North America’s West Coast worked against the grain of homophobic social and cultural trends by generating spaces for queer people at a time when they were rare.

At different moments during the 20th century, social conditions affecting queer people in Canada and the United States of America paradoxically oscillated between becoming more welcoming and more repressive. On the one hand, events such as the First and Second World Wars enabled gay men to develop homosocial and homoerotic relationships because soldiers shared close quarters, which provided them opportunities to express and manifest homoerotic desires (Schneer and Aviv 55). Similarly, women, whose labour shifted away from the domestic sphere to public workspaces, spent more time socializing together (54). On the other hand, prior to, between, and after the World Wars, anti-queer and homophobic values led to the pathologization of queer people. As Michel Foucault argues, at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, socio-legal and medical institutions proliferated discourses that discriminated against queer people (*The*

History of Sexuality 37). For instance, terms like invert, homosexual, deviate, and queer began to proliferate and divided sexualities into normal/abnormal dichotomies (37), which limited the social mobility of queer people. In Canada, the RCMP began surveilling queer people during the early 1960s, citing their non-normative sexual desires and practices as liability to foreign enemies, and were thus discursively constructed as a national threat (Kinsman and Gentile 71). Similarly, in the United States of America, political discourses constructed people who were perceived as opposing the nation's normative gender and sexual practices as threats to the nation's security (Corber 2). In short, Canada and the U.S.A. deployed homophobic discourses to rhetorically construct State-sanctioned regulating tactics as serving the nations' interests. In addition to this symbolic violence, the police in cities across Canada and the U.S.A increasingly raided homosocial and homoerotic spaces, such as gay and lesbian bars and bathhouses during the 1960s-1980s, imprisoned queer people, and outed them (335). These policing tactics physically and symbolically reasserted heteronormative gender and sexual practices to ensure the reproduction of the State's capitalist interests, which reinforced the closeting of queer people's desires and sexual practices. Nevertheless, during the brief periods in which social conditions shifted away from the norm, such as World War I and II, an increased concentration in homosocialization and homoeroticism shaped the beginnings of queer spaces in Canada and the United States of America.

While North America remained mostly hostile for queer people during the 1950s-1980s, radical sexual exploration was welcomed and supported in the cosmopolitan metropolises of the San Francisco Bay Area (hereafter referred to as the Bay Area) and Vancouver. David Schneer and Caryn Aviv argue, the first half of the twentieth century, "an age when people and things moved by ship, most homosexual places were near ports, where people were constantly coming and going, and where people could maintain some sense of anonymity. These were places in which nonnormative forms of sexuality thrived" (53). As such, port areas became increasingly important to the generation

of queer social spaces. Maritime traffic established the necessary social conditions for gay and lesbian activism in these areas to flourish, which lasted beyond changes in local economies. Though there is limited research about the queer history of Vancouver, which this project redresses, a body of scholarship examining San Francisco has demonstrated its rich queer history. For instance, Nan Alamilla Boyd states, “San Francisco is a queer town ... because a queerness is sewn into the city’s social fabric” (2), which “blossomed in 1933 with the repeal of Prohibition and the emergence of queer entertainments in the city’s tourist-district nightclubs, bars, and taverns” (5). Similarly, Allan Bérubé demonstrates that during World War II, San Francisco offered gay male and lesbian GIs opportunities for intimacy at bars, hotels, public parks, and nightclubs, especially in its Tenderloin and North Beach districts (109, 110, 111, 115). Yet, Bérubé notes that “[i]n San Francisco the gay night life went through several periods of disruption and reorganization during the war” (124) as the communities faced and fought against “antivice crackdowns” (124) by the Liquor Board Commission.

From the 1950s to the 1980s, when tactics to surveil, regulate, and track gay men and lesbians were mobilized by the State’s repressive state apparatuses (e.g., the police and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police) and simultaneously by conservative segments of the public (e.g., people who publicly discriminated against homosexuals), the Bay Area and Vancouver became important sites of gay and lesbian resistance. San Francisco’s Castro and North Beach districts and Vancouver’s downtown area attracted lesbians and gay men because their communities welcomed alternative sexual values. For instance, with the arrival of gay Beat poets during the 1950s, San Francisco began to publicly establish itself as a gay literary cultural centre (D’Emilio 176). At the same time, the first homophile organization in San Francisco, the Mattachine Society, was created in 1956, whereas the first one in Vancouver (as well as Canada), the Association for Social Knowledge (ASK), was created in 1963. These organizations generated visibility for gay people, advocated for

their rights, created knowledge about queer desires, and challenged a society that privileged heteronormativity.⁴ These port cities were also sites of globalism, capitalism, and empire, which created social contexts that privileged white, settler-colonial men (Mah 10-11). To combat this inequality, members of more marginalized communities in these cities participated in growing anti-racist, anti-poverty, and anti-sexist social movements (10-11). Whereas lesbian and gay liberation movements intersected with civil rights, Black Power, Red Power, and women's movements in the Bay Area, those movements intersected with workers' rights movements (e.g., the formation of SORWUC),⁵ anti-Vietnam War and nuclear disarmament protests, and Indigenous self-determination movements in Vancouver. In short, the queer histories of the Bay Area and Vancouver overlap in many ways.

The two geographical areas' social histories established the necessary conditions to welcome radical poets who would occupy, participate in, and contribute to ongoing movements that affected queer people across the West Coast. Specifically, several writers such as Bill Bissett, Robin Blaser, Allen Ginsberg, Judy Grahn, Pat Parker, and Jack Spicer were attracted to and migrated to the Bay Area and Vancouver. While the two areas have explicit ties to lesbian and gay liberation organizations, these poets did not exclusively move to this area to work within political organizations. Yet, they do form a migratory pattern of poets who moved to this area and either previously or later identified with queer forms of sexuality. Poets migrating to the Bay Area included Blaser, who moved from Denver, Colorado in 1944, Spicer, who moved from Los Angeles in the 1940s, Ginsberg, who moved from New York City in the early 1950s, Parker, who moved from Los

⁴ While Robert J. Corber points out the limitations of these early initiatives by accusing homophile organizations of trying to assimilate gay people within the mainstream heteronormative society (19), homophile organizations were part of a social shift that sought to depathologize homosexuality (e.g., the Alfred Kinsey report).

⁵ In 1979, Press Gang Publishers published *An Account to Settle: The Story of the United Bank Workers (SORWUC)*. SORWUC is an acronym for Service, Office and Retail Workers' Union of Canada. At least one member of Press Gang was actively involved in this movement (Lynn).

Angeles in the early 1960s, and Grahn, who moved from Chicago in the 1960s. Blaser and Spicer would eventually form a homosocial circle with Robert Duncan, while studying at Berkeley (Davidson, *San Francisco Renaissance* 40), and Grahn formed the Women's Press Collective in Oakland, which focused on intersectional forms of resistance (Garber 31), and was later joined by Parker. Poets who moved to Vancouver include bissett, who moved from Halifax, Nova Scotia with his boyfriend in the late 1950s, and Spicer and Blaser, who moved from the Bay Area in 1965 and 1966, respectively. While these poets are part of a larger group of writers that migrated to the west coast, this sample group's migratory movements hint at the extent to which the two areas welcomed radical writers and facilitated the formation of a poetics of sexual disgust.

Many of these writers gravitated towards or formed small presses such as City Lights, Women's Press Collective, and Talonbooks. These presses were founded on the principle of challenging dominant modes of production and literary consumption (i.e. mass consumption), which dismissed queer desires. Instead of reaffirming a capitalist publishing logic that has privileged mass consumption, these presses believed that they should focus on reaching a limited and like-minded audience. As Clint Burnham argues, "[s]mall press publishing attacks the reification and seriality endemic to the commodity-book. It does this through two strategies: first of all, it refuses such bourgeois dichotomies as amateur and professional. Second, small presses engage with the material composition of the book, and they deconstruct the 'commodity book' through material and semiotic simulation" (9). That is, for the small press, books have two primary objectives: 1) challenging bourgeois literary tastes and expectations, and 2) challenging the material composition of the book as it is understood by the literary market. Small presses generated spaces in which their modes of production would contradict production the capitalist logic, which privileges the mass consumption of works reflecting normative values. For example, City Lights developed their Pocket Books Series in 1956 as a series of small and affordable paperbacks, which as owner Lawrence Ferlinghetti

argues, were part of an effort to “publish across the board, avoiding the provincial and the academic ... [he] had in mind rather an international, dissident, insurgent ferment” (xv). Part of the Pocket Series’ mandate was to promote dissidence through Ferlinghetti’s publication of radical works such as Ginsberg’s *Howl* (1956), which contains homosexual content and will be examined later in this chapter. This set of values assumed that the publication of radical works was capable of causing revolt in the reader instead of reproducing the market’s demands. Similarly, Pat Parker of the Women’s Press Collective attests that, “[t]he way we publish a book (at the Women’s Press Collective) is political. Not holding back is political. You live politics” (Woodwoman 61). For Parker, the small press’s collective saw its lived politics as being intertwined with the material objects that it published. That is, the collective took the opportunity to produce and to circulate works that would promote their lesbian feminist politics that challenged the dominant means of production. The two small presses’ mandates, which sought to challenge the mass market’s tastes, produce revolt, and advance their dissident politics, generated radical spaces in which queer artists could produce radical works.

To produce their objects, small press collectives generated an alternate “gift economy” (Butling 72) in which collective members gave their time and labour in exchange for the advancement of their political ideals. Contrary to major publishers that value profit, anti-capitalist small presses do not see money as the primary goal. As Dean Irvine and Smaro Kamboureli argue in their examination of the small press editor,

editors are most often authors who have taken on the complementary role of curating and disseminating the work of the literary communities in which they circulate. [...] Such editors typically make this effort without expecting remuneration beyond what is necessary to continue publishing the output from a given literary collectivity, however loosely or narrowly defined. (7)

Irvine and Kamboureli emphasize that small press editors are committed to producing books for the sake of creating objects rather than gaining wealth. I extend their research here by considering the experiences of small presses' collective members beyond the editor. Members of small presses, while generating a gift economy, felt the pressures of the capitalist marketplace because they required some monetary support to sustain their activities. For instance, members of the Women's Press Collective engaged in "labor-intensive" (Enszer 66) sales strategies by occupying many roles that were not economically rewarding and exhausted the little economic resources that they had (66-67). Members of these small presses also relied on gifts or grants to advance their projects (Susko 153; Short 5; Hayward 27). Some presses were gifted resources (e.g., a printing machine), which is in line with the principles of a gift economy (Butling 72); however, other presses relied upon government funding (Mount), whose adjudication was influenced by politics and a limited funding pool. Small presses were not entirely free from the pressures of a capitalist economy, but they generated a gift economy that depended upon the collective's investment of labour and resources in exchange for the advancement of their socio-cultural projects.

While they invested in the development of a gift economy, small presses did not always adequately recognize each member's labour. Specifically, the histories of these presses often emphasize the work of some contributors, who are usually male and white, while neglecting the work of more marginalized members of the collective. In her work on Vancouver's little magazine *Tish*, Butling demonstrates how women, for instance, were relegated to a more marginalized position within the collective and argues that their contributions were often erased (56). This problem is not unique to *Tish* because it was prevalent amongst modernist literary communities at the time. Women within small publishing ventures, as Irvine demonstrates, were instrumental to their success and were responsible for a large burden of labour (17). Irvine indicates that women, who were involved in modernist small presses and little magazines, "conducted promotional tours, solicited and

collected subscriptions, courted advertisers, typed stencils, cut and pasted dummies, answered correspondence, and so on” (17). In addition to Irvine’s point, this invisible labour was also often performed by more marginalized members of the collective, such as women and people of colour, who were not properly credited for their contributions. While small presses were supported by gift economies, the instrumental contributions of members who were closer to the periphery were often not recognized by male dominated collectives.

As these labour hierarchies suggest, gender plays an important role in positions of power within the small press. While small presses may have published gay poets, producers within the field of queer cultural production were not always welcoming towards women. As Stephen Voyce argues, “[m]any women found themselves excluded both from the official institutions of culture, as well as the counter-publics and alternative communities seeking to challenge the racist and classist policies of the nation state” (163). That is, marginalized male producers, who were perceived as advancing a politically progressive agenda, paradoxically marginalized women. However, lesbian small presses, which published lesbian content that addressed intersectional forms of oppression, generated women-only spaces in which these hierarchies were destabilized. For instance, the Women’s Press Collective, which was started in Oakland, California in 1970 by Judy Grahn and Anne Leonard, challenged the male dominated field of radical cultural production. Specifically, Grahn and Leonard bought a Gestetner printing press (Short 5), published works that addressed issues specific to women’s experiences, and eventually developed an intersectional space of resistance by collaborating with women of colour, such as Pat Parker. Arguably, these women were what Nirmal Puwar calls “space invaders” (8) because they separated themselves from mixed collectives and asserted their values. In her examination of how “women and racialised minorities” (8) are perceived within male-dominated spaces, Puwar argues:

[s]ome bodies are deemed as having the right to belong, while others are marked out as

trespassers, who are, in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined (politically, historically and conceptually), circumscribed as being 'out of place'. Not being the somatic norm, they are space invaders. (8)

By performing the role of "space invaders," members of the Women's Press Collective thwarted men's dominance over cultural production, while exposing the limitations of radical counter cultural and social spaces. As Parker protests, "[p]oetry has been controlled by men for so long ... It's a matter of where the control lies. There's so little poetry for us because look who sets the standards" (Woodwoman 61). Parker suggests that, to overcome this masculine domination and assert her agency, she has taken control of a space of production. Doing so gives her the opportunity to produce radical works that question the oppression of lesbians and women of colour. Thus, whereas women may have been excluded from male dominated cultural spaces, members of Women's Press Collective generated a space of cultural production that enabled its constituents to become empowered and thwart the limitations imposed onto them by men.

While they actively sought to create spaces of their own, members of small press collectives were also able to expand their community by attracting readers to their press's physical location. Small presses generated social nexuses where queer subjects could meet to overcome their isolation. As mentioned earlier, homosexuals living on North America's west coast were regulated by State sanctioned tactics that limited their mobility. However, to challenge this marginalization, small presses offered queer people the opportunity to meet in physical and imagined spaces, to work together, and to form affinity networks and alliances. In her work on queer spatial orientations, Sara Ahmed explains, "certain objects are available to us because of lines that we have already taken: our 'life courses' follow a certain sequence, which is also a matter of following a direction or of 'being directed' in a certain way" (21). That is, queer people orient themselves towards objects that deviate from regulated heterosexual lines. In the Bay Area and Vancouver, small presses produced radical

discourses in text-form that facilitated alternate social movements by functioning as a nexus for queer directions that deviated from homophobic lines. For example, City Lights Bookstore began as a bookstore in 1953 where marginalized Beat poets could meet in person (Susko 153). Soon after, it became a publisher and published important works such as Ginsberg's *Howl, and Other Poems*. City Lights functioned as a bookseller and publisher for work by members of the Beat generation (e.g., Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky) and works by San Francisco Renaissance poets (e.g., Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan) that promoted radical understandings of sexuality. Moreover, it hosted mass poetry reading events that provided Beat poets a forum to share their radical texts (153). Since this space was intended for poets and readers to meet (153), it facilitated what Ahmed would call queer lines by making objects created by gay poets available to people who would identify with their values. Small presses, while being generative of queer-friendly spaces, published radical poetry that sustained their community initiatives and disseminated their values to the public.

2.3 Small Presses as Productive Spaces for Radical Poetry

Equally integral to their community building, these small presses produced tangible objects, such as books, broadsheets, magazines, and pamphlets, that increased the visibility of queer people's concerns. As I will argue, poems by poets like Bill Sisset, Robin Blaser, Allen Ginsberg, Judy Grahn, Pat Parker, and Jack Spicer, which were published by small presses on the west coast, formed a poetics of sexual disgust, which engaged with modernist aesthetic practices while making queer experiences visible on the page. These poems deviated from more problematic facets of modernist production and imagined alternate ways of conceptualizing sexual stigma by redeploying earlier modernist practices, such as Imagist (e.g., Ginsberg) and dadaist (e.g., Spicer) aesthetic principles, and by producing critiques of heteronormative oppression. However, these queer poets were also indebted to a group of queer modernist writers who made homosexuality visible on the page. Indices of this movement can be seen within the work of early twentieth century writers such as Djuna

Barnes, H.D., Christopher Isherwood, Amy Lowell, and Gertrude Stein, who disrupted taxonomies of sexual and gender propriety (Galvin 3) and transformed modernist aesthetic forms to “transfigure stigma into aesthetic value” (Glavey 7). For instance, Barnes’s novel *Nightwood* (1936) depicts a lesbian relationship between the characters Robin Vote and Nora Flood and “uses an underworld and outcast setting for [Barnes’s] exploration of lesbian existence” (Thompson 74), and Isherwood’s novel *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) portrays gay characters as allies to the book’s protagonist. The poet H.D. wrote many fragmented poems dedicated to Sappho, such as “Fragment Forty,” which, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues, function as “‘coming out’ texts” (*H.D. The Career of that Struggle* 24), and the poet Amy Lowell wrote poems about homoerotic desire like “In a Garden” in which the speaker depicts a bathing person that she desires (Faderman 64). Moreover, several of Stein’s works examined homoerotic relationships, such as the short story “Q.E.D.” (1903) and the poetry collection *Tender Buttons* (1914). The latter examines the domestic sphere that Stein and her lesbian partner Alice B. Toklas had occupied (Schuster), which has been immensely influential for queer poets such as Judy Grahn and Bill Bissett (Grahn, *Really Reading* 3-4; Ben). Like the work of these earlier writers, a poetics of sexual disgust deviates from modernism’s more problematic motives of reinstating a more conservative and hierarchical society that privileges white, heterosexual men, while focusing on the lived conditions of queer people during the 1950s-1980s. How then does a poetics of sexual disgust challenge dominant aesthetic practices, respond to issues of sexual oppression, and contribute to burgeoning liberation movements?

Since this aesthetic spans a thirty-year period of lesbian and gay liberation movements, it would be ideal to study this aesthetic as a whole (e.g., an entire body of work by any of these poets or all formations of this aesthetic). However, this project is beyond the scope of this chapter and this dissertation. For this reason, I focus on canonical and non-canonical examples of this poetry to show a wider array of formations across different circles. I am not assuming that these poets form a

specific collective because they did not all share the same creative circles, coteries, or collectives. Rather, by looking at their work as a poetics of sexual disgust, I highlight this aesthetics' qualities, reveal affinities between poets' works, and identify how their poetry intersected with lesbian and gay liberation movements. Whereas an antiques and homophobic society attempted to shame and repress homosexuality through responses of disgust and aversion because of its threat to heteronormative values (Sedgwick 3), these poets refused to be repressed. As I theorized in Chapter 1, a poetics of sexual disgust is concerned with making homosexuality visible on the page as a means of embracing the stigmatized identity attached to homosexuality. As Michael Warner argues in *The Trouble with Normal*, instead of supporting a "stigmaphobe" (43), whose values represent those of the dominant culture that ensures gender and sexual conformity (43), a "stigmaphile" (43) should recognize the value of their stigmatized identity as being capable of generating alternative queer communities that do not adhere to a "false morality" (36). Like Warner's concept of the "stigmaphile," a poetics of sexual disgust is grounded in a poet's refusal to adhere to homophobic values, their embrace of homosexuality's stigma, and their creation of an alternate understanding of sexuality. A poetics of sexual disgust also uses its material and content to examine social disgust towards homosexuality by affecting its readers differently. For instance, this poetics may cause responses of disgust in homophobic readers, but it may also provoke feelings of sameness, affinity, or support in queer and allied readers. In her examination of disgust in *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai argues, "disgust is neither of the [political] left or of the right and has the capacity to be summoned in either direction" (339) and adds that disgust can be used as an affective tool by any political constituency to advance their objectives and has the power to be deployed to diagnose social oppression (353). Building on Ngai's observation, I suggest that, by using poetry to engage with what had been deemed disgusting, Bissett, Blaser, Ginsberg, Grahn, Parker, and Spicer consciously or unconsciously participated in what Judith Butler calls a process of "citationality and

resignification” (*Bodies That Matter* 21) to change the meaning of disgust. As Butler argues, this process involves “mak[ing] over the terms of domination, a making over which is itself a kind of agency, a power in and as discourse, in and as performance, which repeats in order to remake—and sometimes succeeds” (137). For this reason, I will argue throughout this section that poems by bissett, Blaser, Ginsberg, Grahn, Parker, and Spicer formed a poetics of sexual disgust because they embraced their stigmatized identities and examined what had been deemed disgusting (i.e. queer sexuality), producing a new set of sexual discourses that protested the closeting of homosexuality.

In the 1950s, as initiatives to increase the visibility of gay people began to gain pace,⁶ gay Beat poet Allen Ginsberg published *Howl* (1956). This work adapts Imagist aesthetic practices,⁷ portrays the lived experiences of gay people, amongst other oppressed groups, and protests a homophobic public’s violence. Counterintuitive to Imagist poetry,⁸ *Howl* uses a loose and colloquial language, but it emulates Pound’s direct treatment of the thing by presenting America’s modern problem: the invisibility and oppression of marginalized people. Specifically, the poem is a catalogue of images that depicts social issues, such as homophobia, racism, and poverty. In contrast to Pound’s version of Imagism, which has been critiqued for reproducing heterosexist and homophobic values (Higgins 10), *Howl*’s images depict the hidden experiences of oppressed people. For example, in solidarity with gay people, the poem’s speaker declares that he “saw the best minds of [his] generation” (1)

who bit detectives in the neck and shrieked with delight
in policecars for committing no crime but their
own wild cooking pederasty and intoxication,

⁶ One example of this growth is the development of homophile organizations such as Daughters of Bilitis in San Francisco.

⁷ See Castellito, George P. “Imagism and Allen Ginsberg’s Manhattan Locations: The Movement from Spatial Reality to Written Image.” *Colby Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 2, 1999, pp. 117-128.

⁸ See Ezra Pound’s “A Retrospect.”

who howled on their knees in the subway and were
dragged off the roof waving genitals and manu-
scripts,
who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly
motorcyclists, and screamed with joy... (109-116)

Rather than reproducing a typical image of gay people, which would shame them for their queer sexual practices, the poem shows the violence inflicted upon them by systemic forms of oppression, such as police surveillance. Moreover, the speaker critiques the criminalization of homosexuality by showing that the only “crime” committed by these men is being “fucked in the ass” and “scream[ing] with joy.” This image of gay men being punished for their enjoyment of anal sex evokes what queer theorist Leo Bersani argues is the biggest threat that a homosexual can commit against a heterosexual culture: the defilement of heterosexual masculinity (207). As Bersani explains, “[m]ale homosexuality advertises the risk of the sexual itself as the risk of self-dismissal, of losing sight of the self, and in so doing it proposes and dangerously represents *jouissance* as a mode of asceticism” (222). By producing new images of gay men’s pleasure, Ginsberg’s poem not only refers to this heterosexual fear of sexual defilement but also visually celebrates anal sex through the material of the poem. In deploying Imagist tenets and producing new images of gay people’s experiences, the poem challenges Imagist aesthetic practices, exposes the State’s homophobic violence, and protests this policing in solidarity with gay men.

While some of Ginsberg’s work explicitly critiques homophobia, work by gay poet Jack Spicer from Berkeley responds to the issue more coyly. In “The Unvert Manifesto,” Spicer deploys a Dada aesthetic that plays with pathologizing discourses of non-normative sexual identities.⁹

⁹Although “The Unvert Manifesto” was written when Spicer was working at the Boston Public Library’s Rare Book Room, a position he obtained with the help of his gay friend Robin Blaser, it engages with his earlier gay activist work in San Francisco.

Specifically, it uses a collage technique that engenders a new ordering of inconsequential excerpts, including a manifesto and “other papers found in the rare book room of the Boston Public Library” (1). For instance, a found excerpt indicates, “December 22, 1953: / S. is in Los Angeles” (42-43), which is followed by “December 23, 1953: / To appear as human among homosexuals and to appear as divine among heterosexuals...” (44-45). Unlike the work of the original Dada avant-garde movement, which never quite critiqued homophobia,¹⁰ Spicer’s creative work arguably extends his gay activist work. As a member of the Berkeley Chapter of the Mattachine Society, Spicer “plunged headlong into political activism” (Gizzi and Killian xv) when he was “confounded with injustice and homophobia” (xv). The poem’s absurdism subverts rigid identity categories, like “invert” and “pervert,” that resulted from the “*psychiatrization of perverse pleasure*” (Foucault *The History of Sexuality* 105, emphasis in original). For example, “The Unvert Manifesto” explores the concept of the “unvert” that “is neither an invert or an outvert, a pervert or a convert, an introvert or a retrovert. An unvert chooses to have no place to turn” (1). As the speaker argues, the “unvert” is not an “invert,” a term that has historically connoted a defective sewer system as well as a failed sexual practice based on a person’s assigned gender identity. Rather, the speaker pleads for the “unvert” that has no clear etymological roots tied to stigmatized sexual identity formations and instead connotes the opposite of (“un”) a turning away (“vert”). That is, contrary to the proliferation of pathologizing homophobic discourses, the “unvert” is continuously undoing strict categories of sexuality imposed onto them by refusing to be turned away from their chosen path. The speaker’s ambiguous path echoes Spicer’s own wariness of a conservative reading public. As Susan Vanderborg argues, within the socio-historical context of gay oppression in the 1950s, Spicer strategically “creates a ‘MERTZ’ language of ‘Nonsense,’ of negotiations, repetitions, and circular

¹⁰ As Tirza True Latimer argues, Dada and surrealism sought to challenge bourgeois values and to unsettle its ideologies, but these movements failed to unsettle modernism’s homophobia (355).

definitions, as a playful barrier between himself and the reader” (46). Extending Vanderborg’s finding, I suggest that Spicer’s distrust of a reading public, which may dismiss him on the grounds of his homosexuality, informs the text’s challenge of a homophobic reader’s desire to pin down a clear definition of the “unvert.” By transforming Dada aesthetic practices and subverting homophobic discourses, the text leaves the reader feeling as though the discourse that has codified queer people is both hollow and insufficient, while resisting being easily categorized by new discourses.

Although ambiguity functions as an aesthetic tool of resistance in Spicer’s poetry, it is also used as a tool to demarcate power hierarchies as it reifies some identity markers. Specifically, the speaker’s position of power becomes clearer in contrast to “othered” identities that are included in the poem. For instance, “The Unvert Manifesto” includes a potentially racist claim when the speaker claims, “Jews and Negroes are not allowed to be unverts. The Jew will never understand unversion and the Negro understands it too well” (12). The poem’s ambiguity resists an effective explanation of why these two racialized groups (e.g., “Jews and Negroes”) “are not allowed to be unverts,” and arguably reproduces a hierarchy of power for gay men in which “Jews and Negroes” cannot be considered part of the same gay community. In her work on the complicated identity politics of Cold War poets producing works that challenge and support patriarchal ideologies, Rachel Blau DuPlessis demonstrates that, while Spicer’s poetry seeks to challenge patriarchal understandings of sexuality, his work does not completely dismantle all identity categories. As she argues, speaking from a privileged white male position, “[a]llegorically speaking, [enables] the centre [to] clai[m] the goods of the periphery but ignores the periphery’s coequality and right to power” (91). For DuPlessis, Spicer’s poetry unsettles the marginalization of a group of people who are closer to the centre of power without challenging the ostracization of people who are furthest from this centre. This is the case in “The Unvert Manifesto” where the ambiguous style of the poem not only resists closure, which prevents any fixed category for the speaker’s sexual identity, but also reproduces racialized

identity markers for more marginalized members of the public. For this reason, the poem highlights the power of ambiguity as an aesthetic tool of resistance, while suggesting that it can only be claimed by more privileged members of a public. Consequently, the poem does not address what we now consider intersectional forms of oppression but reinstates a hierarchy of access to power.

Gay poet Robin Blaser, who was part of Spicer's coterie at Berkeley, also protested the closeting of homosexuality. Blaser worked with the serial form to create new myths (Blaser "Advertisement") that ethically challenged homophobic social structures. Specifically, Blaser's serial poems *Cups* challenge hegemonic understandings of sexuality and modernist poetics by imagining alternate social paradigms that embrace homosexuality's transformative potential. While some modernists, such as Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, were in favour of deploying the serial form to create new myths that addressed "the most pressing ethical issues of the time" (Jenkins 20), post-World War II serial poems, such as Blaser's work, are characterized by their "disruptive call of alterity within the structure and technique of their poetics" (20). In the case of *Cups*, content symbolizing queer sexual desire and practices constitutes this poetic alterity. For example, fragment "10" can be read as a challenge to the stable structure of the earlier modernist serial poetic form because its textual space is infused with homoerotic overtones. In this work, the speaker allegorically depicts a modern space that has become striated by technological structures, such as trains and telegraph lines. Though these technological devices fit within the larger telos of a Western civilization's project, the poem's speaker subverts this agenda by depicting a toxic scene where "High on stilts, the black water tank / leaks. A pond rises by the railbed" (1-2). This toxicity is especially poignant in light of the relationship between modern technological advancement and the scientific development of pathologizing discourses and techniques to regulate homosexuality, such

as the “fruit machine” (Foucault *History of Sexuality* 90, 119; Kinsman and Gentile 175).¹¹ The poem challenges this oppression by depicting two male lovers whose “Amor” (12) infiltrates the space “disguised as grass” (12) and who “hoped” (13) that their “seed would fall among the roots” (13). In contrast to the technological devices that symbolize modernity’s production of striated space, the grass in this scene symbolizes an alternate organic and rhizomatic growth that resists these structures. Moreover, the symbol of “seed” can be read as semen, which the poem’s coda emphasizes as the speaker asks, “WHAT IS THAT WRINKLES UNDER THE ROOT?” (16), and responds “SKIN, SEMEN, AN ARM AND A FOOT” (17). In opposition to the opening verse that depicts the toxicity of modern progress, the coda emphasizes the gay roots that embody the poem’s foundation as represented by the work’s “foot” and its relationship to the men’s “SEMEN.” Through this depiction, the poem emphasizes the power of male lovers’ desire and its ability to resist striated structures that marginalize people. Moreover, the poem allegorically suggests that gay sexuality, as an embodied poetic practice, can transform modern structures that discipline gay bodies. Blaser’s adaptation and transformation of the serial form inherited from earlier modernists produces an alternate serial poetics that contributes to new positive images of homosexuality.

Whereas poems by Ginsberg, Spicer, and Blaser predominantly respond to a lack of homosexual visibility, the poetry of Vancouver’s gay poet bill bissett challenges the status quo through his challenge to heteronormative language. Specifically, bissett challenges oppressive understandings of homosexuality by using non-normative spelling, producing radical depictions of

¹¹ The fruit machine was a set of psychological and medical tests deployed by the RCMP to interrogate suspected homosexuals. As Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile state, “Some of these tests included the plethysmograph, which measures blood volume in the finger by electronic or pneumatic means; the Palmer sweat test, which measures perspiration; word association tests; the pupillary response test; the span of attention test, which measures the time spent in attending to various images; and masculinity/femininity (M/F) tests, with all their gender and sexuality assumptions” (177).

queer experiences, and restoring the potential of language. Like the work of earlier modernists such as e.e. cummings and Ezra Pound (see his patois correspondence), which plays with the phonetic use of language in their writing, as well as the work of Futurists, which disrupts the tyranny of grammar through onomatopoeia, bissett's poetry undermines the rigid rules of the English language. As derek beaulieu and Gregory Betts emphasize, bissett "openly proposes and navigates an aesthetic conditioned by failure, by [his] inability to determine or close meaning" (115), while briefly alluding to bissett's sexuality as being part of this practice (115). This connection between bissett's aesthetics and his sexuality needs to be further explored. bissett wrote numerous gay poems that do not reproduce linguistic and social norms that coerce queer bodies. For instance, bissett's *Sailor* (1977) includes his poem "caut in yet anothr fixd fuck," which discusses the gay speaker's experience with syphilis. The speaker shares with the reader,

th siphalis begins to affect my
eyesite if not my vishyun now
at leest i know whats wrong
with me undetectid siphalis fr
six months ... (1-5)

As this passage suggests, bissett's work does not reproduce a prescriptive and normative discourses that pathologize homosexuality. Rather, the poem vocalizes the gay speaker's experience with syphilis as he struggles through its effects and seeks treatment. Moreover, the poem's phonetic spelling unconventionally conveys a gay man's experience that does not villainize him. For instance, the speaker asks, "wondr if siphalis is sum kind / uv punishment for what did I dew" (24-25) which suggests a guilty conscience on the part of the poem's speaker, not too unfamiliar for gay people at the time who were stigmatized. However, the poem does not reproduce shame because, as the speaker asserts, "flash its dumb to think that way / fukan dumb ..." (26-27). Through a phonetic

writing practice restores language's potential, bissett challenges a homophobic symbolic order that coerces bodies through normative institutions, such as prescriptive grammar.

While I have highlighted the work of gay male poets so far, I turn here to the radical work completed by lesbian poets. Judy Grahn of Oakland, California published her work *Edward the Dyke* in 1971 with the Bay Area's the Women's Press Collective. Grahn's poetry collection troubles the stigma of lesbian sexuality and embraces female homoeroticism. As an extension to her work as a member of the Gay Women's Liberation Group in Oakland, which focused on lesbian cultural production, Grahn's collection is an intermedia project that paratextually combines poems with hand drawn images that depict "women-loving-women" ("A History of Lesbianism" 3). Specifically, the collection examines the pathologization of lesbians and heterosexism directed at women, while tracing the origins of female homoeroticism. As Linda Garber indicates, the work was intended to provoke lesbian readers to reclaim the word dyke, as "[i]t was not a straight world [Grahn] was forcing to say the word *dyke*, it was the lesbian community" (37). That is, Grahn was focused on developing a lesbian readership and encouraging her readers to reclaim the word "*dyke*." I extend Garber's point by considering Grahn's indebtedness to and admiration of earlier lesbian writers, such as Gertrude Stein, who may not have been able to assertively claim their identity and how her work continues a lesbian lineage of writing.¹² The poem "A History of Lesbianism," for instance, arguably deploys some of Stein's literary from her work *Tender Buttons*. In the poem, the speaker repeats the phrase "women-loving-women" and accompanies the text with an image of women embracing each other.¹³ This repetition emulates Stein's poetic strategy in *Tender Buttons* in which her poem

¹² Grahn was an avid reader of Stein's work. As Grahn indicates in *Really Reading Gertrude Stein*, "I have considered her my mentor for more than thirty years and I still can not always read an entire book at a time. Every single person I know finds her difficult. At the same time I have gotten so much from her, more than from anyone, and I believe we need her philosophy more than ever" (3-4).

¹³ The abstract image printed on a pink sheet, which represents the colour of the homosexual pink triangle, portrays women embracing each other and caring for each other, as one woman rests her hand on another sitting woman's shoulder.

“Roastbeef” repeats the word “bone” to produce excess and uncover its potential meanings and linguistic functions. Embracing and responding to Stein’s strategies, Grahm breaks down the meaning of “women-loving-women” to explore their origins, lived experiences, sexual practices, and oppression as well as create a new meaning for the concept of lesbianism. This tactic is considerably radical in 1971 because, as Grahm indicates, “[i]n concert with the courts, as late as the 1960’s American publishers demanded that all stories with Lesbian content have sad endings, preferably suicide or at least a renouncing of ‘the life’ and marriage to a man” (*Really Reading* 129). Grahm challenges this publishing agenda with the poem “A History of Lesbianism” by engaging with Stein’s aesthetic strategy and embracing the importance of “women-loving-women.”

Similarly, Black Panther, lesbian rights activist, and San Francisco poet Pat Parker’s *Pit Stop* (1973), which was also published by the Women’s Press Collective, promotes the importance of love between women. For instance, the lyrical poem “For Wyllice” depicts a female speaker performing cunnilingus on her female lover. As the speaker states:

When i make love to you
i try
with each stroke of my tongue
to say i love you
to tease i love you
to hammer i love you
to melt i love you. (1-7)

In this textual space, the speaker emphasizes the act of cunnilingus instead of placing it at the periphery, and it reduces the authority of the lyrical voice by using a lowercase “i.” While the lyrical

voice has traditionally emphasized a masculinist perspective,¹⁴ the speaker in “For Wyllice” does not reproduce this authority. Instead, it creates a space in which the speaker, her lover, and the reader occupy a more equal terrain. The “tongue” symbolizes the speaker’s physical tongue being placed on her lover’s body and the speaker’s organ used to voice the poem. In this way, the tongue stimulates her female lover and her reader by simultaneously “mak[ing] love to” them. Parker’s “For Wyllice” forms a poetics of sexual disgust because its radical expression of sexuality destabilizes the androcentric lyrical voice and builds a radical relationship between the female speaker, her lover, and potentially a queer reader. That is, by making visible two female lovers’ sexual experiences and symbolically making love to its reader, the poem “corrupts” heteronormative aesthetics and challenges a homophobic society’s values.

What may be deemed disgusting by one group, may produce a sense of affinity with another group. Specifically, radical queer poetry may dialectically produce a response of disgust in a homophobic reader and potentially galvanize queer readers to feel an affinity with the poem and to question tactics that have been deployed to construct them as disgusting. While disgust for non-normative forms of sexuality was socially cultivated via ideological state apparatuses, a poetics of sexual disgust did not shy away from including obscene and disgusting content that threatened the stability of a homophobic symbolic order. As antiqueer and homophobic values shifted over time, some poems became less disgusting or obscene and new works became targets of legal or social persecution. For example, Vancouver’s Little Sister’s bookstore faced legal troubles between 1986-1990 when the Canadian government detained books deemed obscene under the Customs Act and the Customs Tariff Act for being circulated across the U.S. border (Fuller and Blackley 15). Although this poetics and its readers’ responses vary in many ways, as some reading publics may

¹⁴ To be fair, earlier modernists such as Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot critiqued and rejected the lyrical voice (Beach 49).

find some poems more disgusting than others, a scale of disgust is counterintuitive to examining this poetics. Rather, it is more productive to recognize that its content was perceived as threatening by legal structures at first and a conservative public later on because of its potential to corrupt readers, even those that would already identify with its discourses (T. Warner 99). Small presses publishing a poetics of sexual disgust faced backlash from the government and a conservative public because they threatened a homophobic symbolic order.

While small presses challenged antiequeer and homophobic values, the government, which was supported by a conservative segment of the public, responded to this cultural activism by censoring the presses' publications. For example, in the summer of 1957, City Lights was charged for obscenity for publishing and circulating Ginsberg's *Howl, and Other Poems* across national borders. This legal backlash became the focus of a long trial tackling issues of free speech and oppressive sexual socio-legal norms. In its first printing in 1956, *Howl*, which was sold primarily in the City Lights bookstore, received limited public attention. However, its second printing in 1957 became the subject of an obscenity trial as American customs officers seized the texts "on March 24, 1957, under section 305, subsection 3, of the Tariff Act of 1930" (Black 47). While Ferlinghetti fought the charges, the local San Francisco police further pursued them to control subversive cultural activists' activities in San Francisco's North Beach area. The primary concern of the obscenity trial was the possibility that Ginsberg's work might inspire a sexual response to the works, and thus further propagate the non-normative sexual practices that it portrayed. This fear led conservative critics to portray *Howl* as a work that could possibly contribute to obscene sexual practices that do not adhere to respectable understandings of sexuality (48). While the trial eventually ended in favour of Ginsberg and City Lights, it did so under the guise of literary merit. Ginsberg's and City Lights's win established a "precedent" (61) "that helped extend first amendment protection to speech dealing with sex or drug use" (62); however, it needed to be deemed acceptable by a homophobic socio-legal

system, which was done to mitigate its threat to a homophobic society. Yet, *Howl*'s circulation and the issues that it encountered in the general public bespeak the threat that City Lights presented to homophobic social structures, the larger revolutionary potential that its published aesthetic held, and the legal system's need to mitigate its galvanizing force. Small presses publishing queer content deemed pornographic, disgusting, or obscene, refused to accept these exclusions of access and became incredibly important to creating powerful counter-discourses capable of generating alternate social formations.

2.4 Final Thoughts

As I have shown, North America's west coast became a hotbed for queer artists, such as bissett, Blaser, Ginsberg, Grahn, Parker, and Spicer, who were part of a growing movement of artists contributing to the advancement of lesbian and gay liberation discourses. bissett, Blaser, Ginsberg, Grahn, Parker, and Spicer produced works that formed a poetics of sexual disgust that included protests of homophobia, new understandings of queer sexual desires and practices, and challenges to power structures that pathologize and delegitimize their ways of being. The production of this poetics was made possible predominantly by queer-friendly small-press collectives that generated spaces grounded in anti-institutional values and opposed homophobic backlash. In other words, small presses created the material conditions to promote anti-capitalist and anti-homophobic values and offered marginalized people a social space to occupy. However, as I pointed out, they did not entirely erase labour or gender hierarchies. Alternatively, lesbians and women of colour carved spaces of their own to address their own experiences as women affected by gender relations within gay liberation organizations. Ultimately, small presses publishing works that form a poetics of sexual disgust on the west coast contributed to the generation and production of physical, imagined, and social spaces for queer people not widely available at the time. In the following chapters, I will further theorize how small presses were generative and productive spaces by closely examining

blewointment press's and Press Gang Publishers' contributions to lesbian and gay liberation movements in Vancouver.

Chapter 3: blewointment press and Queer Cultural Activism (1962-1983)

writing is what yu write. You need to print it yerself to
make its freedom. Yu cin do anything yu want or feel like
with word.

th rules are there to oppress yu. rules watch
yu in a lot of ways, check yr expression. they are not yur
pomes that yu ordr ther expression to be what is saleable

or what theyul dew to yu stay close to th printing
machines. yu as writrs are responsible to the message that
flows thru yu.

-- bill bissett, *RUSH*

3.1 Background

Between 1962¹⁵ and 1983, blewointment press published almost any writer to “let everyone in” (bissett *blewointment*) and made room for artists who were not being published elsewhere. The press published over one hundred writers in seventeen magazine issues, including seven special issues, and one hundred and four monographs. As Gregory Betts indicates, *blewointment* magazine published an eclectic collage of artists and “famously, *outrageously*, did not reject any piece of work submitted. In stark contrast to other literary ventures (you know, normal, modernist literary ventures), it took a stand against authority and blew the publishing gates wide open” (*In Search of Blew* 3). Writers who form this extensive list of contributors include renowned Canadian writers such as Margaret Atwood, Earle Birney, George Bowering, Leonard Cohen, Pat Lowther, John

¹⁵Unlike most histories of the press, which situate 1963 as the starting year of the press, bill bissett identifies fall 1962 as blewointment’s official start date (bissett “blewointment”).

Newlove, bp Nichol, Al Purdy, and Raymond Souster. Yet, more interestingly for this dissertation's purposes, the list of *blewointment* press's contributors includes several gay and feminist poets, such as Bertrand Lachance, Martina Clinton, Judith Copithorne, Maxine Gadd, Gwen Hauser, Daniel David Moses, Alan Rosen, and Ken West. This list is not exhaustive, but, as it shows, the press published numerous marginalized and radical writers. Their works challenged the status quo of aesthetic and sexual norms and shared an affinity with ongoing gay and lesbian liberation discourses in Vancouver. For instance, Lachance's *Tes Rivières T'attendent* (1971) is a collection of concrete gay poems that repeats the colloquial word for semen (i.e. "cum") multiple times. In the poem, "cum" symbolizes the climactic point of jouissance between gay lovers and is materialized through an explosion of abject writing on the page that refuses to be repressed by a homophobic symbolic order. Similarly, in ongoing gay liberation movements at the time, activists sought to proudly make radical understandings of sexuality visible by "rejecting the dominant social attitudes" (T. Warner 84) towards homosexuality. Lachance's poem marks the space of the page with gay sexuality and, like ongoing social justice efforts, proudly rejects dominant social attitudes that closet homosexuality. As Lachance's *Tes Rivières T'attendent* demonstrates, *blewointment* press published materials that merged radical aesthetic forms and content that shared an affinity with the values of ongoing gay liberation organizations. To what extent did *blewointment* press's cultural activism intersect with and influence Vancouver's gay liberation movements?

To date, very little scholarship considers the contributions of *blewointment* press or *blewointment* magazine and no studies examine their relationship to queer cultural production. Without mentioning any of the homosexual relationships formed within the collective, Donald M. Hunter indicates that family and community were essential to the development of *blewointment* magazine (77, 99). Similarly, Betts emphasizes bissett's focus on developing a radical community of artists through the magazine by arguing, "[h]e published hippies, feminists, red-power advocates,

socialists, communists, environmentalists, and anyone else who wanted to be heard in that dynamic community” (8), but he does not mention the numerous gay and lesbian poets published by the magazine, including Stan Persky and Gwen Hauser. However, research examining bissett’s sexuality and creative practices provides an entry point for this chapter. Steve McCaffery’s early essay on bissett’s work “bill bissett: A Writing Outside Writing” (1978) as well as derek beaulieu and Betts’s more recent afterword to the new edition of bissett’s *RUSH: what fuckan theory* (2012) and Carl Peters’ *Textual Vishyuns* (2011) emphasize the libidinal element of bissett’s poetry (McCaffery 94), the role of sexuality in bissett’s practices (beaulieu and Betts 116), and the sexual components of his paintings (Peters 39-40). McCaffery argues that bissett’s writing features “libidinal motions, arrestments and intensities [that] are forces oppositionally related to the signifying graphism of writing” (94). McCaffery’s study remains relevant to a study of bissett’s work because it demonstrates how the poet-editor created a language that allowed fluidity within sexuality. Similarly, beaulieu and Betts stress the importance of bissett’s sexuality to his embodied aesthetic practice (116). In contrast, while he claims that, “[b]y engaging and questioning moral codes, bissett’s whole art is the assemblage of ... erotic sites” (39), Peters extensively critiques scholarship that focuses on the sexual component of bissett’s work. Peters claims that the scholarly tradition of focusing on this “*single aspect of bisset’s work as the most significant aspect of bissett’s work ...* has resulted in a history of reductive critical readings of bissett’s poetry, which neglects many of its other significant critical issues, and ignores the technical ... relationship between bissett’s writing and his visual art” (13, emphasis in original). In response to Peters’s apt critique about the historically “reductive” analysis of bissett’s poetry, I suggest that it is noteworthy that previous scholars do not examine the relationship between bissett’s sexuality, cultural work, and contributions to ongoing gay movements. For instance, the poet edited and published several gay poets’ works during blewointment’s twenty-year span, which overlaps with the growth of gay liberation

movements in Vancouver. My chapter addresses this gap by comprehensively examining the social stakes of bissett's "erotic sites," including his poetry, the formation of the blewointment community, and his editorial practice, and how these sites intersected with the development of the gay liberation movement in Vancouver.

Larger queer historiographical studies in Canada hint at blewointment press's contributions to the nation's gay history. Don McLeod and John Barton mention the press's contributions to gay Canadian publishing in *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada: A Selected Chronology 1976-1981* and *Seminal: The Anthology of Canada's Gay Male Poets*, respectively. McLeod indicates that the publication of bissett's *th wind up tongue* in 1976, for instance, marks an important moment in the development of gay liberation movements (4). Similarly, Barton mentions that "bissett's legendary blewointmentpress, established in Vancouver in the 1960s, was not exclusively gay in its mandate, but bissett did publish several gay poets, including himself and ... Lachance" (21). From a historiographical perspective, McLeod's and Barton's studies provide an initial glimpse into the greater importance of blewointment press to Canada's gay liberation movements and motivate this study's aim of retracing the press's place within Vancouver's queer history. Here I build on studies that examine bissett and blewointment press, which have separately emphasized that bissett's sexuality was important to his work and that blewointment press published gay books, by analyzing blewointment's larger socio-literary contributions to gay liberation social justice initiatives. In joining these two fields of study, this chapter establishes a new terrain of scholarship examining the socio-literary importance of blewointment press's gay publications to Vancouver's gay liberation history.

In Chapter 2, I demonstrated that small presses on North America's West Coast were instrumental to the generation and production of radical spaces for queer people during the second half of the twentieth century. In this chapter, I elaborate upon these findings by examining

blewointment press's intersection with gay liberation movements. First, I will examine the material conditions grounding the small press, including the social relationships between the collective's constituents, including gay men such as bissett, Lachance, Rosen, and West, as well as feminist women, such as Clinton, Copithorne, and Gadd. As one member of the collective remembers, the small press represented a communal project between bissett and the people involved in the project, who contributed to the publication of underrepresented voices (Ben).¹⁶ Second, I will analyze the press's printed objects, such as its magazines, special issues, and monographs to demonstrate how they form a poetics of sexual disgust that intersects with liberation discourses in Vancouver from the same period. Over fifty publications featured transgressive content that challenged sexual norms, explored non-normative relationships, discussed sexual oppression, and made homosexuality visible. Moreover, I will determine how some of these objects' discourses intersected with counter-discourses stemming from other social movements, such as the women's movement, and Québécois and First Nations sovereignty movements. Third, I will evaluate how blewointment's collective used alternative channels to circulate their works to the public, as they sold books door-to-door as well as at local independent bookstores and they shared them at poetry readings throughout Vancouver. Finally, I will examine how the works affected queer and homophobic members of the public to argue that the press facilitated the formation of counterpublics by positively affecting queer readers, while causing vehement responses from homophobic readers. This chapter does not argue that bissett was a gay icon or situate blewointment press as a purely gay publishing organization, indeed that was not its mandate. I argue that, through its cultural activism, blewointment press engendered queer social spaces that included gay men as well as heterosexual and lesbian feminists, produced and circulated queer objects, and generated a counterpublic consisting of queer and allied readers willing

¹⁶ Ben's name has been changed to protect his anonymity. As I explained on pages 13-14 of this dissertation, with the help of Baby Name Voyager, I chose a pseudonym with the same first letter of the person's real name that was common at the time that the interviewee was born.

to support the liberation of lesbian and gay people. By joining my analysis of *blewointment's* aesthetics, which were led by bissett, with my evaluation of the press's tangible contributions to gay communities, my chapter bridges the gap between bissett's aesthetic practices and his gay cultural activism thereby moving beyond previous scholarship's focus on a "*single aspect*" of the poet's aesthetic. Thus, much as it was not a gay press, this chapter demonstrates that *blewointment's* cultural activism played a vital role in the growth of gay liberation movements in Vancouver from 1962-1983.

3.2 Bound by Being Out (of Line): *blewointment* as a Queer Social Nexus

Though it was a predominantly white press,¹⁷ *blewointment* press's social space was grounded in the shared experiences of a group of socially marginalized artists, including gay men and feminist women. At the time, dominant social norms, which closeted homosexuals because their sexuality was deemed abnormal, and positioned women as subordinate members of society (Sedgwick 11; Bourdieu 12), were reflected within modernist collectives in spite of gay men as well as heterosexual and lesbian women's contributions to modernist literature (Higgins 80-81; Rudy and Butling 55-56; Irvine 7; Voyce 25). However, members of *blewointment* press generated an alternate social space of modernist cultural production grounded in the intimate relations between gay contributors and supportive relationships between men and women (Ben; bissett "biographee"). Specifically, at *blewointment* press, members were joined by what Sara Ahmed calls "failed orientation[s]" (91) that were grounded in "shared struggles, common grounds, and mutual aspirations, as bonds that are created through the lived experiences of being 'off line' and 'out of line' ... [which] affects other things that [they] do" (103). In this section, I engage with Ahmed's theoretical approach to queer people's relationships with social spaces to examine *blewointment*

¹⁷ *blewointment* press published the work of one First Nations writer (i.e. Daniel David Moses); however, the collective was solely composed of white artists.

press's queer socio-cultural conditions, which I argue challenged dominant social norms in modernist collectives at the time. As I suggest below, blewointment press functioned as a nexus of failed social orientations that joined gay men and feminist women, who would have been excluded from heteronormative literary collectives.

blewointment press was informed by bissett's queer perspectives and life experiences. As a gay man and activist, bissett did not reproduce heterosexual standards in his daily life. As Ben, a member of the collective, remembered, bissett was marginalized within a heteronormative society because he never identified as heterosexual, was committed to left wing social causes, and was perceived as a threat to the status quo by a conservative public. For instance, bissett left Nova Scotia to move to Vancouver with his boyfriend in 1958, and then lived with his girlfriend Martina Clinton between 1961 and 1967; they had a child together. Subsequently, he began to identify as the person living with Lachance in Northern BC from 1967 until 1972 and as a gay person living with Rosen in Vancouver until 1979. bissett never identified as heterosexual, and predominantly lived a covert sexual life until he lived with Rosen. Although he was not explicitly involved with any of the major gay liberation organizations in Vancouver, he did provide monetary support to local gay liberation causes and *The Body Politic's* legal defence in 1977 (Ben).¹⁸ In addition, he supported social justice initiatives in Vancouver by participating in "a few pro-abortion walks, a lot of peace marches. and when gay pride started, [he] was always in gay pride parades" (Ben). However, for his role in trafficking drugs, he was jailed in 1969, was continuously surveilled afterwards, and forced to live a predominantly covert private life during the 1970s (Ben). Similarly, audience members physically and verbally attacked bissett for not adhering to normal gender and sexual performances during a poetry reading in Vancouver's Cellar Jazz (Mount). As a queer man and survivor of RCMP

¹⁸ The *Body Politic* was one of Canada's first major gay publications that ran between 1971 and 1987 and was circulated across Canada.

surveillance and homophobic public violence, bissett was “out of line” (Ahmed 109). Yet this amalgamation of experiences intersected with his support for gay liberation activism and cultural work because, as Ben attests, for bissett “blewointment was the constant.” Arguably then, bissett’s experiences as a queer man inflected his cultural work with the press, resulting in the non-normative direction of the press that deviated from other literary collectives at the time.

Unlike masculinist literary collectives, blewointment press functioned as a queer space of intimacy for a group of gay artists with mutual struggles. Specifically, several contributors of blewointment press, including Lachance, Rosen, and West, were gay. As discussed in Chapter 2, in the 1960s-1970s, this social space would have been remarkable because of Canada’s ongoing war on gay people and the pre-existing homophobia within Canada’s earlier little magazine collectives. In Canada’s public spaces, gay people struggled to find spaces of their own because they were surveilled, regulated, and experienced physical violence (Kinsman and Gentile 4, 48). Similarly, gay men struggled to find a place of their own within homophobic modernist collectives. For instance, in an editorial published in Montreal’s *First Statement* in 1943, John Sutherland outed Patrick Anderson. Contrary to Sutherland’s homophobic critique, bissett collaborated with gay artists while being romantically and sexually involved with, and living with, them. As Ben indicates, bissett “was working with Bertrand Lachance and ... lived together as well and ... kept printing blewointment books as well; and Ken West; [bissett] was then living with Allan Rosen whose name then was Michael Rosen and ... printed a lot of books together as well.” Though the press’s collective included heterosexual collaborators such as Clinton, Copithorne, Lance Farrell, and Gadd, Ben draws a connection between bissett’s intimate male relationships and the labour of producing books. As Ahmed argues elsewhere, when you are queer, it “affects other things that you do” (103). In the case of blewointment, through their shared struggles as non-normative members of society that failed to reproduce heteronormative standards and their desire to produce radical objects, the press’s gay

collaborators generated a queer social space of intimacy not widely available within earlier modernist collectives and within the larger public sphere at the time.

While gay men were essential to the formation of *blewointment* press's collective, heterosexual and lesbian women also played an influential role. Unlike gay political organizations at the time, which were dominated by gay men and tended to marginalize women through the latter group's exclusion and underrepresentation (T. Warner 174), *blewointment* was a social nexus in which queer poets and feminists met and valorized each other's perspectives. The collective was composed of heterosexual-feminists such as Gadd and Copithorne as well as lesbian feminist Hauser. According to Steve, a reader of the press's publications, who knew the feminist poet at the time, Gadd was "a very outspoken woman" and "some of [her feminist] views were very extraordinary."¹⁹ Copithorne was actively involved in the women's movement by participating in women's caucus meetings and benefit readings (Ben). Lesbian-feminist Hauser was involved with the women's movement and supported lesbian liberation efforts. Hauser believed that women needed to value themselves as "highly" as they valued their relationships with men, and that "[l]esbianism, as a form of communism, [was] also revolutionary and even more so because it [could] lead to an exploration of new roles and new sexuality not possible within traditional hierarchic and, at [that moment], male-dominated society" ("Solidarity with Lesbians"). Beyond their inclusion in the collective, correspondence between Hauser and bissett demonstrates that the collective held an ongoing dialogue about the oppression of queer people and people of colour in the city and the violence that these groups experienced (Hauser "Letter to bill bissett"). The dialogue between Hauser and bissett not only shows that the latter critiqued the violence against these people living in Vancouver but also suggests that gay men and lesbian women at *blewointment* shared

¹⁹ Steve's name has been changed to protect his anonymity. As I explained on pages 13-14 of this dissertation, with the help of Baby Name Voyager, I chose a pseudonym with the same first letter of the person's real name that was common at the time that the interviewee was born.

perspectives about ongoing social issues in Vancouver. Moreover, the dialogue highlights how gay men as well as heterosexual and lesbian feminists within the collective were connected through their shared concerns.

In addition to holding rich dialogue with women within the collective, male contributors have acknowledged women's contributions to the press. While scholars refer to these women as the "now-forgotten women writers" (Mount), bissett has historically acknowledged female members of the collective by name and undone their erasure. For instance, in an early biography, bissett identifies Martina Clinton as a co-founder of the press and acknowledges her importance to the advancement of the collective's aesthetic objectives ("biographee"). The valorization of women's labour and contributions was uncommon at the time. For instance, Pauline Butling argues that *Tish*, an early counterpoint of *blewointment* magazine, was dominated by men during its first phase, while erasing the contributions of women such as Daphne Buckle (now Marlatt) and Gladys (now Maria) Hindmarch (Butling 55-57). Similarly, in an undated letter to a female member of Vancouver's literary community, a male artist critiqued the presence and behaviour of female poets at women's caucus meetings and gloated that he was able to get rid of them (Fawcett "Letter to Gladys Hindmarch"). More recently, collective members claim that bissett continues to believe that these women were essential to *blewointment* press's cultural objectives (Ben; Bernard). In short, valorizing women's contributions has been part of bissett's ethos throughout *blewointment* press and beyond the press's run. Consequently, unlike masculinist artistic collectives and political organizations at the time, *blewointment* press was a common ground for queer artists, who formed intimate bonds, discussed gay and radical feminist perspectives, and valued equitable labour between men and women.

3.3 Pushing the Envelope: Remaking Homosexuality Through a Poetics of Sexual Disgust

As an outgrowth of this collective's values and discussions, *blewointment* press was a ripe socio-cultural space for promoting radical dialogue about social issues affecting marginalized people in Vancouver, especially gay men and women, as it sought to "let everyone in" (Ben) and "publish previously unpublished writers" (Ben). Many of the press's publications formed a feminist poetics that critiqued sexism, a poetics of reclamation that challenged settler-colonialism, an environmentalist poetics that examined the exploitation of the environment for personal gain, and a queer poetics that critiqued homophobia, thereby producing a rigorous polyvocal dialogue that highlighted affinities and differences between the contributors' perspectives and ideals. More importantly, for the purposes of this dissertation, the press published works that intersected with gay and lesbian liberation discourses. During this period, Vancouver also saw the publication and circulation of radical gay discourses that developed knowledge about homosexuality (*ASK Newsletter*), merged poetics and sexuality (*Bed*), reported on the gay bar scene (*Your Thing*), and circulated resources to support queer people (newsletters by political organizations such as GATE, Gay Liberation Front, and Gay Tide). Along similar lines, *blewointment* press created knowledge about homosexuality (Michael Coutts's *March67*; bissett's *Sailor*; Lachance's *Tes Rivières T'attendent*), called for support for oppressed homosexual poets (*blewointment* magazine), identified and challenged some of the issues within the city's gay community and countercultural community (Stan Persky's "My Heart Continues Beating"; Hauser's "What Did the Underground Ever Do For Women"), and challenged the settler-colonialism of First Nations people in Canada (Daniel David Moses's *Delicate Bodies*). Returning to the concept of a "poetics of sexual disgust," which I theorize at length in Chapter 2, I analyze how *blewointment* press's works form a poetics of sexual disgust by transforming modernist aesthetic practices and exploring transgressive sexual ideas. Specifically, I return to Sianne Ngai's theorization of "disgust" (339) as an aesthetic and affective tool to

“diagnose” (353) “social powerlessness” (353) and to Judith Butler’s concept of “citationality” (16) as a performative act that can remake meanings of homosexuality (137) to analyze how *blewointment* press’s works transform modernist aesthetics (e.g., imagist poetry) and redeploy homophobic disgust to challenge anti-queer values. While members of the press perceived Vancouver as a conservative and homophobic place (Hauser “Letter to bill”), I contend that *blewointment* press published works that challenged dominant understandings of homosexuality at the time.

blewointment magazine volume nine number two, published in 1967, shaped an alternative consciousness about homosexuality by galvanizing readers to support contributor d.a. levy, who was criminalized for publishing homosexual content. Modernist little magazines were an important textual milieu for presenting avant-garde aesthetics and ideas that revolutionized the institution of art and life as a whole (Morrison 9-10; Bürger 696). In the case of the *blewointment* collective, *blewointment* magazine offered the collective the opportunity to challenge heteronormative values and to galvanize a gay revolution. *blewointment* volume nine number two includes an editorial by bissett titled “Project Bring Cleveland Into the 20th Century” that encourages its readers to assist the press’s contributor d.a. levy²⁰ in his legal defence against the American government, who accused him of distributing obscene materials to minors in 1966 with his small press Renegade Press. The editorial states, “poet-lama d.a. levy was secretly indicted by the cuyahoga county gestapo in November last year on charges of distributing 'obscene' literature” (bissett “Project Bring Cleveland”). As I outlined in Chapter 2, the war on queers was also waged by the American government. As Ben retrospectively stated in an interview with me, bissett felt an affinity with levy’s experiences because they “were good friends and would publish each other a lot and he was

²⁰ d.a. levy published two books with *blewointment* press: *Zen Concrete* (1968) and *Red Lady* (1970).

under such torment by the power people in Cleveland. He was being accused of writing pornographic poetry, treason, and sedition, and his poetry was very innocent and very revolutionary in its innocence” (Ben). By explicitly pointing to this homophobic censorship and policing, the editorial makes the criminalization of gay people and the transnational nature of the problem visible. It also demonstrates a shared sense of solidarity between *blewointment* press’s collective and the American poet because it encourages readers to purchase an anthology of his radical poetry and assures that “any & all co-operation, ideas etc. on this will be greatly appreciated...direct yr correspondence, yr body, yr mEYEnd to ... d.a. levy's address” (bissett “Project Bring Cleveland”). While the editorial is not necessarily a poem, the underpinnings of the collective’s cultural activism highlights the importance of publishing and supporting gay poets who produce radical sexual discourses. In short, the editorial contributes to the reproduction of a poetics of sexual disgust by demonstrating the oppression experienced by levy and by supporting him. Thus, *blewointment* magazine played an integral role in supporting early gay liberation movements in North America.

blewointment magazine also produced a queer, polyvocal textual space by combining gay poems with radical feminist sexual poetry and presenting avant-gardist aesthetics and ideas that challenge homophobic aesthetic standards.²¹ Specifically, *blewointment*’s special issue *what isint tantrik speshul* (1973) published gay poet Stan Persky’s Imagist poem “My heart continues beating.” The poem draws connections to Vancouver’s gay bar scene by *presenting an image* of the homophobic social conditions in Vancouver, while recognizing the limitations of creating a singular image of the lived experiences of gay men. For instance, the poem portrays the speaker chasing after a lover he has “see[n] for one frame / as a harlequin” (2-3). Although the framing of the lover as a

²¹ The special issue includes an image poem by Earle Birney of a naked hung man who has ejaculated due to auto-asphyxiation (34) and a poem about gay sex by Lachance (59).

harlequin figure presents him as a one-dimensional campy figure, the speaker undermines this image by stating,

... The clubs
where I look for you are permitted by the state apparatus
to exist inside (and therefore outside) a political situation
where people use each other the way capitalism has taught us
everything is commodity. (5-9)

By seeking his gay lover in a space that has been constructed by “the state apparatus,” the gay speaker participates in the reproduction of social structures that enable him to occupy some private spaces, while needing to live a covert life. Pierre Elliott Trudeau claimed in 1969 that “the state has no business in the bedrooms of the nation” (qtd. in Stevens 1), which led to policy changes that decriminalized homosexuality; however, the public/private dichotomy remained. This poem is arguably a critique of the privatization of homosexuality, which reflects and extends Persky’s gay liberation politics as a member of GATE that sought to make homosexuality a public identity (Persky Personal interview). By presenting a more complicated image of homosexual experiences at the time, the speaker demonstrates that the gay bar scene is a continuation of the privatization of homosexuality that closets queer sexualities and regulates homosexuals’ bodies through a capitalist framework.

what isint tantrik speshul also includes radical feminist poetry that critiques androcentric values embedded within countercultures.²² In Gwen Hauser’s poem “What Did the Underground Ever Do For Women,” for instance, the speaker questions the value of countercultures (i.e. “underground”) to the women’s movement. Like the work of earlier modernists, such as Mina Loy’s “Feminist Manifesto,” which borrows aesthetic strategies from the suffragist movement by playing

²² See also Dorothy Livesay’s “Survival” (11-12).

with advertising typography to convey radical feminist ideas, Hauser's poem shares affinities with ongoing concerns and strategies of the women's movement. Key phrases in Loy's poem like "Is that all you want?" (14) encourage women to question their desire to be equal to men and ask them to find empowerment within themselves. Similarly, Hauser's poem underlines the question "What Did The Underground Ever Do For Women?" (1) to encourage her female readers to question the value of male-dominated countercultures to women's movements. The poem exposes the androcentric social conditions structuring this counterpublic sphere to demonstrate a disjunction between women's liberation values and a reaffirmation of women's oppression. For instance, the speaker suggests in response to the poem's larger question that the underground has

allow[ed] you to sleep
with some handsome young stud
and wash his dishes
to the yippee national anthem ... (3-6)

The speaker also protests that women have also been given the opportunity to

live in a commune
with a culture hero
and clean his shit
till the withering of the state ... (7-10)

Although the counterculture masks itself as a space that "allows" women to have agency, this agency is structured around their tacit consent in accepting responsibility for domestic tasks, such as washing dishes and "clean[ing] his shit." Yet, the poem suggests that if a woman becomes aware of these oppressive social structures, she will find the real underground amongst other women, as the speaker asserts, "Euridyce [sic] knew --- / it drove her underground" (13-14). By naming Eurydice and not the men within the counterculture, the poem personalizes the experience of a woman within

the women's movement who can become a model for the female reader. The feminist poem deploys earlier feminist, modernist strategies and intersects with the 1970s women's movement to challenge the sexual oppression of women and emphasize the importance of women's collectives. Thus, *what isint tantrik speshul* develops a polyvocal space that facilitates the formation of affinities between gay liberation and women's movement concerns at the beginning of the 1970s.

A few years before the publication of *what isint tantrik speshul*, the collective developed the *blewointment* project into a small press that published radical gay books. For instance, published in 1967, Michael Coutts's *March67* produces homophilic discourses, while employing a minimalist aesthetic to explore the criminalized and taboo subject of homosexuality. As one of *blewointment* press's first monographs containing gay content, the work intersected with projects from homophilic organizations in Vancouver, which sought to create knowledge about and a better understanding of non-normative forms of sexuality (T. Warner 59). For instance, the poem "To you:" shows the male speaker's reflections as he wonders if his love for a man named Sam is a "fatal sort of / love" (7-8). This description of homosexuality as possibly "fatal" echoes conservative and oppressive understandings of homosexuality at the time that describe it as a sin (T. Warner 61). To undo this ideology, the speaker suggests that his love for Sam is innocent by describing how his lover's

child eyes
reached in
to
me. (20-23)

Yet, the gender identity of the lover is not revealed until the third page of the poem. The minimalism of the work enables the speaker to scaffold the reader about his lover's gender, construct his loving experience as a "precious moment" (30), and later subtly hint that he is a male by referring to "his / beauty" (45-46). This scaffolding potentially undermines the reader's expectation about love, while

demonstrating that homosexual love can be as “precious” as heterosexual love. Like homophilic efforts at the time, the poem is focused on showing an alternate perspective about homosexuality that constructs it as a “precious” form of love rather than demonize it as a “fatal” form of love. While the minimalist poetry of *March 67* does not overtly embrace the stigma of homosexuality, it produces an alternate understanding of homosexuality that does not condemn it at a time when homosexuality was a criminal offence.

bissett's collection of melancholic love poems *Pomes for Yoshi* (1971) challenges middle-class, heteronormative, and capitalist understandings of love and loss.²³ In his work on queer art and failure, Jack Halberstam identifies an intimate connection between success in a capitalist society and successful performances of heteronormativity (2). Halberstam argues that, though capitalist and heteronormative success are closely tied in our society, failure to adhere to these values liberates queer people because it fosters new ways of imagining art and love (88). bissett's homoromantic collection of poems, which focuses on a failed relationship and fails to adhere to prescriptive grammatical rules, challenges heteronormative and capitalist understandings of sexuality. Specifically, it adapts literary strategies by earlier modernists such as Gertrude Stein and e.e. cummings, who critiqued normative spelling and punctuation by avoiding punctuation and using phonetic spelling (87 *RUSH*). As bissett theorizes in “a study uv language,” rules such as “correct spelling,” “non/ phonetic” writing, and “punctuashun” form “obscene rules” controlling language. bissett redeploys the word “obscene,” which has been used to construct homosexual content as disgusting, to describe grammar as a disgusting, regulating practice that corrupts people. The poem “whn,” for instance, challenges heteronormative language and understandings of love by producing

²³ This collection of poems details the poet's attempt to work through a breakup with his lover Yoshi by making his homoromantic love and loss visible in the book's textual space.

playful textual shapes and using non-normative spelling to describe the speaker's longing for his lost male lover. As the speaker states,

whn
peopul
ar
together
they shud
be ... (1-5)

However,

love is
not
middul
class
possessyun ... (19-23)

These passages fail to adhere to and reproduce “obscene rules” of grammar and love. First, in the poem, the non-normative spelling and punctuation disrupts the rules of grammar by refusing to become language’s “possessyun,” which creates a fluid discourse that opens up the possibility to consider homoromantic love and loss outside of a capitalist framework. Second, in the first passage, the object of the sentence is missing, suggesting that a relationship cannot be objectified. Instead, it can only “be” and thus exists on its own accord. As a result, the speaker refuses to adhere to conventional understandings of love and destabilizes the possessive lyrical voice, which has been controlled by language and in turn perceives love as an object. That is, instead of reproducing “middul / class” values that perceive love as a form of possession, the speaker releases love from the shackles of capitalism.

Similar to bissett's aesthetic practice, Lachance's poetics disrupt the boundaries of language by producing poems that integrate his stigmatized Québécois and gay identities. By being gay and Québécois during the 1970s, Lachance experienced a precarious life because he likely "encounter[ed] oppression based on language and nationality as well as on sexuality (and often on class)" (Kinsman and Gentile 271). Lachance's bilingual collection *Tes Rivières T'attendent* (1971) deploys similar aesthetic strategies to those found in bissett's poetry (i.e. non-normative spelling and a lack of punctuation) to discuss his gay sexuality. These works also highlight Lachance's identity as a gay Québécois poet by using a joul language to show his homoerotic experiences.²⁴ At the time of this poem's publication, joul was stigmatized because it was socially perceived as a "bad" (Laurendau) French dialect, whose "traits themselves were typical of the speech of the working class and were often considered signs of acculturation" (Laurendau). However, by using joul, Lachance embraced his stigmatized identity and created discourses that revolted against homosexual and nationalist oppression. The poem "é pi lé gnoux ym tremble baby kim tremble," for instance, is a bilingual sexual poem that makes the intense, secret sexual pleasures between a Francophone man and an Anglophone man visible. The speaker states,

é pi lé gnoux ym tremble baby kim tremble
mé gnoux krisse monte plu ho krisse kim tremble
ta langue baby ta langue plu ho plu ho
baby baby yu
keep it cumming baby keep it cumming (1-5)

²⁴ The work of playwright Michel Tremblay published during the same time period provides another example of another gay Québécois writer using joul to embrace the stigma of Québécois working class identity. Coincidentally, his plays were translated in English for the first time by Vancouver's Talonbooks.

In this passage, joul words, such as “ym tremble” (ils me tremblent) and “krisse” (Christ), mark the text and represent the intersection between two stigmatized identities: Québécois working class and gay identities. The use of joul embraces the stigma tied to this language that disrupts prescriptive grammatical rules for French, while creating a bilingual and working-class discourse, and challenges homophobic values by depicting the moment of ejaculation (“cumming”) between two men. Moreover, by including English, the poem highlights affinities between Québécois and Anglophone gay men’s experiences. Since Lachance and bissett were romantically involved and collaborated at the time of this work’s production and publication (Ben; Bernard), as evidenced by the latter’s drawings in *Tes Rivèeres T’attendent*, I suggest that the poem “é pi lé gnoux ym tremble baby kis tremble” reflects their shared experiences as Québécois and Anglo-Canadian poets, while being rooted in Lachance’s experience as a gay Québécois man. Thus, the poem is an example of *blewointment press*’s production of proto-intersectional discourses and demonstrates the shared affinities between gay Francophone and Anglophone poets living in Vancouver.

Yet, some of Lachance’s poetry that critiques the marginalization of lesbians can be read as misogynist. For instance, in *Eyes Open*, Lachance’s poem “th whores of granville street”²⁵ depicts two women, who are married to men, searching for a lesbian social space throughout Vancouver. While gays and lesbians struggled to find a place of their own in Vancouver, lesbians were doubly marginalized because most gay social spaces were reserved for men (Kinsman and Gentile 226). The poem builds a textual space for dialogue between the two women and identifies the tense position that lesbians occupy in the city at the time. For instance, the poem’s speakers attest, “...th guys have got 5 or 6 [gay clubs] / around town we got only one its about time th womens lib do sumthing about it too like its almost / impossible for women to get together nowadays” (121-123). By making these concerns visible, the poem functions as a tool for forming an allyship between the gay male poet and

²⁵ The poem was re-published in *blewointment’s* 1970 *Occupation* issue.

lesbians living in Vancouver. Aesthetically, Lachance's poem embraces the stigma tied to being homosexual in Vancouver by employing non-normative spelling and vulgar language (e.g., words such as “cock” [64] and “fuck” [64]) to challenge notions of indecent language. However, its use of derogatory words such as “bitch” (72) to describe the lesbians does not undermine the discursive patriarchal logos that regulates lesbians’ lives. For instance, in the poem, the speakers unironically refer to other women as “bitch” stating, “... How is she anyway that / old bitch fine dont call her a bitch I mean in front of her she might hear sumtimes ...” (20-21) and “... now listen yu bitch don’t start bitching right away let me at / least take a goddam shower ...” (75-76). Within a patriarchal society, the term “bitch” has connoted an unruly or treacherous woman. In this case, the term is used unironically by the female speakers to refer to other women and reproduces the stereotype that women are unruly and enjoy “complaining.” For this reason, I argue that the poem’s language reproduces a misogynist understanding of women by suggesting that women wilfully deploy the term to denigrate each other the same way that misogynist men may denigrate them. The poem’s discussion of an ongoing social issue affecting lesbians combined with the use of misogynist language demonstrates the potential problems of gay men representing the experiences of lesbian women. Though this work does identify the need for women to have more meeting spaces in the city, the poem enacts symbolic violence by using patriarchal language to describe the two women. Consequently, the poem paradoxically represents androcentric values, while trying to challenge the gendered power dynamic present within the gay community that further marginalizes lesbians.

blewointment press also worked towards building alliances with gay First Nations poets. Specifically, in 1980, blewointment press published *Delicate Bodies* (1980) by Daniel David Moses, a Delaware from the Six Nations of the Grand River. Though First Nations people have experienced settler-colonialism that has erased their ways of being, including their sexualities, since the 1980s, First Nations people living in urban centres have “beg[u]n to articulate their tribal sexualities and

gendered identities in ways that [bring] together the varied threads of their embodied experience around an Indigenous center” (Justice, Rifkin, and Schneider 9). The publication of *Delicate Bodies* intersects with this social movement because, as Moses emphasizes, “thanks to bill bissett’s blewointmentpress, [*Delicate Bodies*] became my first book ... that seemed to represent with some clarity what I guess I’d call my poetic voice and my particular poetics” (*Indigenous Poetics in Canada* 134). The work produces a poetic space marked by what I call an intersectional poetics of sexual disgust that combines First Nations and gay people’s concerns. For instance, in the poem “Late Song,” the speaker indigenizes the poem’s textual space by remembering their sense of place, which “reflect[s] [the] very entrails, its insides, its soul” (Cajete 6) of his locus in Southern Ontario, and by actualizing his longing for another man. The poem draws explicit connections between the speaker’s organic relationship with the land and homoerotic love, as the speaker states that “These two hues” (10), referring to the “barn” (8) and the “river under / the overcast morning” (9-10), are

as rich in my eyes as your body
 did and as warm beneath my fingers’
 tips. Digging among these trees with their sun
 dry mosses, it is the cured wood of old
 love, my love for you I’ve uncovered. (11-15)

The poem draws a metaphorical connection between the locus (reflected by the organic setting) and the homoerotic experience of the speaker (reflected by his uncovered love). This “uncover[ing]” functions as what Mark Rifkin calls a “*felt* threshold between the actual/residual and the potential/emergent” (19) in which the poem’s speaker remembers and makes an Indigenous erotic site possible. To put it another way, as the speaker digs through the natural setting, he “uncover[s]” the beauty of his rural home as well as that of his homoerotic love, he marks the page with his integrated sense of memory and life tied to the place that he embodies as well as his relationship

with another man. *Delicate Bodies* reflects Moses's sense of place as a gay, First Nations man and participates in a burgeoning social movement by First Nations people reclaiming their sense of place and identity during the 1980s.

Near the end of its publication run, as it pushed the boundaries of art to challenge intersecting forms of oppression, *blewointment press* published homoerotic concrete poetry that challenged the boundaries of textual representations of homosexuality. As Tom Warner emphasizes, during the 1980s, one stream of liberation efforts challenged "archaic and sex-negative laws and the repressive actions of the police [while] advocat[ing] for the concept of queer space and queer community values" (301). bissett's *Soul Arrow* (1980) forms a textual space composed of a series of concrete poems that embrace the stigma attached to homosexuality by making homosexuality literally visible through concrete images. bissett's concrete poetry, as Ken Norris explains, borrowed from the 1950s European modernist movement that "emphasizes the poem as picture and works with the potential of written language" (141), yet his concrete poetry "has been classed as 'dirty' concrete" (145) because of its "messiness" (146). Lori Emerson argues that "dirty concrete" moves away from the clean lines of earlier concrete poetry by using the typewriter and the mimeograph machine to create

poems that deliberately court a visual and linguistic nonlinearity and illegibility by putting the typewriter to the test. As [dirty concrete] poets smeared letters with inked ribbons or different carbons while turning and twisting the page, the result was often the imprint of letters that appeared literally dirty or rough around their edges [which became] a viable, more politically activist alternative to clean concrete. (100)

Here I expand Emerson's definition to not only examine the "dirty" method of production deployed by bissett but also the "dirty" sexual content portrayed in some of his concrete poems. For instance, one of the works in *Soul Arrow* is this circular concrete poem depicting a phallus entering a man's mouth.

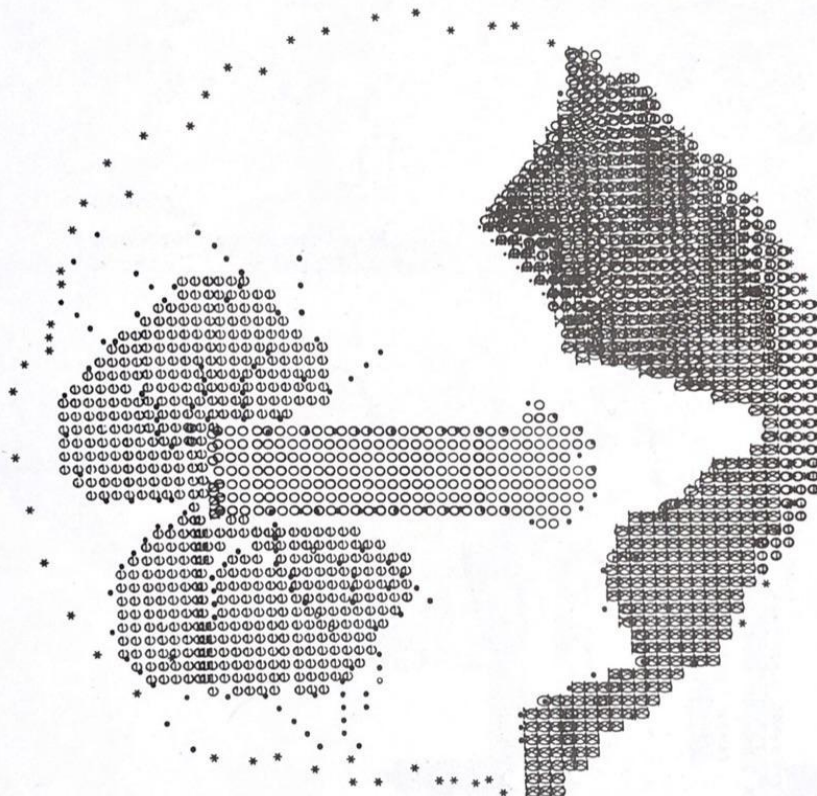


Illustration 1. Concrete Poem from bissett, bill. "Untitled." *Soul Arrow*. blewointment p, 1980, p. 7. Reprinted with permission of bill bissett.

The poem is composed of repeated typewritten letters and asterisks that are superimposed onto each other and includes letters that are typewritten sideways, thus forming what Emerson calls “dirty” poetry. More interestingly for the purposes of this dissertation, when considering the sexual semiotic nature of the poem, the “dirty” concrete poem becomes even more politically charged because the poem literally makes the act of fellatio visible on the page as the typewritten letters create the image of a phallus entering a man’s open mouth. In addition, if we consider the letters of the poem, which consist of the letters “o” and “e,” one can also imagine the aural element of the poem as an allusion to the sounds of sexual pleasure potentially expressed by the men performing the sexual act. bissett’s “dirty” poem serves an activist purpose that goes beyond a challenge to the form of concrete poetry because it makes homosexuality visible. To put it another way, whereas the closet produces strict social structures that hide homosexuality, the superimposition of letters in this poem produces a messy poem that portrays a “dirty” act of fellatio. Like many of the other works that blewointment press published, *Soul Arrow* participates in a poetics of sexual disgust and thwarts the closeting of homosexuality. More broadly, as I have shown, blewointment press’s gay works advanced the development of gay liberation efforts by making queer experiences visible, embracing stigma imposed onto queer people, diagnosing queer oppression, provoking disgust towards a homophobic public’s tactics, and offering possibilities for solidarity between writers and readers.

3.4 Pass th Pome Release th Spirit²⁶: Building Counterpublics Through the Sharing of Poetry

blewointment press’s radical works gained social meaning by being circulated through alternative channels that enabled the collective to generate a queer counterpublic composed of non-conservative members of the public. Members of the blewointment press collective circulated their

²⁶ This heading is a play on the title of bissett’s book *pass th food release th spirit* published by Talonbooks in 1973.

poems by giving many books away, selling them door-to-door, and selling them at independent bookstores that shared the press's values. Through these modes of circulation, the works reached radical reading publics, while offending conservative reading publics, which sought to preserve a heteronormative society. In her work on the formation of a homophobic symbolic order, Judith Butler argues that heteronormative values gain meaning through a process of "citationality and resignification" (21). That is, the patriarchal symbolic order prohibits some gender performances and sexual practices and produces sexed bodies that fit into categories of intelligible or abject matter (16) "where the principle of that materialization is precisely what 'matters' about that body, its very intelligibility" (32). However, abject bodies, which have been repressed, can challenge the heteronormative regulation of queer bodies by citing socially repressed, alternate forms of matter that resignify our society's understandings of sexuality (87). Through the production of radical sexual works, blewointment press created a new body of material to be cited and circulated, which contributed to the formation of queer counterpublics in Vancouver. As Michael Warner argues, "[a] *public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse*" ("Publics and Counterpublics" 420, emphasis in original) as indicated "through an intertextual environment of citation and implication" (421). Within gay counterpublics, "no one is in the closet: the presumptive heterosexuality that constitutes the closet for individuals in ordinary speech is suspended" (424). The material published and circulated by blewointment press suspended the social structures of the closet by forming a gay reading community in Vancouver. Specifically, while some offended members of the conservative public, who refused to accept the press's abject matter but cited it as evidence of the Canada Council funding pornography in the House of Commons (Cox 152-153), one reader named Steve remembered that the press influenced gay members of Vancouver's community, such as Scott Watson and Robin Blaser. The former curated a bill bissett art exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1984 and the latter supported bissett and was part of a reading community called "th

friends of *blewointment*,” who donated money to support the press. In spite of the oppression that gay people endured in the city, *blewointment* press circulated radical works that led to the formation of queer counterpublics in Vancouver.

To circulate its works and sustain its publishing efforts, *blewointment* press employed a do-it-yourself approach. Counter to larger publishers that valued wealth accumulation and used mass market channels to circulate their works, collective member Ben recalled that bissett sold *blewointment*’s books wherever he went and at relatively low costs to sustain the production and dissemination of the press’s publications. Editors like bissett, who also play the role of cultural practitioners, “take on the complementary role of curating and disseminating the work of the literary communities in which they circulate” (Irvine and Kambourelli 7). They also “make this effort without expecting remuneration beyond what is necessary to continue publishing the output from a given literary collectivity” (7). bissett did not sell *blewointment* books to accumulate wealth, but to disseminate the radical ideas that he and the rest of the collective published. As Jamie Reid, member of the first *Tish* editorial board, states, bissett “carried copies [of *blewointment*] with him everywhere, constantly exercising his patient skills as a salesman, explaining to anyone and everyone the importance of making financial contributions necessary to the survival of *blewointment*, and consequently the very survival of the Vancouver arts community” (23). For instance, after being jailed for trafficking marijuana in 1967, bissett sold books door-to-door to pay off a fine and convinced his readers that it was worth investing in his publications (Ben). Because he spent his energy convincing potential readers that his press’s works were socio-culturally valuable, bissett’s door-to-door selling of *blewointment* books represents a do-it-yourself approach that supersedes traditional channels of book selling.

When he did not need to sell them, bissett gave away copies of *blewointment* press books as a community building practice. bissett was known within Vancouver’s literary community for, what

Pauline Butling describes as, his “ubiquitous gifts of books, paintings, magazines” (62). In her analysis of gift economy practices, Butling examines how bissett’s friend bpNichol gave away many copies of his *grOnk* magazine, a Toronto concrete magazine counterpoint to *blewointment*, to “get the news out, get as many poets as possible into print, and reach as many readers as possible” (66). Though she focuses on Nichol, Butling’s analysis can be extended to bissett’s practices. By giving away his books, bissett did not benefit monetarily. Rather, as Ben claims, bissett focused on expanding *blewointment*’s reading community by offering readers access to the works. Though the oppression of homosexual people went hand in hand with the promotion of capitalist values in Canada (Kinsman and Gentile 22), bissett developed an alternative strategy for circulating the press’s works that undermined a capitalist economy’s monetization of cultural objects in the following ways: first, by giving away queer books for free, bissett increased the circulation of works that challenged heteronormative values, and second, by expanding the press’s reading community through “ubiquitous gifts of books,” bissett challenged dominant economic values. However, it is noteworthy that, in spite of developing this alternative method of circulation, bissett increased his social capital in the following ways: first, he established himself as what Steve called “an important person in Vancouver in the 60s” and “one of the cultural leaders of the [city’s] counterculture,” and second, he increased his social network and the readership of his works, thereby growing his counter-cultural social stature within the city. Though he circulated radical books for free, which circumvented distribution channels that have monetized cultural objects, bissett benefited from this practice because it increased his social capital within Vancouver’s literary scene.

Independent small bookstores were also integral to the circulation of *blewointment*’s books. In Vancouver, independent bookstores, such as Duthies Books, MacLeod’s, and Horizon Book Store, were key to the press’s book-selling practices (Mount). Independent bookstores and small press bookstores have a history of supporting each other in Canada and share affinities through their

anti-capitalist values. In his analysis of the relationship between the bookseller and small presses, Cameron Anstee argues that

[b]ooksellers, via their allegiance to the small press, adopt traits of the small press gift economy, despite the seeming incompatibility of those traits with the running of a store. These traits and actions not only take on a different inflection when adopted by the bookseller, they deepen the small press gift economy by introducing new resources and forms of gift exchange via the particular excesses generated by the contributive bookseller. (131-132)

As Anstee demonstrates, the bookseller plays an integral role in the circulation of small presses' books because they does not see the book as a commodity but rather as an opportunity to create "possibilities of sharing, interpersonal connections, and feeling-bonds" (131). Duthies, MacLeod's, and Horizon Book Store supported blewointment press in a similar manner by generating spaces for potential engagement between the press's books and readers. As Eva, a member of the lesbian community, reflected, "I fondly remember going downstairs at Duthie's and finding a giant box that was falling apart filled with blewointment books; it was overflowing."²⁷ This reader's experience of finding an "overflowing" stack of blewointment books in a box at Duthie's demonstrates the importance of the bookstore to the circulation and potential reception of queer texts. Equally, it demonstrates the importance of the bookseller, who has created the possibility of an encounter between the reader and the press's books, thereby creating the material means for generating a readership. By working in allyship with the press and generating opportunities for queer readers to come into contact with the press's works, independent bookstores facilitated the circulation of blewointment's books and enabled the formation of queer reading communities.

²⁷ Eva's name has been changed to protect her anonymity. As I explained on pages 13-14 of this dissertation, with the help of Baby Name Voyager, I chose a pseudonym with the same first letter of the person's real name that was common at the time that the interviewee was born.

Poetry readings were another important site for circulating *blewointment*'s works and reaching readers. Readings, especially those events that were scheduled as part of political organization events, were an important site for disseminating poetry published by *blewointment* press. Although the practice of reading at protests was not widespread amongst the press's contributors, Copithorne often read at Women's Caucus meetings in Vancouver (Fawcett "Letter to Gladys Hindmarch") and bissett read poetry at gay and lesbian liberation protests in Vancouver during the 1970s and 1980s, such as a GATE picketing event in 1976 and a Lesbian and Gay Caucus protest in 1983 (Ben). For bissett, the poetry reading was an extension of his aesthetic practice that enabled him to circulate his work through a different medium. bissett's role at these events suggests that the gay community saw him as one of their own and that they valorized poetry as part of their protests. Because poetry, as Stephen Collis argues elsewhere, is capable of reproducing revolutionary subjects ("Poetry in Protest"), poetry readings at gay liberation protests facilitates the formation of a network of revolutionary subjects based on their shared affinity with a work. Although there is no concrete evidence of the influence that bissett's poetry had over attendees, the poetry reading was an integral method of circulating the press's queer works to a gay public, and the reading was deployed as a form of cultural activism by event organizers. Thus, poetry readings further disseminated the press's works at events that countered capitalist values, such as women's caucus meetings as well as gay and lesbian liberation protests, which potentially contributed to the generation of an affinity network of activists.

The circulation of *blewointment* press's works suspended the closet for homosexual readers who may have felt isolated within a homophobic public space. For instance, the press's works influenced Steve, who was a member of the political organization Gay Liberation Front and artistic communities in Vancouver. In my interview with him, Steve recalled that bissett's work was important to him early on. Steve spoke about the importance of one of bissett's earliest books *Pomes*

for *Yoshi* by referring to it as “classic gay book.” As he stated, “it was important for me to know that bill was gay ... I realized this when I read *Pomes for Yoshi*. Whenever I read them was when I thought, oh bill is gay, these are gay poems. So that made me feel good.” Speaking about the material in the text, Steve shared that “there’s something about the bittersweet gay poem about unrequited disappointment that fit my own sense of melancholia at that age.” Steve seems to suggest that his reading experience of *Pomes for Yoshi* enabled him to feel an affinity with bissett’s experience of “unrequited love,” highlighting the bond formed between the reader and the text as well as the poet. In his work on counterpublics, Michael Warner indicates that a queer counterpublic suspends the oppressive social closet that isolates homosexuals (“Publics and Counterpublics” 424). While many homosexuals were closeted in Vancouver during the 1970s, Steve’s oral history suggests that reading a queer text by a fellow gay Vancouver artist was significant for him because it allowed him to feel less isolated. To put it another way, Steve’s retrospective interview suggests the importance that bissett’s book held for him as a gay man at the time because he identified a shared experience that would not be visible within the larger public. Although he recounted his experience of reading bissett’s book over forty years later, Steve’s oral history remains important because it suggests that his memory of reading the book still resonates with him today.

The press’s readership extended beyond Vancouver and formed a queer counterpublic across Canada. For instance, the press’s books were read and reviewed by Ian Young of *The Body Politic*. Young lived in Toronto, but he contributed poetry to *blewointment* magazine and he was an avid reader of blewointment press’s books. For instance, the Ian Young Collection at Cornell University contains eight blewointment press books and four books by bissett published by other Vancouver presses, such as Talonbooks and Air. He also wrote several reviews of blewointment press books. In volume forty-eight, Young promoted *Hands Get Lonely Sometimes* (1977) and *The Ordinary Invisible Woman* (1978) (36) by lesbian-feminist poet Hauser. Similarly, in volume ninety-eight,

Young promotes Rosen's *Rory the Price of Morning* by calling it "a delightful little booklet of captioned colour photos of a young man in bed" (44). The numerous positive reviews of blewointment's work suggest that Young not only followed and read blewointment press's publications but also that he was fond of the press's works. Moreover, by publishing his reviews in Canada's leading lesbian and gay liberation magazine, Young promoted the works to Canada's queer counterpublic by speaking about the works and recommending them to the magazine's readers. Though blewointment press was a Vancouver based collective, its influence on gay and lesbian readers extended beyond Vancouver, and potentially generated a readership across Canada.

However, the press also received backlash from more conservative members of the public, who perceived some of blewointment press's gay content as pornographic. During the late 1970s, the work of bissett and Lachance was cited in the House of Commons by conservative MPs from British Columbia such as Robert Wenman and Jack Ellis as examples of the misuse of public funding by the Canada Council who supported blewointment press with artistic grants. Wenman from Fraser Valley West accused the Canada Council of "supporting, with public money, individuals to write what anyone in this chamber [the House of Commons] would term as offensive and demeaning pornography" (qtd. in Cox 148). Categorizing their work as *offensive* and *demeaning pornography* demonstrates how the Canadian government helped construct the "public's" perception of homosexuality as a pathological identity marker. As Ryan J. Cox argues, "when Robert Wenman condemns the work of bill bissett as evil and obscene and implies those that facilitate the production and distribution of this work are complicit in that evil and obscenity, he does so with the symbolic power of the Canadian government as the elected representative of the people of Fraser Valley West" (152-53). In short, when Wenman critiques the work of bissett and Lachance, he is symbolically representing a segment of the public that shares these values. Though it is believed that the PC MPs attack on bissett was likely an effort to target the Liberal government that had supported

the Canada Council (Ben), this attack might have also played into the conservatives' larger dismissal of the Liberal government's shift in public policies affecting homosexuals in 1969 and the funding of works by gay and lesbian writers via the Canada Council. To put it succinctly, by challenging the Liberal government for funding "pornographic" literature, the conservative MPs were targeting bissett to critique recent shifts in Canadian policy that affected homosexuals and artists.

The attacks in the House of Commons not only reflected the views of some members of the Conservative political party at the time but also the values of conservative members of Vancouver's public. Ellis of Prince Edward-Hastings critiqued the public funding of blowoutment books and circulated some of bissett's and Lachance's works to his constituents to prove the pornographic nature of the material. Ellis photocopied four pages of poetry collections by bissett and Lachance published by blowoutment press, which were reproduced without their permission, and circulated them to conservative-leaning voters. Ellis claimed that he received hundreds of letters a day from local constituents and organizations that supported his campaign (French 14). The conservative public response to the works demonstrates the extent to which the press's poetics disgusted these readers and diagnosed a larger problem within the city. As bissett and Lachance worked together to produce art that represented their experiences as gay men within Vancouver and received limited public funding, members of the conservative public actively sought to support a campaign to defund the press based on their belief that the works were pornographic. Ultimately, in 1978, the House of Commons debate and the conservative public's support contributed to the cutting of funding to blowoutment press, which depended upon this money to survive. During the late 1970s, "[t]he censorship and repression of sexually expressive materials produced by and for gays and lesbians dramatically illustrated that, notwithstanding the Criminal Code amendments of a decade earlier, the state felt the need to harshly curtail same-sex sexuality, and to keep it out of public view" (Warner 118). The attacks on bissett and his press and the subsequent cutting of their funding demonstrates

that the press was symbolically attacked and punished because it challenged the heteronormative values of British Columbia's and Vancouver's conservative voting publics. However, it is also noteworthy that Conservative MPs' censorship efforts paradoxically increased homosexuality's public visibility by publicly circulating the same "pornographic" works that they condemned.

To better understand the context informing these accusations, it is important to consider how the circulation of *blewointment* press's materials was informed by ongoing debates about pornography during the 1970s. On the one hand, members of the women's movement fought against heterosexual pornography because of its exploitative nature and aptly claimed that it degraded the female body by making it a sexual object for men's visual consumption (T. Warner 126). On the other hand, lesbian and gay activists protested the political censorship of queer literature and claimed that queer pornography was a "a vital component of a liberated sexuality" (126). Unlike heterosexual pornography, which symbolically and physically exploits the female body, queer publications by *blewointment* press depict homosexual acts that do not exploit the female body. Rather, as bissett claims, these works are love poems that are grounded in "resiprokal" (bissett "afterword 2 its a sailors life") representations of sexuality. Here, bissett suggests that, unlike the accusations held against heterosexual pornography, his love poems depicting sexual acts are grounded in consent. Though bissett is speaking about his own work and the argument for reciprocity could also be made about his collaboration with Bertrand Lachance (e.g., *Tes: Rivières T'Attendent*), bissett's perspective may not necessarily be shared with other writers who published with *blewointment*. At the moment, our understanding of consent and queer poetry in *blewointment* is limited by what bissett has stated and may be contested by oral histories with other members of the press. This line of inquiry is beyond the limitations of this dissertation's oral history findings; however, in light of current public dialogue about consent (e.g., the #MeToo movement), I believe that further research about consent and queer

poetry in blewointment would foster a fruitful, critical dialogue about the limitations of this utopic ideal.

While some members of the women's movement drew a distinction between erotica and pornography by claiming that the former is not exploitative (T. Warner 127), Menominee two-spirit poet Chrystos, who published with Press Gang Publishers, critiqued this class-based judgment. As she argues, "'erotica' was the word used by the upper class to describe their smut and 'pornography' was used by the lower class to describe their smut. So they're the same thing" (Califia and Chrystos 15). That is, the claim that something is erotica and that something else is pornographic is a classist judgement. Moreover, like bissett's claim that his sexual poetry represents "resiprokal" love, Chrystos argues that her texts, which depict sexual acts, reflect values of consent (15). These debates surrounding the use of the word pornography demonstrate that, whereas members of the women's movement made strong claims against exploitative, heterosexual pornography, queer poets publishing sexual literature were doing so to valorize their desires and promote sexual consent. The production of queer poetry is not intended to exploit marginalized people but rather to create collective knowledge about queer sexuality and for queer people to become empowered through it. For instance, readers of this poetry can unlearn heteronormative ideology and can form a reading community by engaging with these materials. For this reason, I suggest that the conservative political backlash against blewointment's publications represents a homophobic and classist rejection of queer ways of being that are grounded in consensual understandings of sexuality.

The Vancouver Poetry Centre²⁸ (hereafter VPC) challenged the conservative tactics against blewointment by creating a public dialogue about the cultural war against the press. The VPC published articles that responded to the public dialogue about pornography and censorship. During

²⁸ The Vancouver Poetry Centre was a local reading community led by Warren Tallman. The Centre organized events (e.g., discussions and readings) and published a monthly newsletter called the *Vancouver Poetry Centre Newsletter*.

the 1970s, anti-pornography feminists fought to censor pornography because of its exploitation of women, yet, as Tom Warner argues, for gay men and lesbians, pornography was a way of liberating sexuality rather than further repressing it (126). However, The *Vancouver Poetry Centre Newsletter* refused to reproduce this perspective, published records of homophobic attacks on bissett, and critiqued the labelling of his work as pornographic. Through this activism, the VPC participated in a public poetics, which as Erin Wunker and Travis V. Mason postulate,

comprises more than the circulation of poetry in public; it also includes those attempts to deliver poetry to a public and to generate discussion about poets and the work of poetry (particularly in relation to pressing social, environmental, and political concerns) as well as those moments in which poetic representational economies make changes in order to proffer alternative ways of knowing. (4)

In solidarity with bissett, the VPC participated in a public poetics that directly contradicted the discourses circulated by Conservative MPs. For instance, the VPC's newsletter generated a discussion about the oppression experienced by bissett and called for greater dialogue about the Canada Council and Conservative attacks. In its December 1978 issue, the VPC published an open letter by a reader defending bissett's works and his press's publications by resignifying them as "love poems" (3) rather than as pornographic materials. In the same issue, a reader critiques the policies informing the Canada Council's decisions, stating his disapproval of the endowment fund being controlled by the interests of a group of "men whose chief interest is controlling the finance capital cartels which so much determine and deform our lives" (Atticus 3) and who have been given "carte-blanche" (3). In the same issue, UBC English Professor Warren Tallman calls for "investigative poetry," which "severely locates this age's philo-misanthropists" who have misused the funds to enrich themselves instead of supporting the funding of arts in Canada (1). In other words, the problem with the Canada Council's public funding is not that bissett has received money

but that funds have been misused to satisfy private interests. Continuing this public discussion in the March 29, 1979 issue, the VPC newsletter editorial board traces the events related to the public debate of bissett's work by publishing what the newsletter calls a "boxscore" (Vancouver Poetry Centre Editorial Collective "Boxscore"), chronologizing the Parliamentary and public attacks on bissett and describing their effects on the press.²⁹ In so doing, the newsletter made the ongoing oppression experienced by bissett visible in the VPC's text, which was then circulated to its countercultural readers. Thus, the newsletter articulated an alternative perspective on the public debate about funding non-normative love poetry and generated dialogue about the effects of sexual oppression and Conservative cultural policies against gay artists.

Beyond their textual efforts, the VPC produced a public dialogue about the importance of bissett's work through the organization of the 1979 "Writing in Our Time" reading series. "Writing in Our Time" consisted of seven events over a seven-month span with each one featuring a panel discussion and a reading. In part, it functioned as a fundraiser for bissett and blewointment press. The events included readings by gay poets bissett and Allen Ginsberg, and event organizers sold works by gay poets who had published with blewointment press as well as other presses.³⁰ While the series set records by selling over 830 series tickets, (Vancouver Poetry Centre Editorial Collective "Writing in Our Time"), it more importantly created dialogue between artists and the public. As Daphne Marlatt, who participated in the events, stated in an interview published in *Vancouver Poetry Centre Newsletter*,

²⁹ In its August 16, 1979 issue, the VPC sought to financially support bissett by publishing a pledge form requesting support from the readers, which states that the attacks on bissett have led to his financial indebtedness ("Ointment").

³⁰ The following books were sold at the events: bissett's *th wind up tongue*, *Pomes for Yoshi*, and *Stardust*, Lachance's gay work *Street Flesh*, and Hauser's lesbian text *Hands Get Lonely Sometimes* (Vancouver Poetry Centre Editorial Collective "WANNA BUY").

So you have 800 people – that’s not ‘fringe’ – and the excitement of a really public occasion. People want to be spoken to as part of that occasion. Or they want to be spoken for. And when that doesn’t happen there is disappointment and you get heckling from people who are drunk and bored, or turned off, from what is coming across because they’re expecting something else. What they want is also to speak, *and* the speaking out and the demand to be spoken for is healthy, I think, because it means that writing is being heard as part of our collective life” (“Footnote I”; emphasis in original)

Marlatt’s emphasis on the series’ ability to bring marginalized concerns to the forefront of the community’s consciousness speaks to the social importance of the events and their ability to create radical public dialogue. As she suggests, marginalized members of the community sought a public voice that made their concerns visible and created the potential for public dialogue. In light of the series’ support for bissett and critique of homophobia, the readings and talkbacks created a public dialogue about issues affecting bissett, which reflected the experiences of other members of the community, and the events enabled the public to respond to the art in order to denounce ongoing social injustices. Pauline Butling troubles the series’ ability to represent the concerns of marginalized people by arguing that, although it was “[o]stensibly a fundraiser for bill bissett’s *Blew Ointment* magazine and press, the series also celebrated the cumulative successes of the North American, male-dominated avant-garde” (23-24).³¹ Butling’s critique here is apt in light of the overrepresentation of male artists at the series as twenty-one of the twenty-seven readers were men. Yet, it obfuscates the series’ ability to create dialogue about homophobia through the public dissemination and discussion of poetry. Hence, “Writing in Our Time” functioned as a counterpublic series of events that supported *blewointment* press and created public dialogue about ongoing social injustices.

³¹ To clarify, *blew ointment* magazine was no longer being produced at this time.

As an extension to the VPC's efforts, a reading community named *th frends uv blewointment* self-organized to raise funds to sustain bissett and the press's cultural work. As Michael Warner emphasizes, it is through an environment of intertextuality and continuous circulation of texts that a reading community comes together and maintains itself (*Public and Counterpublics* 97). Begun in 1979, *th frends of blewointment* was a group of dedicated readers who contributed thousands of dollars to the press, mostly in the form of twenty-four post-dated cheques, to pay off the press's debt when its Canada Council funding was cut. In exchange for their support, the readers received one painting by bissett and a permanent subscription to all of the press's publications as gifts (Vancouver Poetry Centre Editorial Collective "Ointment"). Some members also received limited editions of poems by bissett (1). Members of this group included gay poets Robin Blaser and Henry Greenhow and lesbian bookseller Beth Appeldorn. Blaser also organized an event to raise more funds for bissett on July 21st, 1979 at UBC. At the event, forms for pledges to donate money to *blewointment* were distributed and books by *blewointment* press, Talonbooks, Air Press, New Star Books, and Intermedia Press were sold. The formation of *th frends uv blewointment* press reading community highlights how a reading community formed around and in support of *blewointment* press was necessary for the counterpublic to survive. That is, the exchange of monetary support for a lifetime subscription of books suggests a reciprocal relationship between the small press and its readers and highlights their interdependence. With this monetary support, bissett and Lachance successfully sued Ellis and other MPs for circulating the press's publications without their permission. Thus, the circulation of *blewointment* press's books was generative of a queer counterpublic that was able to support the press in its time of need, challenge homophobic attacks, and create public awareness about the cultural war against queer writers.

3.5 Final Thoughts

This case study provides greater insight into the press's engagement with early gay liberation efforts during the 1960s-1980s, while equally showing how it speaks to current concerns within LGBTQ2+ communities. By positing that *blewointment* press produced and generated intersectional spaces that addressed concerns of sexual, gender, racial, and class oppression during the early stages of Canada's lesbian and gay liberation movements (1960s-1980s), I demonstrated how *blewointment* press was integral to gay liberation activism. Specifically, as I showed, *blewointment* press generated a radical collective composed of gay men as well as heterosexual and lesbian feminists. These artists produced poetry that not only reflected queer experiences but also critiqued dominant social norms. To circulate their works, they sold them door-to-door, gave them as gifts, and shared them at poetry readings, which enabled the collective to have an important influence on gay readers. While it did face conservative backlash, ultimately leading to its end in 1983, the press received strong support from the Vancouver literary community, which led to the development of the biggest poetry reading series in British Columbia.

Chapter 4: Press Gang Publishers and Lesbian-Feminist Cultural Activism (1974-1989)

“British Navies would go into the streets and haul people off the streets and put them onto their sailing ships, and they would become sailors, that was a press gang”

(Lynn Personal interview)

“The freedom of the press belongs to those who own the press”

(Author 01)³²

4.1 Background

In the previous chapter, I focused on the intersection between blowoutment press and gay liberation movements, while pointing to some of the press’s contributions to the women’s movement. Here, I consider the intersection between Press Gang Publishers and lesbian-feminist movements in Vancouver. Contrary to lesbian separatists, who distinguished their concerns from women’s liberation movements and rarely addressed the concerns of racialized women (T. Warner 81, 183), lesbian feminists working at Press Gang increased the visibility of systemic forms of oppression affecting lesbians across social divides. Between 1974 and 1989, the women-only collective created an anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, and anti-racist social space for lesbian and heterosexual women to meet, learn how to produce books, form intimate relationships, and support each other (Paula; Lynn Personal interview; Norma). During that time, the press published 20 books and printed pamphlets, periodicals, and posters that reflected the anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, anti-racist, and anti-ableist values of Vancouver’s lesbian-feminist political organizations.³³ For instance, in 1985 it published *Still Sane*, a mixed-media project by Persimmon Blackbridge and Sheila Gilhooly that includes photographs of Gilhooly’s sculptural exhibition, which analyzes the torment

³² As per SFU Archives, I am not allowed to use any referent that may disclose the anonymous authors’ name. For this reason, this author is indicated with the pseudonym “Author 01.” For more information, see pages 12-13 of this dissertation.

³³ Out of the twenty books that Press Gang published, four of them were written or edited by lesbian-feminists, and one of them was written by a First Nations lesbian writer.

she endured as a pathologized lesbian who was incarcerated in a psychiatric institution. To challenge this violence, Gilhooly's sculptures embrace the stigma of lesbianism with poetic inscriptions claiming that "it was ... *great*" ("Coming Out: in the closet") to be a lesbian. Works like *Still Sane* were circulated and promoted with the support of a lesbian-feminist network of women working in independent bookstores (e.g., Little Sister's) and feminist periodicals (e.g., *Kinesis*), which led to the formation of a lesbian-feminist reading community that not only benefited from the press's publications but also contributed to the press's publishing efforts (Norma). As this evidence suggests, Press Gang Publishers advanced anti-homophobic social justice efforts by building lesbian-feminist communities through the production, circulation, and reception of radical texts.

Yet, Press Gang's intersection with lesbian-feminist liberation movements remains under-explored. While some interviews and other scholarly research briefly mention the press's importance to publishing marginalized peoples' voices (Maracle "Change the Way Canada Sees Us" 55; Klinger 27), at the moment of writing this chapter, only two studies extensively consider Press Gang's cultural contributions to social movements in Canada. First, Christine Kim's dissertation *The Politics of Print: Feminist Publishing and Canadian Literary Production* (2004) shows that Press Gang was an important cultural space that challenged a Canadian publishing trend of promoting heteronormative and nationalist values. As Kim asserts, "[t]he emergence of Press Gang ... in the 1970s within a literary field dominated by masculinist and nationalist interests ... introduced competing narratives of feminism, socialism, and lesbianism into the dominant narratives of Canadian culture and identity" (2). Kim's examination of Press Gang's challenge to a national trend in publishing and its growth of a new form of radical feminist cultural production is an important lead for my research. However, while she focuses on the *feminist* elements of the press to demonstrate the collective's radical contributions to Canada's literary field, my research pushes her analysis further by addressing the press's *lesbian-feminist* aspects to better understand how the

collective contributed to lesbian liberation efforts. Second, Linda Christine Fox's dissertation *Queer Outburst: A Literary and Social Analysis of the Vancouver Node (1995-96) in English Canadian Queer Women's Literature* (2009) examines the press's lesbian cultural production during the 1990s. Fox corroborates Kim's finding that the press contributed enormously to the production of content by women in Canada (99), and, more pertinently for the purposes of this dissertation, demonstrates the press's contribution to the production of queer material in Vancouver (27). With an emphasis on the years 1995-1996, Fox's dissertation does not discuss the press's lesbian cultural activism during the 1970s-1980s. I turn to this earlier neglected period to provide a fuller picture of the press's lesbian cultural activism that led to this important moment in Vancouver's lesbian history. Whereas these prior studies have focused on the feminist elements and later phases of the press, this chapter deploys a queer and feminist theoretical approach and engages with lesbian historical studies to show Press Gang's influence on lesbian liberation movements in Vancouver from 1974-1989.

With a focus on the press's second phase between 1974-1989,³⁴ I will examine how Press Gang influenced lesbian liberation movements. Specifically, section one will analyze how Press Gang generated a women-only collective that included lesbian feminists who shared anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, and anti-racist values. As part of this collective, lesbian feminists worked together, learned how to print and publish works, and formed social bonds. Section two will examine the lesbian-feminist works published by Press Gang. Although the press published mostly non-fiction books, Press Gang perceived poetry as integral to its printing and publishing efforts:³⁵ it

³⁴ Press Gang's first phase began in 1970 when a mixed collective formed a printing house. The second phase began with the formation of a women-only collective in 1974 and ended in 1989, when the press and the printing house officially separated. The press's third phase, which is beyond the scope of this chapter, ended in 2002 with the official closure of the press.

³⁵ As one member of the press indicated, poetry was not the primary literary form published by the press. However, it remained integral to the press's publishing efforts because books of poetry were found at the press, broadsheets were on the walls, and it published a few poetry manuscripts during its second phase. Nevertheless, "it was with Chrystos that Press Gang and poetry came together" (Norma).

printed lesbian leaflets and posters that featured poetry, and it published four poetry collections and one mixed-media book that incorporated poetry. Third, I will determine the means through which the press circulated and promoted their works to reach lesbian-feminist readers, and I will conclude with an evaluation of the press's influence on lesbian feminists. Ultimately, I will contend that, by building a women-only collective, publishing radical lesbian-feminist texts, and disseminating those works to lesbian readers, Press Gang contributed to social change for lesbians living in Vancouver and were integral to the city's lesbian liberation movements.

4.2 "The problem of women": Generating a Lesbian-Feminist Collective

In Vancouver, women were often disenfranchised within political organizations dominated by men. As Tom Warner argues, lesbians "generally had even fewer options" than gay men to meet (52) and "gay organizations — in which men were often predominant — were hostile or unwelcoming" to women (80). Not unlike what Warner describes, the women of Press Gang also eventually felt as though they were outsiders within their collective. Specifically, from 1970-1974, Press Gang was composed of three men and six women, whose values reflected those of political organizations at the time, but, by 1974, "tension between the men and women at [the press] was increasing" (Giraud and Gilhooly 48). Eventually, "the problem of women" (48) became a core issue, as male outsiders ignored women within the press,³⁶ and, at the suggestion of one male collective member, the men amicably left the collective (48). Though the departure was amicable, male members of Vancouver's political communities assumed that the women had purged the men from the collective (49). This assumption suggests that the women of Press Gang were perceived by

³⁶ As Lynn Giraud and Sheila Gilhooly recount in "A Herstory of a Women's Press: Press Gang Printers," "Sarah Davidson, a former member, recalls answering the phone one day and having a male voice ask for Schraeder. When Sarah answered [sic] he wasn't in, the caller asked for Ed or Richard. When Sarah explained neither of them were in either, the caller hung up after telling her he 'would call back when someone was there!' These were the political times in the 1970s in which the 'problem of the women at the Press' was discussed" (10)

members of Vancouver's political communities as being "trespassers" because they had transformed the press into a women-only collective. Yet, the consequences of this departure also had positive consequences for women at the press. As I will show throughout this section, collective members gained agency and asserted their anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, and anti-racist values.

Press Gang's social space was inflected by the values of its lesbian-feminist constituents' political communities, which reflected diverging social activist perspectives. While members of the collective felt like they belonged to political communities, such as lesbian liberation, women's, and unionization movements, Press Gang did not "belon[g] to the larger political community" (Pollak "Press Gang Policy"). Rather, it was "responsive" (Pollak "Press Gang Policy") to it. Press Gang formed its goals apart from the political communities that surrounded it while being informed by them. Although the small press was managed predominantly by lesbians and despite the overlap between the press and the movement's origins (Norma),³⁷ it was not exclusively part of lesbian liberation or lesbian separatist movements. As collective members Nancy Pollak and Pat Smith state in a policy document from the early 1980s, Press Gang does "not hire lesbian seperatists [sic] or women [sic] who would actively promote lesbian separatist policies at the press" (Pollak "Press Gang Policy"). Vancouver's lesbian separatist movement, as Tom Warner argues, "contemplated severing, or at least limiting to the unavoidable, contact and involvement with straight women and all men, including straight feminists and gay liberationists" (81). Press Gang's collective disagreed with and rejected lesbian separatists from their community because the latter group objected to the inclusion of lesbians who had male children (Norma). Press Gang recognized that lesbians, who were coming out at the time, were often previously married, had children, and needed a community (Norma). For this reason, the press empowered lesbian mothers of male children who were

³⁷ Lesbian separatist efforts began in the early 1970s (T. Warner 81), which was around the same time that Press Gang Publishers and Printers became a women-only collective.

marginalized for rejecting heterosexual expectations of motherhood. Thus, contrary to lesbian separatists' values, Press Gang's collective perceived its members' bonds as superseding divisional politics between lesbians, lesbians with children, and heterosexual women.

The press empowered its collective members by providing them educational opportunities. While the printing equipment had previously been owned by male collective members during the press's first phase, women had the opportunity to control the means of production and learn how to print books during the press's second phase. As lesbian collective member Lynn, who volunteered during the mid 1970s, indicated, she was attracted to Press Gang because she "wanted to learn printing as a skill" and Press Gang offered her the opportunity to "work on the negatives, correcting errors ... until I became more familiar with that, and then there was some layout we would do as well, making some plates. Gradually I learned all of these things. Sara taught me how to run the press."³⁸ Similarly, another lesbian collective member name Paula, who worked with the press from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, remembered that she "developed all of [her printing] skills on the job."³⁹ She also recalled that Press Gang focused on educating its members by paying for a few of them to complete printing courses and workshops at local schools, such as the Vancouver Community College (Paula).⁴⁰ Though women had previously been part of male-dominated arts collectives in Vancouver, they were often relegated to a marginalized position. For instance, Pauline Butling was a member of the *Tish* collective during the 1960s, but was assigned to the role of "reader, listener, friend, muse, supporter, lover, wife, hostess, and behind-the-scenes organizer" (50).

³⁸ Lynn's name has been changed to protect her anonymity. As I explained on pages 13-14 of this dissertation, with the help of Baby Name Voyager, I chose a pseudonym with the same first letter of the person's real name that was common at the time that the interviewee was born.

³⁹ Paula's name has been changed to protect her anonymity. As I explained on pages 13-14 of this dissertation, with the help of Baby Name Voyager, I chose a pseudonym with the same first letter of the person's real name that was common at the time that the interviewee was born.

⁴⁰ Press Gang's Sarah Davidson was the "first woman in a Vancouver Vocational Institute printing trades night course" (Giraud and Gilhooly 49).

Conversely, women from Press Gang “learned as much about the trade and the equipment as they could, both out of a sense of responsibility and a sense of empowerment” (Giraud and Gilhooly 49). Press Gang’s ability to educate its constituents marked a radical shift in which women were focal members within the collective and empowered agents who were capable of producing books of their own. As a result, the press was part of a growing women-led movement that focused on women’s abilities, concerns, and contributions.

In exchange for opportunities to learn how to print and for access to printing machines, Press Gang’s collective generated a gift economy that relied on members volunteering their time to support the press. A gift economy, as I pointed out in Chapter 3, relies on cultural activists being invested in giving their time and labour in order to develop a community rather than being invested in exchanging their labour for economic returns (Butling 62). During Press Gang’s second phase, the collective consisted of a group of six to eight women (Lynn Personal interview) who were part-time or full-time “political volunteers” (Giraud and Gilhooly 50; Lynn Personal interview). According to Paula, the press was “anti-hierarchical, part of [their] ambition around that was to fuse the skills in as democratic a way as possible.” However, this approach faced some obstacles because the collective needed some specialized workers (Paula). To address the problem, “[i]t would be very collaborative how that would be figured out, if someone didn’t want to always be doing something, then their voice would be listened to. If they wanted to develop something on their own, they would be listened to. There was a more equitable division of labour” (Paula). In exchange, women were given opportunities to learn skills on the job, as I have previously shown, and given lifetime access to the printers for free. As the press’s policy statement from the early 1980s states, “former collective members are allowed to use the printing presses” (Pollak “Press Gang Policy”). However, this collective’s labour was only made possible by the economic privilege of the collective’s middle-class women. As some members of the collective indicated, they were able to volunteer their time

due to the low cost of living in Vancouver at the time and because they were financially stable (Paula; Lynn Personal interview). Paradoxically, this suggests that the press's gift economy was only made possible by the members' accumulated wealth. Nevertheless, through this alternate non-hierarchical economy, collective members would give their labour in exchange for educational opportunities and access to printing resources.

The press also functioned as a space for radical discussion and research. As Butling argues, small presses offer the “material space and discursive contexts for poetics ‘research’ ... where poets can work together to explore new ideas and forms, assert ‘new’ subject formations, and investigate alternative histories” (33). Press Gang offered this type of material space to its collective, which enabled members to investigate political issues and cultural representations of marginalized women. As former editor Nancy Pollak states, “in 1978, a typical day might involve running a printing press, doing bindery work, mixing ink, and trying to find the time to think about the late afternoon collective meeting where we would be discussing a manuscript” (“Talk at Press Gang’s 20th”). Pollak’s talk emphasizes the importance of intermingling labour (running machines) and research (discussing a manuscript), suggesting that the press was invested not only in the production of radical books but also in the generation of new ideas about publications. As a result, Press Gang formed a reading public of its own that responded to manuscript submissions and publications as well as generated radical ideas in response to these works. Also, the press sought to valorize women’s ideas and aimed to produce a social space that worked across racial and cultural divides. For instance, as part of its hiring policy, Press Gang did not discriminate “on the basis of age or race (ourwork [sic] and building mean that we discriminate against disabled women) or sexual orientation or children or class” (Pollak “Press Gang Policy”). Although this policy became increasingly important in the 1980s because the press incorporated women of colour’s voices (Lynn Personal interview), Press Gang focused on creating what we would now call an intersectional research space

since the beginning of its second phase, while recognizing some of its limitations. Overall, Press Gang generated a space in which its social constituents were given the agency to transform the means of production in order to advance its social justice efforts.

Beyond the political concerns of the press, Press Gang facilitated intimate relationships between lesbian activists and artists. At the time, gay men dominated queer spaces in Vancouver, but lesbians fought for more space and visibility (T. Warner 83). Press Gang's shop was part of these efforts because it contested gay men's domination of social and physical spaces by providing lesbians a physical place to meet. As Lynn remembered, when she left her home in Ontario to move with her girlfriend and live in Vancouver, she was drawn to Press Gang because she recognized it as a place where she could meet other lesbians, print books, and become politically active (Lynn Personal interview). Later on, she had several intimate relationships with other women at the press (Lynn Personal interview). Indeed, she was not alone in viewing Press Gang as a space for meeting other women. As Norma, another collective member stated, "I had a few women that I was involved with who were also involved with Press Gang. My first lover in Vancouver was someone that I met through Press Gang who was just hanging out in the bindery."⁴¹ These members' oral histories suggest that Press Gang was recognized within the lesbian community as a meeting space for lesbians, and, as a result, it formed a nexus for queer women to connect. In her work *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed argues that queer social movements are engendered by queer people's orientations towards queer individuals (86). Desire and interest in queer people enable them to navigate society differently by forming queer trajectories that do not adhere to heterosexual social formations (21). In the case of the press and its collective, Press Gang's social collective facilitated homosocial, homoromantic, and homosexual bonds by enabling lesbians to meet. Despite a policy

⁴¹ Norma's name has been changed to protect her anonymity. As I explained on pages 13-14 of this dissertation, with the help of Baby Name Voyager, I chose a pseudonym with the same first letter of the person's real name that was common at the time that the interviewee was born.

statement dated from the early 1980s indicating that “collective members must refrain from sexual entanglements with one another; this has always led to collective strife” (Pollak “Press Gang Policy”), these former members demonstrate that women working at the press were still sexually involved with each other. Though lesbians had much greater difficulty than gay men to come out at the time, Press Gang’s collective offered lesbians a space to meet, socialize, and form intimate relationships.

Yet, the press’s collective was predominantly composed of white women, in spite of its anti-racist values. This homogenous social formation inadvertently led to the generation of a white-centric press that held racial biases. As Paula, one of the collective’s members indicated retrospectively, “in the late 1970s, everybody at the press was white, we didn’t sit around saying we’re all white, but we would have known without really talking about it.” Inasmuch as the collective tried to address this issue in the mid 1970s by trying to find other job candidates to work at the press (Fox 141), the collective only hired one First Nations woman during its first and second phases. This effort, however, failed to address the collective’s lack of diversity. As Norma remembers, when they “hired a[n unnamed] First Nations woman ... it didn’t go that well because she was the only one, and probably other factors as well, such as economic decline of the print shop” (Norma). The press did publish *Not Vanishing* (1988) by Menominee two-spirit poet Chrystos, and it agreed to publish the proceedings of the 1988 “Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures” conference (Fox 142). However, the collective’s predominantly white representation marks a shortfall in the press’s attempt to create a space grounded in anti-racist values. This issue persisted during the press’s third phase. In 1996, the press was accused of exploiting artists of colour for the benefit of their white privilege (Author 02).⁴² More recently, Lee Maracle, a First Nations writer

⁴² As per SFU Archives, I am not allowed to use any referent that may disclose the anonymous authors’ name. For this reason, this author is indicated with the pseudonym “Author 02.” For more information, see pages 12-13 of this dissertation.

who published with the press during its third phase, indicated that when the press folded in 2002 “the three people who endured the biggest losses were myself, Chrystos, and Ivan Coyote” (“Change the Way Canada Sees Us” 54) and that they are still owed “thousands” (54) of dollars. Maracle indicated that collective member Della McCreary was very supportive before she got sick, but the writer remained skeptical of why First Nations women and a transgender man incurred the biggest financial loss (54). The press’s whiteness during its first phase and its mistreatment of First Nations women in the 1990s and 2000s suggests that the press’s anti-racism was limited, an issue I will further address in Chapter 5. In spite of this shortfall, Press Gang generated a social space for white lesbian feminists that centered on their values and experiences, when such a space was rare within the city’s cultural and gay communities.

4.3 Materializing Collective Values on the Page

The press’s social framework formed a dialectical relationship with the body of works that it published. Specifically, the press published and printed radical literature that represented the collective’s anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, anti-ableist, and anti-racist values. Whereas *blewointment* press’s queer publications were predominantly written by gay men, Press Gang’s publications explicitly focused on the lives of lesbian feminists, who have been further marginalized within a heterosexist society. Although they published mostly non-fiction, Press Gang believed that publishing poetry was an important part of the press’s mandate (Lynn Personal interview; Norma). The press published four poetry monographs of varying aesthetic practices (from Imagist to Indigenous poetry), one mixed-media book, and works that referenced poetry directly (e.g., a lesbian-feminist workbook, the “Telling It” conference proceedings), and the collective printed poetry on broadsheets. In so doing, the press participated in what Judith Butler calls a “citational politics” (21) by transforming “abjection into political agency” (21) and contributed to a transnational dialogue amongst heterosexual and lesbian feminists about issues affecting women. For

instance, as I argued in Chapter 2, Oakland's Women's Press Collective published works by Judy Grahn and Pat Parker, which addressed lesbian existence as well as issues affecting lesbians of colour, respectively. Elsewhere, publications by Women's Press, Press Gang's Toronto counterpoint, "played an integral role in the proliferation of feminist writing in Canada" ("Women's Press - About") during the 1970s-1980s. At the theoretical level, Adrienne Rich argued in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980) that women have historically experienced systemic violence in a patriarchal society that regulates their bodies to fit within what she calls the institution of "compulsory heterosexuality" (30). Of course, in British Columbia, there were also lesbian writers who were producing a poetics of desire that demonstrated homoerotic love, such as Phyllis Webb's *Naked Poems* (1965) and Daphne Marlatt's *Touch to My Tongue* (1984), and a poetics of disruption that challenged sexism and the erasure of women, such as Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic* (1988). With this larger conversation in mind, this section contends that Press Gang's publications responded to the proliferation of radical lesbian-feminist discourses by participating in or promoting a poetics of sexual disgust that embraced lesbian feminism's stigma, examined the pathologization of lesbianism, and powerfully challenged disgusting practices of physical and symbolic violence against lesbians and women in general.

In 1983, the press published Nym Hughes, Yvonne Johnson, and Yvette Perreault's *Stepping Out of Line: A Workbook on Lesbianism and Feminism*, a resource book reflecting lesbian feminists' concerns. Aimed at a general lesbian readership, the work comprises resources that reflect ongoing lesbian activist efforts, such as political organizing, education, and community building efforts. Although it is not a book of poetry, *Stepping Out of Line* encourages readers to engage with a poetics of sexual disgust by citing, responding to, referencing, and encouraging the readership of intersectional lesbian poetry that made this book possible. For instance, the book discusses Persimmon Blackbridge and Sheila Gilhooly's "Still Sane" sculpture and poetry exhibit to address

the incarceration of lesbians within psychiatric hospitals, demonstrate how one lesbian worked through their trauma, and challenge the way that the institution of psychiatry has treated lesbians (122). It also cites Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), which examines how gender, race, class, and sexual oppression intersect. *This Bridge Called My Back* argues for the need to bridge gaps between women, while acknowledging differences in the lived experiences of white women and women of colour as well as white lesbians and lesbians of colour to overcome larger systemic issues that affect women as a whole (xix). In so doing, the work's contributors participate in a debate that addresses different ways of seeking liberation from sexism, homophobia, and racism. In response to Moraga and Anzaldúa's book, Hughes, Johnson, and Perreault state that the text "[d]ocuments the analytical and lived links between racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism, and looks at the racism and elitism of our communities" (171). For this reason, it is a "useful resourc[e] for fighting racism and classism in our [lesbian] communities" (171). The workbook also emphatically supports the reading of lesbian literature, which a general public may have deemed obscene, by encouraging readers to "[s]ubscrib[e] to lesbian and feminist publications [because it] is the best way to learn about the experiences, successes and failures of other lesbian communities, and groups" (171). References to and discussions of poetry in this book demonstrate that poetry is an important resource for lesbian feminists to learn how to embrace their stigma, to question their privilege within their communities, and to engage with radical literature as a means of becoming more familiar with ongoing liberation efforts. As such, *Stepping Out of Line* functions as a manifesto that encourages lesbians to learn about themselves and become empowered by returning to earlier radical lesbian literature and recognizing lesbian poetry as an important tool in lesbian liberation efforts.

Kiku Hawkes' photographs of Blackbridge and Gilhooly's "Still Sane" exhibit discussed in *Stepping Out of Line* were reproduced and examined in the publication *Still Sane* (1984). Through

this publication, Press Gang produced and circulated new understandings of lesbianism by increasing the visibility of lesbians' pathologization (notably, the incarceration of lesbian women), vindicating their desires, and challenging institutions that pathologized and sought to "cure" them. As the artists state, it "makes no apology for claiming that the raw details of our ordinary lives *can* be the basis for the best kind of art: provocative, reassuring, beautiful, enraging" (Preface; emphasis in original). The sculptures visually represent Gilhooly's very "raw" and "enraging" experience, and the poetic text inscribed onto them voices the survivor's lived experiences of being medicated, hospitalized, incarcerated, punished, shamed, and sexually assaulted. For instance, inscribed on the sculpture "Birchwood: Shock #1," the speaker states, "I told my shrink I didn't want to be cured of being a lesbian. He said that just proved how sick I was. He said I needed shock treatment" ("Birchwood: Shock #1"). The abstract sculpture can be read as a depiction of the woman experiencing the violence of shock treatment on a hospital bed, who becomes fractured through this experience. It can also be read as a depiction of a fractured woman standing lifelessly and facing away from a broken mirror, which suggests the aftershock that she has experienced because her sense of self has been broken by the mental institution's symbolic (trying to convince her that she is sick) and physical (imposing shock treatment) violence. In his work *Crip Theory*, queer and disability studies scholar Robert McRuer argues that heterosexual culture discursively constructs queer bodies as abject and subordinate within a heterosexual/queer and able-bodied/disabled binary (9). In addition, he states that a "system of compulsory heterosexuality" (2) assumes that a queer body must naturally desire to be cured because it fails to participate in a heterosexual culture and can be redeemed/remedied if it is cured from its deviant ways (9). Blackbridge and Gilhooly's work challenges this type of ideology by undermining heterosexual institutions that pathologize queer bodies. *Still Sane* embraces Gilhooly's abject identity by making her raw experiences visible and challenging the homophobic politics of mental institutions.

To heal from these experiences and trauma, the speaker of the poems on the “Still Sane” sculptures speaks about the importance of embracing one’s stigma publicly, as well as lesbian visibility and community building. After years of enduring traumatic experiences and attempting to escape her incarceration, the speaker in the “Still Sane” exhibit was released because she could pass the institution’s gender and sexual norms, and thus fulfilled its assumption that she was cured (“Strackville: getting out”). As she felt broken, this performance of heterosexuality did not resolve her trauma. In the sculpture “Strackville: getting out,” which portrays a single naked woman smiling and walking, the speaker states,

So there I was, trying to *pass for normal*, all drugged up in this place that stinks of shit and lysol and every day is endlessly boring except for the occasional flashes of violence and I’m powerless to protect myself and I’m *normal*. *Normal women* don’t talk about being a lesbian and they’re always cheerful. I was always good and smiling, never complaining or bothering the staff, keeping my mouth shut and smiling, always *obedient* and *quiet and nice and smiling* ... After three months I got out. (“Strackville: getting out”, my emphasis)

The speaker’s focus on the performance of obedience, cheerfulness, and heterosexuality demonstrates that, within a homophobic society, women are expected to restrict their self-expression to pass as “normal.” Bolded and larger words on the sculpture such as “DIED” (“Strackville: getting out”), “NORMAL” (“Strackville: getting out”), and “STINKS” (“Strackville: getting out”), foreground the painful performance that the portrayed woman must endure as she performs heterosexual normality. However, the sculpture “Coming Out: in the closet” depicts two women overlapping each other to form a new joined body, which represents the value of embracing one’s stigma as well as a new sense of lesbian community building. The words “lesbian” (“Coming Out: in the closet”), “Feminist” (“Coming Out: in the closet”), “PROUD” (“Coming Out: in the closet”), and “Life” (“Coming Out: in the closet”) are bolded in the poem on the sculpture and embrace the stigma

of being lesbian. On the sculpture, the speaker indicates that it was not until she enrolled in a class titled “sociology of deviance” (“Coming Out: in the closet”) and found a lesbian community that she discovered it was not only “OK to be a lesbian” (Coming Out: in the closet) but also “even great” (Coming Out: in the closet). Photographs of the sculptures with transcriptions of the poems were collected in *Still Sane* as a way of embracing lesbians’ stigma and to circulate alternate perspectives to help create solidarity with readers familiar with this experience. Blackbridge and Gilhooly’s work thus contributes to ongoing lesbian liberation movements by exposing the systemic oppression imposed onto lesbians by medical institutions and empowering lesbian women through art. More broadly, Press Gang was completing important solidarity work with people with different abilities by demonstrating the symbolic and physical violence enacted by mental institutions and supported by an ableist society.

Phoenix’s “this poem is about incest” (1985) is another textual example of Press Gang’s critique of the symbolic and physical violence that a patriarchal society enacts upon women’s bodies. Dedicated to her lover Jean, the poem vocalizes the speaker’s support for incest survivors, whose experiences have been discredited by a patriarchal society, and challenges a rape culture that enacts symbolic violence toward women. Specifically, rape culture labels women as sexual commodities, restricts their mobility and sense of safety, casts doubt about their experiences with sexual assault, and places the blame onto them. In addition to being terrorized by this symbolic violence, women often experience physical violence and trauma within a rape culture (Rich 131-132; Gavey 2; Brownmiller 13-15). Incest is a distinct part of this culture in which women are violated by a family member. In the poem, the speaker demonstrates that members of a patriarchal society tend to question survivors’ narratives by asking “so what happened? / how can y say yre an incest survivor / if y dont remember what happened” (48-50). While one facet of rape culture is that it symbolically reduces women to sexual objects and physically coerces them to adhere to this identity,

another facet is that it dismisses their traumatic experiences by further isolating them and placing the burden of responsibility onto them. For instance, the speaker illustrates this isolation and burden by repeating the verse “*my fault / my fault / my fault*” (38, 39, 40). The speaker challenges rape culture’s isolation and silencing of rape survivors by addressing them, asking “how many women in this room havent been raped? / raise y hands” (1-2). Moreover, she bears witness to their trauma as well as her own by telling a patriarchal society, “y say y want to hear about strong women? / listen. *ive* got a story.” The speaker describes these women as “strong girls” (3), who have sexual agency (e.g., “fuck anyone” [9]) and have survived rape (e.g., “*get fucked by their daddies*” [10]), to contest rape culture’s discourses that also construct rape survivors as “dirty” (30). At the level of its form, the poem seems to oscillate between plain and italicized text to indicate empowered (plain text) and stigmatized (italicized text) discourses. That is, the speaker performs a healing process in which the survivor’s empowering narrative becomes the norm through plain text and the violent discourse becomes distorted and slanted through italicized text. In response to a rape culture that discredits, labels, and blames survivors, the poem participates in a poetics of sexual disgust by bearing witness to rape survivors, by challenging how a rape culture symbolically and physically violates women, and by contesting the discursive construction of women as marked victims.

Much like Phoenix’s poem is in solidarity with her lover Jean’s experience, Beth Jankola’s *Jody Said* (1977) fosters solidarity between heterosexual and lesbian women. While some “straight women became resentful” (T. Warner 80) and “defian[t]” (78) towards lesbians when they came out of the closet, Press Gang’s publications sought to mend that divide. For instance, Jankola’s *Jody Said* (1977) seeks to “further understan[d] the political implications of [her] role as wom[a]n/worke[r] in a capitalist society” to challenge “the confining sexual stereotypes which oppress [women] and [their] children” (*Jody Said*). The Imagist poem “Bukowski” within this

collection transforms this aesthetic form by challenging the reductive, stereotypical images of Vancouver's "unusual folk" (3), including lesbians. As the speaker states,

People wanna look at freaks/these days/
dwarfs/midgets/drunks/down & outs/
unusual folk/Diane Arbus/photographed/
them for years... (1-4)

Like Diane Arbus's photography, which does not censure or mock what a conservative society deems grotesque (Lane), the speaker acknowledges the presence of "unusual folk" in Vancouver and makes them visible in the poem's textual space. However, the poem troubles this visibility by questioning how the act of gazing can create visibility for and regulate lesbians. As the speaker states, her "small unem- / ployed friend" (8-9) "got hassled/by the cops/ / for buying/two hungry dykes/ a ham- / burger" (11-13). Although the "small unem- / ployed friend" bore witness to the "two hungry dykes" and tried to help them, all three people were surveilled and regulated by the police. This set of images participates in a poetics of sexual disgust by demonstrating the paradoxical way that the act of gazing upon lesbians can be both liberating (increasing visibility and understanding) and oppressive (surveilling and punishing lesbians). That is, by presenting these images, "Bukowski" supports the visibility of lesbians' experiences and challenges the violence that they endure, such as the prevention of their movement through society as lesbian women, and the punishing of allies who support them.

Press Gang's collective also tried to bring visibility to First Nations' women's experiences. Its initial attempt to do so, with the publication of *Daughters of Copper Woman* by white writer Anne Cameron, alienated some First Nations writers. For instance, Sto:Loh writer Lee Maracle, "on behalf of Native writers, asked ... Cameron to stop using Native culture and sacred stories in her books and to move over and make room for Native writers who are writing out of their own

experiences and traditions” (The Telling It Book Collective 16). In 1988, the press published *Not Vanishing* by Menominee two-spirit poet Chrystos,⁴³ which shows how First Nations people have experienced settler-colonialism and how their sexual desires have been regulated to reproduce colonial power. While their “rituals, stories, & religious practices have been stolen & abused, as has [their] land” (Chrystos *Not Vanishing*), Chrystos states that their “purpose is to make it as clear & as inescapable as possible, what the actual, material conditions of [Indigenous Peoples’] lives are” (n.p). *Not Vanishing* creates an Indigenous textual space that troubles the pathologization of two-spirit desire and vindicates their experience as a two-spirited person. For instance, in “Double Phoenix,” the speaker portrays her spiritual rebirth with another woman, and states, “*I want you* my vulva shivers clenches / her mouth takes me her / tongue tells long dancing stories of flight...” (5-7). The poem juxtaposes an anatomical term like “vulva” with the sensuality of a phrase like “I want you” to create a clash between scientific discourses that have objectified and othered their desire and their bodily experience. Moreover, the poem challenges the medicalization of the body as the two women share an erotic moment together, and metaphorically become recharged through their experience. The speaker states,

she enters me in the moment when my blood begs her
hard deep light lifts from my lips
whirls moves tightly her mouth shivers
birds appear in my hands
my toes skim stars
I’m wings in the night sky crying out in her breasts
my hips wet flowers. (9-15)

⁴³ The term “two-spirit” gained prominence two years later when Myra Laramée coined the term at a conference for First Nations and LGBTQ people in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1990. However, Chrystos currently identifies as “two-spirit.”

At the climactic moment, the speaker's lover fills her and produces "hard deep light" in their mouth, as their body becomes a site for regrowth and their "hips wet flowers." The wetness of the poem overcomes the sterile medicalization of their body and symbolically re-empowers the two lovers as the speaker and their lover experience a spiritual rebirth. The poem asserts the importance of two-spirited people's experiences, challenging the medicalization of the two-spirited Indigenous body, and resignifies the meaning of their desire against settler-colonial discourses. Chrystos's *Not Vanishing* marks a turning point within Press Gang's publishing history as its poetics began to incorporate the perspectives of First Nations two-spirit writers and it contributed to ongoing two-spirit and self-determination movements.

As its publication of Chrystos's work suggests, Press Gang began to place itself at the centre of ongoing intersectional publishing efforts towards the end of the 1980s. During its initial phase, Press Gang mostly published the work of white women, which reflected a larger problem within lesbian organizations at the time. As Tom Warner states, "[m]ost lesbian, gay, and bisexual community organizations did not have *any* people with disabilities, gays, lesbians, or bisexuals of colour, or aboriginal people involved with them" (183). However, after the 1988 "Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures Conference" at Simon Fraser University, Press Gang agreed to publish the conference proceedings. This publishing agreement demonstrates the press's commitment to challenging a white trend in lesbian organizations at the time. At the "Telling It" conference, Asian-Canadian, First Nations, and lesbian writers met and discussed their experiences as members of marginalized communities in British Columbia, and consequently "address[ed] the intersections of gender, race, and sexuality" (Butling 33). Daphne Marlatt, one of the event's organizers, proposed the book project as a publication that would reflect the strong First Nations and lesbian communities present at the conference. For this reason, Marlatt sought to co-publish the proceedings with a First Nations press as well as Press Gang Publishers and originally only agreed to

co-publish with Press Gang if the collective tried to find a First Nations publisher (Marlatt “Letter to Barbara”). Marlatt envisioned the press as an ideal publishing milieu for lesbian materials, while arguing for the need to find a publisher that reflected First Nations’ perspectives. Though they did not secure a contract with a First Nations press, in 1990 Press Gang published the work, which merged transcriptions of the presentations, essays, and poetry that articulated anti-racist and anti-homophobic perspectives.

In *Telling It*, white lesbians and lesbians of colour embrace their radical social position and develop an intersectional lesbian dialogue. Lesbians’ essays, presentations, and art within the book make their experiences visible and claim that they have a language and culture of their own. The discourses of the conference proceedings are “stigmaphilic” (M. Warner *Publics and Counterpublics* 43) because they embrace non-normative sexualities’ stigma, refuse to be repressed, and work across social divides. For instance, in her conference presentation, Betsy Warland argued that she spoke English through her lesbianism by stating, “[w]hen I was thirty years old I finally realized that I speak English as a second language” (“f.) is sure” 32) because her lesbianism influenced her “sense and use of the English language” (33). A woman of colour critiqued lesbians’ presence at the conference by claiming that they did not have a culture of their own (The Telling It Book Collective 44) in spite of their influence on “Telling It.” However, SKY Lee, a woman of colour who came out at the conference, made her complex position as a self-identified Asian-Canadian lesbian visible (122). As she states, “Now I’d like to tell you about my beliefs of the Eastern sense of being a lesbian. I’m a lesbian, but I’m also bisexual and I’m heterosexual, but I like to currently think myself a lesbian” (122). She later adds in the proceedings, “[m]y biggest strength is that I came to my lesbian context via my woman of colour context” (188). Lee’s statement that her cultural context stems from her “Eastern sense of being a lesbian” demonstrates how an intersectional understanding of sexuality and race reflects a different perspective that works across and disrupts identity

boundaries. White lesbians and lesbians of colour at the conference demonstrated that one's sense of writing influences one's sense of being a lesbian and nationality. Anticipating the 1995-1996 boom in intersectional queer publishing that Linda Christine Fox identifies in her dissertation (110), the *Telling It* publication reflects the future of Press Gang's publishing efforts as it formed an intersectional poetics of sexual disgust that sought to bridge boundaries between racial divides and moved away from earlier lesbian liberation politics. Therefore, the press's publications undermined the very foundation of compulsory heterosexuality and contributed to ongoing lesbian liberation efforts by promoting the values, experiences, and cultures of lesbian-feminist women at the time.

4.4 Lesbian Networks of Circulation Across the Public/Private Divide

To promote their anti-homophobic and anti-sexist values more widely, Press Gang depended upon a network of lesbian-feminist allies, used radical forms of distribution, and deployed alternative forms of promotion. Circulating radical lesbian-feminist works was difficult at the time in light of ongoing homophobic social policies. During the 1970s, members of the women's movement fought to ban the circulation of what it deemed to be pornographic and exploitative representations of the female body. In response, the federal government established heteronormative policies that banned pornography, while targeting lesbian and gay materials (T. Warner 125). These materials, as Press Gang's *Stepping Out of Line* workbook states, were essential to the development of the lesbian community because it *depended* upon "making [their lesbian] community accessible" (Hughes, Johnson, and Perreault 170). Of course, as a lesbian-feminist press that included both heterosexual and lesbian women, Press Gang responded to this issue as an independent press would: members of the press worked with independent feminist bookstore owners as well as lesbian political organizations to sell their works in safe spaces; they solicited reviews from lesbian and feminist periodicals; and the collective printed single poems from collections of poetry to increase their exposure to a reading public. These methods, as I will contend, enabled Press Gang to challenge

systemic obstacles that blocked the circulation of lesbian works and played an important role in contributing to the intellectual and analytical conversations surrounding ongoing lesbian liberation efforts.

Press Gang partnered with independent feminist and mainstream bookstore owners across North America's west coast to make their works accessible within safe spaces. By buying two copies of each book and selling them in their stores (Norma), independent and mainstream bookstores created safe spaces for readers to engage with radical works. Independent "[b]ookstores and presses," as Kristen Hogan argues, were "interdependent, [and] were both necessary" to the women's movement (9). Hogan adds, "While the presses worked to publish, reprint, and distribute women's work, the bookstores gathered the physical evidence for the energy of women's authorship and artwork" (9). Although Hogan's research focuses explicitly on the connection between feminist bookstores and the women's movement, a similar point can be made about feminist bookstores, lesbian-feminist movements, and lesbian authors. Press Gang's alliances with independent bookstores began as early as 1974, when they supported each other and made a case for their presence within events organized by lesbian liberation movement activists (Author 05).⁴⁴ Press Gang's collective perceived bookstore owners as allies in the distribution of their works, and it believed that their stores were safe spaces for lesbians to meet (e.g., Little Sisters [Lynn Personal interview]). The partnership between Press Gang and independent feminist bookstores enabled both parties to promote each other's socio-political and cultural goals and to rely on each other to further circulate radical texts. Through these partnerships, Press Gang and independent feminist bookstores generated physical and social spaces for lesbian readers to be surrounded by like-minded people and to encounter queer works that would be of interest to them.

⁴⁴ As per SFU Archives, I am not allowed to use any referent that may disclose the anonymous authors' name. For this reason, this author is indicated with the pseudonym "Author 05." For more information, see page 13 of this dissertation.

While their relationships with independent and mainstream bookstores differed, both spaces served a similar purpose: circulating Press Gang's lesbian-feminist works. Mainstream bookstores were not designed specifically for a lesbian readership; however, as Norma, a collective member, states, the impetus behind this effort was "that even though we were very small, we were staking a claim to be in those mainstream bookstores." Some mainstream bookstores functioned as social spaces that welcomed lesbians by making lesbian-feminist works available for purchase in a physical and public location, and thus helped increase the visibility of lesbians' concerns. In a letter dated February 7th, 1981, collective member Marlene Wildeman indicates that Press Gang's books were sold in the local bookstore in Penticton, B.C., writing "they had several copies right out in front where you could see them." Press Gang faced some obstacles when they promoted the work of lesser known writers to mainstream bookstores, but the press solicited reviews from major authors to create credibility for their works. For example, they solicited reviews from Margaret Laurence and Margaret Atwood on their work *Common Ground: Stories by Women* (Slemin "Letter to Ottie"; Slemin "Letter to Margaret Laurence"). These reviews helped Press Gang tap into an established feminist field of cultural reception (i.e. bookstores selling feminist works and a feminist readership purchasing these books) and build credibility for their works. In spite of their differences, these partnerships facilitated a citational politics by increasing the visibility of lesbian content. Press Gang forged activist alliances with bookstore owners as a means of circulating their works in safe spaces that made their works more accessible to lesbian readers.

To create an international reading community, Press Gang solicited reviews from and purchased ads in ideologically aligned periodicals throughout North America. Reviews supported Press Gang by promoting their works alongside other radical ideas about gender and sexuality to a pre-established reading community. Like small presses, these periodicals, which were edited by a group of lesbian and heterosexual feminists, were literary "research sites" (Butling 33) with the goal

of articulating and promoting lesbian and women's liberation movements' concerns to a queer counterpublic (Irvine *Editing Modernity* 181; Morrisson 87; McLeod *LGLC: 1964-1975* 258). Because Press Gang did not have major distribution channels for its works, its collective purchased ad space in and solicited reviews from periodicals to create dialogue about their publications. For example, Press Gang purchased ad space in Iowa City's lesbian publication *Common/Lesbian Lives*, Berkeley's lesbian quarterly *Sinister Wisdom* and *Plexus*, Toronto's feminist periodical *Canadian Woman Studies*, and Wellesley's *The Women's Review of Books* (Kuhne "Letter to Yvette Perreault"). They also sent copies of *Stepping Out of Line* to Toronto's LGBT magazine *Rites*, Toronto's feminist newspaper *Broadside*, Canada's feminist magazine *Herizons*, and Vancouver's feminist newspaper *Kinesis*, which all published reviews about the work (Kuhne). In her review of *Stepping Out of Line* in *Kinesis*, Nicky Hood states that the workbook "works -- as a book verbally and graphically; as a workbook with lots of blank pages to scribble notes and ideas; and as a vehicle for social change, as anyone who reads it will better understand lesbianism" (23). Although she acknowledges some limitations, such as no overt dialogue about "issues of racism and disablism" (23), Hood frames Press Gang's publication as an essential guide for social change for members of its reading community. By soliciting reviews for their books as well as purchasing ad space from periodicals, Press Gang made their works accessible to an expanded readership across North America that identified with the radical discourses that these periodicals already promoted to their pre-existing and potential readers.

While they promoted their works in periodicals that reached a readership within and beyond Vancouver, Press Gang experimented with other low-cost and local promotional strategies. One branch of these efforts was the printing of poems on broadsheets that would be distributed for free at local events and book launches. In his work on women's modernist editing strategies, Dean Irvine argues, "the editors of Canadian little magazines initiated schemes [including broadsheets] ... in

order to gain public exposure, to attract more readers, and to increase circulation levels” (*Editing Modernity* 18). Whereas Irvine focuses on the work of little magazine editors, the same could be said of small-press editors, such as the collective members of Press Gang Publishers and Printers. For the collective, the practice of postering was a direct form of activism because posters could often be found in women’s and progressive bookstores (Hughes, Johnson, and Perreault 177).⁴⁵ Press Gang printed Chrystos’s poem “I’m not Your Princess,” published in *Not Vanishing*, on broadsheets and circulated them for free (Chrystos “Broadsheet”). The collective also used the broadsheet to publish Phoenix’s poem “this poem is about incest.” This strategy enabled Press Gang to promote and circulate their ideas in alternative formats that extended beyond the constraints of a book’s physical format. As Norma indicated in an interview, while “poems spend a lot of time in darkness lying flat,” broadsheets “that you would put on your wall ... remin[d] you that you are part of a political tradition that is seeping in those books on your shelf” (Norma). That is, broadsheets transform poems by enabling them to gain visibility in a different material form and become a political tool of resistance. Moreover, broadsheets cost much less than a standard book publication, and their material form offered an alternative way of increasing the visibility of its publications. This form of circulation reflected the anti-homophobic values of the collective, while increasing the visibility of lesbians’ concerns in more public spaces.

Amidst these multiple public forms of circulation, Press Gang developed more covert strategies to connect potential readers with their works. Due to the grave consequences of being

⁴⁵ One example is the poster titled “Class Consciousness” by Pat Smith, which was intended to evoke solidarity between women across social divides (Lynn Personal Interview). The poster portrays a woman leaning on a fence and looking away into the distance, while an inscription underneath her states: “Class Consciousness is knowing which side of the fence you’re on, and class analysis is knowing who is there with you” (Press Gang “Class Consciousness”). The poster suggests that being part of an activist collective creates solidarity between women across social divides.

publicly lesbian during the 1970s and 1980s (e.g., public harassment or job loss), some lesbian women did not want to be seen entering queer public spaces, such as lesbian-feminist bookstores. Press Gang tried to protect its readers from a homophobic society by enabling their readers to order books by mail. For instance, as Hughes, Johnson, and Perreault state, “[m]ost gay publications will be mailed out in non-identifiable wrappings; they can also be picked up directly at feminist, gay and progressive bookstores” (201). The discreet circulation of books by mail to readers through “non-identifiable wrappings” is a political challenge to a conservative society that has deployed police surveillance to identify and regulate any hints of sexual deviation. While the risk of receiving lesbian materials at the time held the potential risk of outing someone, the distribution of lesbian publications could have also put Press Gang at risk of being charged for distributing obscene materials.⁴⁶ Press Gang could have contested these charges, but the legal costs of doing so would have had economic ramifications for a press run by “political volunteers” and potentially harmed its readers. By developing a covert circulation strategy, such as a mailing service that promised discreet packaging, Press Gang circumvented the oppressive methods of queer surveillance and regulation established by the State.

Press Gang also promoted their works to members of reading communities that held anti-homophobic and anti-sexist values. The fostering of a sustained readership is essential to the development of radical dialogue about issues affecting women. As Hughes, Johnson, and Perreault state, “[s]ubscribing to lesbian and feminist publications is the best way to learn about the experiences, successes and failures of other lesbian communities, and groups” (171). For this reason, Press Gang’s collective members kept each other informed about existing and possible reading groups that had read or may be interested in their works. For instance, Anne Cameron’s *Daughters*

⁴⁶ See Janine Fuller and Stuart Blackley’s *Restricted Entry: Censorship on Trial*, which traces the many legal battles that Little Sister’s bookstore endured for distributing what some conservative members of our society deemed to be obscene materials.

of *Copper Woman* was a “Boulder Best Seller” (Author 03) and was discussed in Vancouver’s Women’s Book Club (Author 04).⁴⁷ This evidence demonstrates that Press Gang’s publication reached reading communities across North America (i.e. in both Boulder, Colorado and Vancouver, British Columbia). Along similar lines, Barbara Kuhne wrote to Yvonne Johnson, editor of *Stepping Out of Line*, notifying her that “There is a new lesbian/gay book club (mail order) just getting started. Don’t know if you would want to contact them but am enclosing a copy of their ad in case it will be useful” (“Letter to Yvonne”). Since *Stepping Out of Line* sought to educate lesbians and heterosexual women about issues affecting lesbians as well as empower them through dialogue, Kuhne’s letter suggests that book clubs were sites where radical lesbian dialogue could grow. Although there is no concrete evidence of the direct influence of this publication, the possible discussion of Press Gang’s work in a “lesbian/gay book club” suggests the effect that it could have on lesbian strangers. By deploying this strategy along with other radical forms of circulation, Press Gang made its works accessible to a lesbian readership during the 1970s-1980s.

4.5 From Stranger to Community Member: Press Gang’s Counterpublics and Community Involvement

Through the production and circulation of lesbian-feminist texts, Press Gang provided lesbian readers an alternative set of anti-homophobic and anti-sexist discourses. These readers may not have originally been acquainted with each other (Lynn Personal interview), yet their engagement with the works enabled them to become part of the press’s counterpublics. As Michael Warner argues, counterpublics are formed via the circulation of texts that address strangers, who hold a subordinate status in relation to members of dominant publics (“Publics and Counterpublics” 418, 420, 423-424). While queer people have been ostracized by a dominant public’s homophobia,

⁴⁷ As per SFU Archives, I am not allowed to use any referent that may disclose the anonymous authors’ name. For this reason, this author is indicated with the pseudonym “Author 03” and “Author 04.” For more information, see page 13 of this dissertation.

strangers who engage with and respond to anti-homophobic texts form a counterpublic (417).

Whereas Warner emphasizes that counterpublics are composed of strangers, throughout this section I expand his definition to consider the more personal relationships developed between members of the press and its counterpublics. I suggest that the social conditions of counterpublics, which Warner argues are predicated on the “strangeness” of its members, can be transformed when readers have the agency to develop their shared affinities into a physical community (e.g., strangers joining the press or becoming allies). Here, I will examine instances of these transformations, such as public gatherings and public reading talkbacks, while also evaluating how these events encouraged some readers to work alongside the press. In so doing, I will suggest that Press Gang contributed to ongoing lesbian liberation efforts by motivating some readers to participate in their social justice efforts.

At public readings, Press Gang fostered anti-homophobic dialogue between lesbian feminists, who may have previously been strangers. As Pauline Butling argues,

poems [within public readings] become linguistic and social *events*, rather than cultural objects designed for silent contemplation by the connoisseur or messages to decode by an individual in a private sanctuary. As such, the public reading contributes to a cultural/social nexus that strengthens communities and creates a *receptive environment* for experimental work. (37; latter emphasis mine)

That is, public readings transform the relationships between readers and texts. Within the aural and public context, a work-reader relationship changes because it becomes an author-work-audience relationship. At a literary event, the work is shared in an instance of time amongst multiple constituents, fosters critical public dialogue, and forms bonds between producers and readers/listeners. In the case of Press Gang’s public readings, the public sharing of works provided the collective opportunities to promote and sell the press’s books to first-time readers as well as to

put their activist concepts into practice. For instance, Press Gang organized a cross-Canada reading tour of Hughes, Johnson, and Perreault's *Stepping Out of Line*. Reflecting upon the success of one event in Toronto, Perreault told Press Gang editor Barbara Khune that they

sold more at the reading Nym and I did than we did at the International Gay Conference. I was very happy with the response to our reading—close to 50 women and very *productive discussion* afterwards—starting to feel as though these ideas (workshops and activism) will be useful here too. (Perreault; my emphasis)

Perreault highlights how the reading affected a sizeable group of women (i.e. 50 women) by pointing out that it enabled the editors to generate a “very productive discussion afterwards” and to “feel as though these ideas” were “useful” for the community. Through these public readings and talkbacks, Press Gang's collective fostered anti-homophobic dialogue in a public context that strengthened the relations between strangers, including lesbians, who engaged with the works. Thus, by sharing works through public readings and creating opportunities for public engagement, Press Gang contributed to the growth and strengthening of lesbian counterpublics and developed stronger relationships between readers and artists.

In Vancouver, Press Gang encouraged members of its counterpublic to self-organize and supported them by providing material resources for their political purposes. Specifically, the press established policies that opened their printing house to members of the public and offered them access to printing resources (Pollak “Press Gang Policy” 2). For instance, in the early 1980s, Pollak stated that “the press ha[d] been used as a meeting place/storage place for various politocal [sic] groups” (2) and the collective had encouraged groups to work in the physical space by completing their printing on their own at a lower cost (2). By offering these people a safe space to meet, to hold discussion groups, and to use printing tools, Press Gang developed partnerships with local activist organizations that supported its members and had a direct influence on the lives of Vancouver's

lesbian-feminist activists. While they occupied a shared space with Press Gang's collective and sometimes developed bonds with members of the press, these members of the counterpublic were not explicitly part of the collective and often remained strangers, who were part of the wider lesbian-feminist community in Vancouver (Norma). Through its production and circulation of radical materials, Press Gang gained the reputation of being a safe space for lesbians to meet and collaborate, while staying at an arm's length from the rest of the collective. Through its publishing and printing efforts in support of lesbians, Press Gang brought together lesbian activists in their space and provided them the necessary resources to advance their socio-political goals.

Some readers developed personal relationships with members of the press and supported each other's social justice efforts. As Evelyn, feminist cultural activist and former member of Vancouver's women's liberation movement during the 1970s-1980s, recalls, members of Press Gang's reading communities "were all part of the same community, the same idealism and the same politics. It was much more direct than a reading community."⁴⁸ Evelyn self-identified as a member of Vancouver's women's liberation movement, which "work[ed] for women's equality, women's power, and a world without sexism" and as an avid reader of the press's publications.⁴⁹ She developed bonds with members of Press Gang's collective by being part of early discussions on Persimmon Blackbridge and Sheila Gilhooly's "Still Sane" exhibition. She also knew Nym Hughes (editor of *Stepping Out of Line*) personally and, for this reason, read her co-edited book (Evelyn).

⁴⁸ Eva's name has been changed to protect her anonymity. As I explained on pages 13-14 of this dissertation, with the help of Baby Name Voyager, I chose a pseudonym with the same first letter of the person's real name that was common at the time that the interviewee was born.

⁴⁹ In her oral history, Evelyn fondly remembers reading Kathy Frank's *Anti-Psychiatry Bibliography and Resource Guide* (1974), Linda Briskin, Maureen FitzGerald, and Barbara Eidlitz's *The Day the Fairies Went on Strike!* (1981), Anne Cameron's *Daughters of Copper Woman* (1981), Nym Hughes, Yvonne Johnson, and Yvette Perreault's *Stepping Out of Line: A Workbook on Lesbianism/Feminism* (1982), Persimmon Blackbridge and Sheila Gilhooly's *Still Sane* (1985), and Helen Potrebek's *Sometimes They Sang* (1986). She also still owns copies of some of these works, and she continues to argue for their importance within her cultural activism (Evelyn).

Unlike Michael Warner's understanding of counterpublics as being predicated by what he calls an "environment of strangerhood" ("Publics and Counterpublics" 417) in which members are at an arm's length from each other (417), Evelyn's personal relationship with the press suggests that strangers within a queer counterpublic can develop closer relationships and potentially collaborate. As she states, "The women's movement, of which, in Vancouver, Press Gang was an important part, [as] a revolutionary movement [and that] [b]eing part of the women's movement (and part of the social justice movement) influenced my cultural practices. Press Gang was a part of that movement. We all influenced and supported each other." By forming bonds with members of the collective, Evelyn was both inspired by and directly contributed to Press Gang's cultural activist efforts, consequently forming a reciprocal activist relationship with the press that suggests the press's importance to Vancouver's women's and lesbian liberation movement.

However, Press Gang's publications did not go unchallenged. Readers pushed back against what they perceived to be more problematic publications that silenced some members of the community. The press's publication of white feminist Anne Cameron's *Daughters of Copper Woman* (1981) generated an important debate within Vancouver's women's community. Specifically, Cameron's text appropriated First Nations stories from the Pacific Northwest region, creating debate between white women and First Nations women about who has the right to speak for the community, and exposing differences amongst the two communities. For instance, Sto:Loh writer Lee Maracle critiqued Cameron's use and retelling of First Nations women's stories for her own benefit and asked her to move aside and allow Indigenous women to tell their own stories (The Telling It Book Collective 16). Maracle challenged an ongoing trend in publishing at the time that privileged mostly white women's stories, especially at the expense of more marginalized members of the women's community. In speaking about the social effect of *Daughters of Copper Woman*, Christine Kim argues:

debate around Cameron's text centred on the racism of feminist politics [as it pertained to white women appropriating First Nations stories]. This suggests that understandings of racism, feminism, and collaboration needed to be reconsidered. Feminist criticism is often equated with a politics of difference, but texts such as Cameron's question how such a sense of difference is to assert itself in feminist writing, reading, and evaluating, given that such work is also positioned within a larger literary field. (161)

That is, although feminist writing may have had a revolutionary goal of liberating women as a whole, the homogenization of this objective, which erases differences between white feminists and First Nations women, inevitably reproduced a racist social hierarchy. While Press Gang and Cameron made concerted efforts to donate the proceeds from the publication to First Nations organizations that accepted them (Author 03), the publication still made an important divide visible. The effects of this divide and this pushback may have also influenced the press's decision to publish Chrystos's *Not Vanishing* prior to its split in 1989. Overall, the work generated greater dialogue about issues of power and race within the women's community and provoked resistance against the work produced by Press Gang Publishers.

Some members of Press Gang's counterpublic joined the press's cultural activist efforts. As mentioned earlier, while counterpublics are predicated upon the members' relationships to each other as strangers, some members can develop closer relationships with members of the press. Some women who had previously heard of Press Gang through its publications sought out positions within the press to contribute to its social justice efforts. For example, Nancy Pollak stated that she was attracted to Press Gang because it "seemed like the right place to be: there were plenty of political ideas and political art circulating here; the work was very tangible and, excepting the low pay, it was refreshingly nontraditional [sic]" ("Talk at Press Gang's 20th Birth Celebration"). That is, Pollak was a member of Press Gang's counterpublic and discovered the press via the ideas that it published and

printed. Similarly, Paula stated that when she moved from Toronto where she had worked with Women's Press, she joined Press Gang's collective because of her familiarity with their work. Both women's desire to join Press Gang suggests that the collective attracted readers who were interested in supporting the press's larger cause and was able to grow as a result of its earlier publishing and printing efforts. Through their production and circulation of radical discourses, Press Gang enabled its queer counterpublic to form bonds with members of the press, to provoke challenges against the dominant strand of lesbian-feminist values, and ultimately enact social change for lesbians.

4.6 Final Thoughts

This chapter has demonstrated that Press Gang contributed to social change for lesbians in Vancouver by creating a space for lesbian feminists as well as publishing and circulating radical texts. Press Gang published radical works that were circulated and promoted through lesbian and feminist channels, such as journals, magazines, and book stores, and consequently contributed to the formation of lesbian counterpublics in Vancouver and beyond. Although some of the press's readers raised important issues about Press Gang's works (i.e., Anne Cameron's *Daughters of Copper Woman*) that unethically appropriated First Nations voices and produced a white-centric narrative, the collective was integral to advancing lesbian liberation efforts in the city. It offered its readers a physical space to make their experiences visible, to circulate their own ideas, to discuss the press's works, and to generate counterpublics. Though the small press went on to publish works until 2002, my delimitation of 1974-1989 highlights the collaborative nature of the printing and publishing sides as they worked in tandem.

Through this cultural activism, the press vindicated lesbians' desires and challenged symbolic and physical forms of violence. While scholars such as Christine Kim and Linda Christine Fox have demonstrated the importance of Press Gang to the women's movement and to queer cultural efforts in the 1990s, respectively, this chapter has addressed a significant gap in scholarship by highlighting

how Press Gang was an essential part of Vancouver's early lesbian-feminist liberation efforts.

Despite the press's predominantly white lesbian feminism during its first phase, the press was a key contributor to the growth of lesbian liberation movements in Vancouver. Moreover, by the end of the 1980s, the press began to publish work by women of colour. In my final chapter, I will examine the legacy of Press Gang's and blowoutment press's cultural activism.

Chapter 5: The Legacy of blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers (1983-2019)

Publics [...] lacking any institutional being, commence with the moment of attention, must continually predicate renewed attention, and cease to exist when attention is no longer predicated.

--Michael Warner "Publics and Counterpublics (Abbreviated Version)" (419)

What makes the archive a potential site of resistance is arguably not simply its mandate or its location but rather how it is deployed in the present.

--Kate Eichhorn *The Archival Turn in Feminism* (160)

5.1 Background

In the previous two chapters, I demonstrated that collective members of blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers contributed to lesbian and gay liberation movements in Vancouver from 1963-1989. In this chapter, I move beyond the scope of these chapters and consider how new methods of renewing public attention about these presses provide insight into their current socio-cultural importance. As interviews with members of the two presses show, the work completed by cultural activists in blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers continues to reverberate with them to this day. For example, as one member from blewointment press states, when he was associated with blewointment press, "no matter what I was doing in ... life ... I kept printing blewointment books" (Ben). As he suggests, Ben continues to remember the press fondly as an integral part of his literary career. Beyond their importance to members of the presses, blewointment's and Press Gang's publications remain relevant to members of LGBTQI2S+ communities because they have been preserved, shared, and circulated in new ways. Specifically, the two presses' works continue to be circulated through new channels such as Vancouver's only queer

library Out on the Shelves, university archives, and other small presses.⁵⁰ As these modes of circulation continue to renew public interest in the presses' works, new and older readers also continue to remember, discuss, and critique the contributions of these presses, highlighting their ongoing resonance with gay and feminist artists. Steve, for instance, remembers the work of bissett "because he stood for the entire counterculture ... He was excoriated by parliament, which made him even more established as this counterculture personage, and I mean the poetry has lots of fans." Likewise, Evelyn, an avid reader of Press Gang's publications, states that these works "nourished me, reminded me I wasn't alone. Those of us who grew up in the very heavy sexism and stereotypes of the 1950s and early 60s were fighting for our lives." As a whole, oral histories, new modes of circulation, and ongoing public responses shed light upon the ongoing influence of these presses.

The current state of LGBTQI2S+ activism in Vancouver provides some insight into the potential social importance of these earlier cultural activists' contributions. Although the efforts of Canada's earlier liberation activists led to the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1969 and to social policy changes that improved some queer people's lives, the discrimination, policing, and homophobia that LGBTQI2S+ people have experienced persist in more micro and intersectional ways. Specifically, the progress that earlier activists made has come at the expense of more marginalized people, who do not fit the concept of a "respectable" homosexual citizen, in favour of homosexual citizens who promote a nation's capitalist and imperialist agenda (Dryden and Lenon 5-6; Kinsman and Gentile xvii, 394; T. Warner 303). For this reason, the earlier goals of liberation activists, such as "fostering positive identit[ies], building community, and asserting visibility have not diminished" (T. Warner 305). Rather, black, Indigenous, and trans activists have turned to earlier intersectional grassroots efforts from the 1960s-1980s as models for organizing sites in which they

⁵⁰ Titles by Press Gang continue to be printed through former collective member Penny Goldsmith's Lazara Press. Titles include Marusya Bociurkiw's *The Woman Who Loved Airports* (1994) and Sheila Baxter's *Still Raising Hell: Poverty, Activism & Other True Stories* (1997).

can articulate anti-homophobic, anti-capitalist, and anti-racist concerns as well as challenge the dominance of white, upper-middle-class, gay men's interests. The effects of this movement can be seen in the organization of Black Lives Matter sit-ins at the 2017 Vancouver and Toronto Pride Parades as well as the 2018 Vancouver March on Pride, which challenge intersecting forms of oppression, such as homophobia, racism, and classism ("The March on Pride"). This turn to initial efforts suggests the importance of earlier liberation activists' contributions, including the work of members of blewointment and Press Gang, and the potential influence that they have recently had on the lives of LGBTQI2S+ people. With this context in mind, I ask throughout this chapter: what are the legacies of blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers; how do their works continue to be circulated; how do readers engage with them today; how does the public remember these presses; and how might narratives about these presses be further troubled within our current social context?

Scholars have brought critical attention to blewointment press's and Press Gang's cultural activism and celebrated their efforts as members of a 1960s-1980s socio-literary vanguard. For instance, in *Writing in Our Time*, Pauline Butling places blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers within a radical Canadian cultural movement occurring during the second half of the twentieth century. Butling argues that both blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers were part of "a virtual tidal wave of publishing [that] swept across" (32) Canada during the 1960s-1970s, which "sustained the social/material/discursive nexus that enable[d] radicality" (41). Similarly, Don McLeod's *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada: A Selected Annotated Chronology 1976-1981* situates the two presses within Canada's lesbian and gay liberation history. For instance, the text references blewointment's publication of bissett's *Pomes for Yoshi* (1977) and *th wind up tongue* (1976), Gwen Hauser's *Hands Get Lonely Sometimes* (1977), and Allan Rosen's *Michael* (1976), as well as Press Gang's publication of Nym Hughes, Yvonne Johnson, and Yvette Perreault's *Stepping Out of Line* (1981) as important moments during Canada's lesbian and gay liberation movements (4,

5, 93, 203, 606). Through these studies, Butling and McLeod have brought critical attention to these presses' contributions and argued for their current socio-cultural value. In so doing, their studies continue to draw attention to *blewointment* and *Press Gang*. As Michael Warner argues elsewhere, "[p]ublics ... lacking any institutional being, commence with the moment of attention, must continually predicate renewed attention, and cease to exist when attention is no longer predicated" ("Publics and Counterpublics" 419). That is, publics continue to exist because of an ongoing and renewed attention to earlier radical movements, including its more problematic facets (e.g., transphobia), which make them part of a current public debate. In their works, Butling and McLeod draw attention to the two presses, which may strengthen their legacies as members of Canada's lesbian and gay countercultures, and they establish the groundwork for this chapter's focus on the presses' contributions to Vancouver's LGBTQI2S+ social justice efforts.

This chapter builds on Butling's and McLeod's scholarship while echoing and engaging with research questions posed by recent scholars of queer as well as feminist archives and cultural memory. I focus on the ways that members of the presses remember their earlier cultural activist efforts, how their works continue to be circulated, and how members of the public have more recently responded to them. Specifically, by considering their current modes of production, circulation, and reception, I reveal how they remain relevant and important within our current social climate. Of course, while doing so, I am also contributing to their legacies by drawing attention to their contributions. For instance, the oral histories that I produced with members of the collectives during my research for this dissertation illustrate and contribute to the legacies of the presses. As I will show, oral histories resurface details about cultural activists' lived experiences when they formed radical communities, produced and circulated books, and developed relationships with readers. The oral histories also demonstrate how the cultural activists currently view some of the ongoing debates within LGBTQI2S+ communities. The two presses' materials have also been

reshaped through new methods of circulation (i.e. new publication imprints, queer libraries, and university archives) that enable an ongoing engagement with the works beyond the presses' initial periods of production. Through these new channels, the two presses' works continue to address different publics, whose interests and values share affinities with the presses' works. These new modes of circulation have enabled older and newer readers to engage with work by these presses, to celebrate them (e.g., public memorials), to propose their destruction (e.g., proposed book burnings), to mourn their losses, and to feel supported as LGBTQI2S+ readers overcoming homophobic and anti-queer discrimination. Earlier in this thesis, I focused on the work completed during the presses' periods of production, which intersected with early lesbian and gay liberation movements. While current LGBTQI2S+ activists face new challenges, they may benefit from the strategies developed by earlier cultural activists working at *blewointment* and *Press Gang*, who also promoted anti-homophobic, anti-racist, and anti-sexist values. Yet, they may also push against the more problematic aspects of the presses. Thus, I will contend that oral histories by members of the presses, new modes of circulation, as well as more recent and ongoing responses to these publications highlight *blewointment* press's and *Press Gang*'s legacies as contributors to LGBTQI2S+ social justice efforts in Vancouver.

5.2 Heard and Remembered: Producing Lesbian and Gay Oral Histories

As current scholars of LGBT histories and members of LGBTQI2S+ communities assert, now is an opportune time to return to the forgotten histories of earlier lesbian and gay liberation activists.⁵¹

⁵¹ Of late, Canadian scholars have increasingly implemented digital technologies in their research practices to record the histories of ageing queer people (see *Qmunitys* at Simon Fraser University), as well as feminist writers (see Deanna Fong's and Karis Shearer's article "Gender, Affective Labour, and Community-Building Through Literary Audio Artifacts"). Also, see current activist efforts, such as *March on Pride*, which contest the infiltration of capitalism into *Pride* events, and turn to earlier models of lesbian and gay liberation activism to revolutionize queer activism.

Echoing this sentiment, one member of Press Gang noted in an email from February 2017: “I think it's great that there's interest in that period of Vancouver's history, because it was an intensely political and activist time. A bit like what we're about to enter now, I suspect” (Lynn “Press Gang”). This lesbian cultural activist was cognizant of the importance of sharing her lived experience amidst protests at Pride events and the election of President Donald Trump, whose administration would soon implement homophobic and transphobic social policies.⁵² I recorded aging activists’ oral histories to better understand how they may shed light on the commonalities between current and past efforts, concerns, and lived experiences and renew interest in their histories. As feminist and queer scholars have demonstrated, oral histories “mak[e] available in accessible forms the words of women who had previously been silenced or ignored” (Gluck and Patai 2), “disrupt [heteronormative] monologues” (Kinsman and Gentile 14), and “open up spaces for critical inquiry” (14). These histories, as I will discuss below, brought to the forefront memories of kinship, cultural activist labour, and political activism, while revealing that there are some disjunctions between aging and younger activists’ perspectives about core concerns. These oral histories, I suggest, form what Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez call “bodies of evidence” (1). As Boyd and Ramírez argue, bodies of evidence consist of “[c]losely mined and diligently listened to, oral histories—including their many silences—[which] can bring personal affect, individual significance, and personal memory to bear especially on sensitive themes and experiences such as sexual consciousness, gender identity, and sex acts” (17). By hearing and recording the histories of cultural activists from blewointment and Press Gang, interviewees and I produced bodies of evidence that discuss the importance of radical art, community building, and transgenerational activism,

⁵² For instance, in 2018, Trump’s administration reversed an anti-discrimination policy for trans workers, and it issued a religious liberty policy allowing people to discriminate against LGBTQ2+ people based on religious beliefs (“Donald Trump”).

consequently challenging the potential erasure of their queer experiences. These oral histories, as I will contend, are essential for voicing and documenting the social experiences of queer cultural activists that disrupt gender and sexual power hierarchies.

In their oral histories, members of *blewointment* and *Press Gang* discussed their personal memories of the material conditions of the presses and why these artistic spaces provided unique opportunities to express themselves as artists, which were limited at the time. Although lesbians and gay men have emphasized the limited social and cultural space available to them during the 1960s to the 1980s, members of *blewointment* and *Press Gang* worked in DIY environments to advance their cultural activisms. In their oral histories, the narrators highlighted their dedication to and the labour involved in producing books, the working conditions of the presses, and the sales skills required to promote their works to a reading public. These discussions did not focus explicitly on sexuality. However, they did centre on the labour of lesbian and gay people. For instance, Ben remembered that *blewointment* press “offered ... tons of opportunities” to publish as members of the collective would “print it and we would collate it and we would distribute it.” He notes as a key example that writers like *bissett* “published with *blewointment* every year.” Considering the lack of social and literary space given to gay people at the time, Ben’s oral history demonstrates that this independent approach to producing and circulating books gave the collective the agency to publish these books on a yearly basis.

Similarly, in her oral history, *Press Gang*’s *Lynn* reflected upon the feeling that, at *Press Gang*, “it felt like you could actually do things that would change society. Having access to printing equipment and being able to print things, and not having to rely on anyone else.” She also elaborated upon the press’s material conditions, stating “I always really enjoyed handling the different types of papers, the different aspects. The smell of the ink ... We didn’t have any proper ventilation and we were working with solvents. It wasn’t the healthiest of environments and plus there was the noise of

the machines” (Lynn Personal interview). Lynn’s oral history demonstrates not only the feeling of possibility for social change at the press but also her memories of the pleasures and difficulties of working in this tangible environment. Her oral history suggests that, in spite of unhealthy working conditions, Press Gang provided her a space of production that was not widely available at the time, which brought her joy because she could be part of an independent collective working towards social change. On the selling side, Press Gang’s Norma stated, “one of my favorite early memories in the first two years of being involved with Press Gang was going on a sales trip in BC with Penny Goldsmith. We grabbed a bunch of books, put them in the car, and drove across BC (Kootenays and the Okanagan) and stopped at all the bookstores” (Norma) where they promoted the press’s spring catalogue and works by “other feminist publishers” (Norma). I suggest that what Lynn and Norma describe in their oral histories is the materiality of Press Gang as a DIY publishing venture, as they were heavily involved in the production and dissemination of their works. Specifically, these oral histories demonstrate that collective members remember the lived experiences of producing books independently (Lynn’s description of the smell of ink, paper, and ventilation) and of travelling extensively to sell the works to feminist readers (Norma’s road trips throughout British Columbia). Members of the collective were directly involved in strengthening their communities as they self-organized, worked directly with the materials, and collaborated with other queer cultural activists, while advancing their social justice efforts.

Members from both presses also remembered their relationship to organized political activism at the time. Specifically, Ben and Bernard at blewointment constructed themselves as outsiders to gay liberation political organizations.⁵³ Ben remembered attending protests and participating in Pride events, but he was not part of any political organizations. Similarly, Bernard

⁵³ Bernard’s name has been changed to protect his anonymity. As I explained on pages 13-14 of this dissertation, with the help of Baby Name Voyager, I chose a pseudonym with the same first letter of the person’s real name that was common at the time that the interviewee was born.

remembers being focused on his cultural work, which was political in nature because it was written from a gay perspective and made his sexuality an essential component of his art. Steve, a previous member of Gay Liberation Front, a gay political organization in Vancouver, explained that blewointment's bissett was not associated with political organizations and shed some light on why he may not have wanted to participate in political organizations. Steve recalled that "GATE was led by a guy named Maurice Flood who was a pretty hardcore Trotskyist and very difficult to deal with. He was very impatient with the undisciplined people in the Gay Liberation Front, which would have been me." Steve suggested that bissett and Flood lived very different gay lives. As he asked, "would Maurice Flood and bill bissett [have] gotten anything out of each other, I don't know." That is, bissett and Flood did not share the same activist strategies for overcoming homosexual invisibility, which may explain why the former would not have wanted to be a part of a political activist organization. Conversely, the women of Press Gang constructed themselves as active political participants who were engaged in myriad political projects. For instance, Lynn remembered: "I was living in a communal house, I was active in the co-op movement, and I was part of a group that set up CC Credit Union. I felt like my whole life really was engaged in progressive stuff, which was great" (Personal interview). For Norma, apart from being involved with Press Gang, "my other involvements were with the women's theatre group called 'Acting Up,' the organization of International Women's Day. I would be at the gay pride and women's marches." These histories show that members of blewointment and Press Gang saw themselves first and foremost as cultural activists, but that they were responsive to the ongoing political activism at the time.

Members of the presses also emphasized the importance of social relationships that grounded their work. In remembering these relationships and the names of other presses' contributors, these cultural activists participate in a new form of queer activism. While I indicated in Chapters 2 and 3 that the intimate bonds built between members of the presses were essential to overcoming their

isolation as queer people at the time, some of these bonds continue to be important to this day. For instance, speaking about her friendships with other members of Press Gang, Lynn, a lesbian member of the collective indicated that she had kept in touch with Sara, who, as I mentioned in Chapter 4, had taught her how to use the printing machines (Lynn Personal interview). Lynn stated, “I still feel connected to those women. You can’t erase that shared experience. We all went through it, you know. It forms something, it’s like a touchstone, it has definitely been a touchstone in my life” (Personal interview). This cultural activist’s oral history affirms the importance of her strong bonds with other collective members, which, as she suggests, have persisted since the press’s closure because they are grounded in their shared creative practices and life experiences. Similarly, blewointment collective members Ben and Bernard continue to stay in touch and spend time together when they are in their respective hometowns (Ben; Bernard), which suggests that the importance of their friendship supersedes their earlier collaborative relationships. By maintaining these bonds, these cultural activists continue the original work of the presses and preserve their legacies as spaces for communities that share anti-homophobic values. Beyond maintaining these relationships and explicitly referring to them in their oral histories, the act of directly mentioning the names of other collective members is itself a form of activism. Instead of erasing and forgetting the contributions of other queer cultural activists, cultural activists record and preserve their names and solidify their importance to Vancouver’s queer history.

Although members of the presses spoke to the more positive elements of their experiences as members of lesbian and gay collectives, each oral history also spoke to the systemic oppression that individual members of the press had experienced. While men from blewointment press spoke about individuals’ experiences with public surveillance and social discrimination, the women of Press Gang focused on the collective experience of existing at the margins of a heteronormative society. For instance, in speaking about bissett’s issues with the police, Ben recalled that bissett was “living

secretly with Bertrand [Lachance] and Michael [Rosen] because the police and members of parliament were always after [him] and [he] was being tailed everywhere [he] went.” Similarly, Bernard recalls a visit to Vancouver in October 1970 during which the police entered his hotel room to look for bombs in the middle of the night (Bernard). The front desk had called the police because he was Québécois and possibly gay (Bernard). Bernard has suspected that it was related to the events of the October Crisis underway in Québec at the time (Bernard).⁵⁴ While Ben’s and Bernard’s oral histories highlighted bissett’s and Bernard’s experiences with the police, members of Press Gang emphasized their general sense of being marginalized as members of a lesbian-feminist organization. For instance, Norma stated that “there wasn’t a sense of oppression, other than being a lesbian feminist organization operating in the world that we live in” (Norma). These oral histories, which speak in the current moment about the feeling of being surveilled, questioned, and socially marginalized, form bodies of evidence that demonstrate how these earlier experiences inform their current lives as lesbians and gay men. They also demonstrate that these systemic forms of oppression continue to reverberate with members of both presses. These experiences are not entirely different from those of more marginalized members of today’s LGBTQI2S+ communities, who continue to be seen in opposition to the nation’s heteronormative values and remain susceptible to being surveilled, tracked, and targeted (Kinsman and Gentile 432). Through the sharing of these experiences, the interviewees create opportunities for making visible the connections between earlier and current forms of oppression affecting older and younger members of LGBTQI2S+ communities.

The majority of these oral histories focused on collective members’ experiences during the 1960s to the 1980s, yet some interviewees’ comments on ongoing social issues, such as censorship

⁵⁴ The October Crisis was sparked by the Front Liberal Québécois, a Québécois terrorist organization, when they kidnapped James Cross, the British Trade Commissioner in Montréal, on October 5, 1970, and kidnapped and killed the Minister of Immigration and Minister of Labour Pierre Laporte on October 10th and October 17th, 1970 (Smith). As a result of these terrorist acts, Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau invoked the War Measures Act (Smith).

and cultural appropriation, are reminiscent of earlier disjunctions between collective values and practices. Earlier in this dissertation, I argued that blewointment and Press Gang were grounded in anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, and anti-racist values. However, as I showed, some poems published by blewointment (e.g., Bertrand Lachance's "th whores of granville street") could be read as a form of appropriation. Similarly, Press Gang's publication of Anne Cameron's *Daughters of Copper Woman* was accused of occupying the limited cultural space available for First Nations women. Amongst the oral histories, Bernard, a white gay male member of blewointment press, discussed his fear that critiques of cultural appropriation overlap with a new form of censorship. Specifically, while he mentioned that he had recently fought for better representation of First Nations people on the screen by hiring First Nations actors, Bernard discussed what he viewed as the censorship of playwright Robert Lepage, who was accused of cultural appropriation in 2018. Bernard stated: "for me, the concept of cultural appropriation does not interest me. I do not know what it can do. All of art is a disruption of boundaries between different groups of people. Of course, First Nations people should have their own voices, but we can't censor theatre for instance" because "the last time this happened was in the 1960s with the Catholic Church." Censorship is of course a sensitive and complicated issue because it was deployed by members of the State (e.g., Customs Officers) during the Cold War to limit the visibility of queer experiences and perspectives, which lesbian and gay liberation activists challenged to increase the visibility of homosexuality. However, this is very different from cultural appropriation, which involves the silencing and passive colonization of members of marginalized communities. In this oral history though, the cultural activist seems to conflate discussions about cultural appropriation with the censorship of artists. In so doing, he is arguably upholding an anti-censorship stance to support the appropriation of other marginalized groups' cultures. Thus, this oral history reveals a disjunction between the anti-censorship ideals of the collective and their actions and beliefs, which complicates the legacy of the press's contributions

to LGBTQI2S+ social justice efforts. Moreover, this artist's privileged perspective about cultural production and activism troubles the legacy of blewointment's social ideals.

Though the sharing of past experiences helps shape a better understanding of lesbian and gay liberation cultural activism in Vancouver, oral histories reveal the difficulties of reconstructing the past through a contemporary set of discourses. As Michel Foucault argues in *The Order of Things*, it is impossible to imagine a new way of thinking at a time when that way of thinking or the language to support it did not exist and only began many years later (89). Indeed, due to the development of queer and intersectional discourses, some interviewees were able to critique their earlier experiences with language that they did not previously have. At Press Gang, the collective was not self-aware of racist structures. When reflecting upon the absence of First Nations women at the press at the end of the 1970s, Norma remembered that "everybody at the press was white, we didn't sit around saying we're all white, but we would have known without really talking about it" (Norma). Press Gang, as Norma recalled, developed a "maturing understanding" of racism by increasingly holding direct conversations about racism within the press and deciding to provide space for previously unheard voices. In her oral history, Norma demonstrates a greater ability to acknowledge and analyze these issues. As these oral histories show, members of Press Gang's collective have had to work on developing stronger self-critical perspectives to critique the limitations in their work on homophobia and racism. Ultimately, oral histories produced with members of blewointment and Press Gang form bodies of evidence that challenge the erasure of queer people by bearing witness to, recording, valorizing, preserving, and circulating queer thematic concerns, while demonstrating some of the limitations of their social justice efforts.

5.3 Queer Sites of Potential Encounter

So far, I have examined the ways that blewointment's and Press Gang's cultural activists continue to remember their earlier experiences and produce oral histories about them. Here, I turn

my attention to the methodologies deployed to preserve, organize, and share earlier materials of these inactive collectives. Whereas the circulation of these works was often subject to arrests during the 1960s-1980s, such as banning of radical sexual materials (T. Warner 125), blewointment's and Press Gang's works now circulate publicly, sometimes with the support of public funding. Since their closure, members of the public have developed methods of renewing attention on these presses' works. For instance, archivists and social activists have organized the presses' materials in university and alternative archives, new presses have re-published the books under new imprints, members of the collectives continue to informally share personal materials, small and independent used bookstore owners resell the presses' books, and activists have produced queer libraries containing works by these presses. These new ways of circulating the presses' works enable reading publics to persist, as it allows the works to "circulate through time" and "become the basis for further representations" (M. Warner "Publics and Counterpublics" 422). Yet, the materials from blewointment's and Press Gang's collectives gain new discursive meanings when they are organized through new modes of preservation and circulation. As Kate Eichhorn argues in her examination of the relationship between archives and feminism within the current neoliberal period,

as a site of preservation (a place to house traces of the *past*), feminist scholars, cultural workers, librarians, and archivists born during and after the rise of the second wave feminist movement are seizing the archive as an apparatus to legitimize new forms of knowledge and cultural production in an economically and politically precarious *present*. (4)

Though she focuses on feminism, Eichhorn's point encourages me to ask the following: how might a work, which was previously the source of debate in the House of Commons, gain new discursive meaning within a publicly funded institution such as a university archive? Similarly, how does a gay work, which was originally sold during Vancouver's gay liberation movement, be read differently when it is made available in a public queer library for younger LGBTQI2S+ readers? How do these

sites “legitimize new forms of knowledge and cultural production”? If reading publics exist through the circulation of discourses that “continually predicate renewed attention” (M. Warner 419), it is worth examining how the presses’ earlier materials continue to be publicly circulated. For instance, it is necessary to interrogate how previously radical cultural artifacts may have been incorporated into more traditional university archives. In the following, I consider the new material conditions of these sites of encounter and determine how they transform the ways that readers can engage with these works. In doing so, I suggest that new modes of circulation renew interest in these presses’ works, transform their discursive meaning, and reflect a shift in the public’s values, while creating new opportunities for engagement.

Following their closure, *blewointment* and *Press Gang* were sold to Nightwood Editions and Raincoast books, respectively. Nightwood Editions and Raincoast Books continue the earlier work of the older presses by publishing new books under new imprints and republishing old titles, while promoting radical values. Specifically, in 1983 bissett sold *blewointment* to David Lee and Maureen Cochrane in Ontario, who renamed it Nightwood Editions and published “a wide assortment of titles, in subjects as diverse as jazz music, poetry, fiction and film” (“About Us”). In 2005, Nightwood Editions launched a *blewointment* imprint, which published books that “maintain bissett’s original commitment to grassroots and innovative poetry” (“About Us”). Although the imprint does not publish original material from *blewointment*, it does continue its earlier legacy. As Michelle Elrick states: “It is an honour to see my work [*then/again* (2017)] published under such a banner, to be part of this legacy, and to settle this strange book in the right home” (“*then/again* from Nightwood Editions”). Elrick here seems to suggest that her work is a continuation of the radical work begun by *blewointment* press, while asserting the importance of being able to contribute to the press’s legacy. Similarly, following the closure of *Press Gang* in 2002, Raincoast Books, which bought *Press Gang* (“*Press Gang Publishers*”), continued to distribute “key titles from *Press Gang Publishers*”

(“Raincoast Books Adds Nathan Sellyn”). For instance, at first, it continued to print and sell copies of Susan Stewart, Persimmon Blackbridge, and Lizard Jones’s lesbian text *Her Tongue on My Theory: Images, Essays, and Fantasies* (1994) under the Press Gang imprint.⁵⁵ However, since then, it has stopped printing many of Press Gang’s titles. At the moment, Raincoast Books only prints Lee Maracle’s *I Am Woman*. By distributing this work, Raincoast Books continues Press Gang’s legacy. Raincoast not only makes this publication from Press Gang available to the public beyond the press’s closure but also promotes the values of the lesbian-feminist collective. For instance, the following motto is appended at the end of Maracle’s *I Am Woman*: “Press Gang Publishers is committed to producing quality books with social and literary merit. We give priority to Canadian women’s work and include writing by lesbian and by women from diverse cultural and class backgrounds” (*I Am Woman*). By distributing books that contain this motto, Raincoast Books preserves the older press’s values and reminds readers that the work is important for cultural activism. Thus, these presses continue the earlier work of blewointment and Press Gang, make their work accessible to readers in new ways, and demonstrate their historical importance to literary communities.

Used bookstores throughout Vancouver also make copies of the press’s books available to the public by selling them. However, the relationship between sellers and the texts has changed. In Chapters 2 and 3, I indicated that independent bookstores, such as Duthie’s and Little Sister’s, were essential to supporting small presses’ efforts of sharing radical works with lesbian and gay readers. In contrast, used bookstore owners often purchase these works and resell them as rare commodities to the reading public. For instance, while blewointment originally printed limited copies of its

⁵⁵ In addition to these titles, the list of Press Gang titles that Raincoast Books originally distributed include: Janine Fuller and Stuart Blackley’s *Restricted Entry: Censorship on Trial*, the Telling It Collective’s *Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures*, Kiss & Tell’s *Drawing the Line: Lesbian Sexual Politics on the Wall*, and Lee Maracle’s *Sojourners and Sundogs*.

publications and sold them at low costs, copies of *blewointment* publications, such as *blewointment* magazine special issues, now cost at least five times the original cost of the books at Pulpfiction Books in Vancouver. At the moment of writing this dissertation, the price of a copy of *blewointment*'s *what isint tantrik speshul* (1973), which originally cost \$5 CAD (Ben), is \$45 USD on Abe books ("what isint tantrik – search").⁵⁶ This shift in book value within the literary market place is significant because these works have previously been deemed obscene or uninteresting to the masses, yet culturally important and scarce because of their limited printing. Arguably, these works are no longer perceived as obscene materials, but are now perceived on the literary market as rare commodities that reflect a higher amount of economic and cultural value. In his work examining the socially constructed categories of high and low art, Pierre Bourdieu argues that "The network [of cultural production] has its ultimate source in the opposition between the 'élite' of the dominant and the 'mass' of the dominated, a contingent, disorganized multiplicity, interchangeable and innumerable, existing only statistically" (Bourdieu *Distinction* 468). While they may have previously been deemed low art by the cultural elite and the reading masses, the value of works by *blewointment* has reached the opposite pole, as the price suggests that they have become high or rare art. The contrast between how these works were previously sold (i.e. at low costs with a focus on being circulated amongst radical readers) and how they are currently being sold (higher cost commodities) suggests that the works play a different role in Vancouver's and the wider literary market place. As rare and used books, they suggest that *blewointment* press's works are no longer intended to address the marginalized reading communities that the presses originally targeted, but instead they are intended for readers who have access to a higher income to purchase these copies. That is, the exchange value of these works has shifted away from being limited publications sold at a

⁵⁶ According to the Bank of Canada, with the rate of inflation *what isint tantrik speshul* would cost \$29.44 CAD today.

low cost for the sake of creating a reading community to becoming rare publications sold at a higher cost for the sake of acquiring a piece of rare literature that signals one's understanding of the work's cultural value. Copies of these works sold by used bookstores transform the cultural value of these presses' publications by attributing them a higher cultural value.

Nevertheless, the presses' original values continue today through their collectives' practices, such as valuing their publications as gifts to be shared with members of the community. Earlier in this dissertation, I demonstrated that members of both presses participated in gift economies that enabled them to create stronger literary and activist communities. As previously discussed, Pauline Butling argues that a gift economy is focused on the giving away of materials for non-economic means, which challenges the logic of the literary market place that values "tidily packaged, marketable commodities" (62). In her analysis, Butling points to Canadian poet bpNichol's efforts, which valued "get[ting] the news out, get[ting] as many poets as possible into print, and reach[ing] as many readers as possible" (66), while receiving cultural recognition in return (62). Although I am removed from *blewointment*'s original community, bissett has chosen to support this dissertation by giving me 40 copies of rare *blewointment* press books. Similarly, Nancy Pollak and Penny Goldsmith separately offered me access to their respective personal archives of rare Press Gang materials. These acts are similar to the original practices that the small press collectives established in the 1960s-1980s, but for slightly different purposes. These cultural activists continue to give copies of rare books and materials for free, which once again circumvents traditional channels of circulation in the literary marketplace (e.g., bookstores). However, these practices may no longer be for the sole purpose of creating or expanding a reading community. Instead, by giving these materials to a researcher, these cultural activists may contribute to their own cultural legacy. As a researcher, I recognize that my research is indebted to their gifts, as they have enabled me to engage with, analyze, discuss, and generate interest in their works. Moreover, through this dissertation, I

have contributed to their legacy by discussing their work and I have actively critiqued their legacy by addressing the presses' shortcomings. Yet, based on my experience as a researcher, these artists do not receive economic capital in exchange for their gifts. Rather, they renew public interest in their original works and increase their cultural capital and legacy within Vancouver's literary history.

University archives also make these small presses' materials available to researchers and the wider public. Specifically, York University's Clara Thomas Special Collections have housed the bill bissett fonds since 1976, which contain original monographs, correspondence, political activist posters, and financial papers that visitors of the archive can access and learn from. At the same time as Earle Birney was encouraging bissett to sell his materials to the university, archivists at York were organizing this acquisition as part of a larger project of producing and legitimizing Canadian Literature as a literary institution.⁵⁷ As Ruth Panofsky and Michael Moir argue, "Donations [of fonds] are not only financial exchanges; they also mark an author's standing within the Canadian literary community. Donors recognize that literary papers can support the critical study of the creative process and the business of writing and publishing" (175). The archiving of work by living Canadian authors at York University coincided with the development of Canadian Literature courses, which was led by faculty members such as Clara Thomas (Panofsky and Moir 176). The acquisition of bissett's work in 1976, when he was considered a polarizing cultural figure (see my discussion of the House of Commons debate in Chapter 3), demonstrates that his work was already gaining institutional credibility in spite of his marginalized position within the general public. In

⁵⁷ To understand this shift in archival practices in Canada, it is worth turning to Stephen Cain's work on the development of archival collections by Anansi Press and Coach House Books. Cain argues that, whereas Margaret Atwood "has felt that her papers relating to Anansi are of such significance ... that they are sealed until 2035" (83), "the Coach House papers at the National Library were sold in complete disarray" (83) and "parody the entire attempt to historicize or preserve the activities of the press" (83). To add, Lorna Knight notes that the Coach House fonds do not provide "its acquisition policies, editorial decisions, production styles, sales and successes, and its overall historical development" (34).

spite of the poet's polemical position within Canada at the time, bissett's fonds at York are an example of the cultural legitimization of his work as a major literary figure within the growing institution of Canadian Literature. Moreover, York was challenging homophobic social values by deeming his materials worthy of preservation and actively making them available to the general public at a publicly funded institution. Archivists at York University were performing a radical social justice act by legitimizing bissett's work at a point in time when he would still have been considered a countercultural figure and was socially marginalized for being gay. This archive in turn has contributed to bissett's legacy as an important gay cultural figure within Canadian literature.

Though blewointment materials were being archived at York in the midst of gay liberation efforts, Press Gang materials were archived following the closure of the press in the mid 2000s. The Press Gang Publishers and Printers fonds at Simon Fraser University (hereafter SFU) form a lesbian-feminist archive. In her work on the feminist archive, Eichhorn argues that "[a] turn toward the archive is not a turn toward the past but rather an essential way of understanding and imagining other ways to live in the present" (9). In addition to producing new ways of imagining society in the present, the archive can also serve the purpose of preserving one's history. In her examination of the development of the Jane Rule archive at UBC, Linda M. Morra discusses the radical act of producing and safe-keeping a lesbian-feminist archive. Rule, who was a contemporary lesbian writer from British Columbia, produced an archive in which "The materials therein could further mobilize ideas she so vocally espoused during her lifetime; as these materials bear witness to her efforts to create legal and imaginative space for the queer and feminist communities, the archive itself further protects and authorizes those efforts and that space" (110). In the case of Press Gang's lesbian-feminist archive at SFU, Paula states that the collective sought to preserve their materials and make them available to future researchers (Paula), suggesting that the materials would offer new research benefits. The archive consists of correspondence, monographs, catalogues, posters, and other related

materials documenting the lived experiences of lesbian feminists, resulting from a collective effort by members of the press as well as the university. With the support of SFU archivists, Frances Fournier, Enid Britt, and Richard Dancy, members of the press collected the materials and donated them to SFU. Much like the radical work completed by Rule, Press Gang's donation of their fonds is an extension of their radical cultural activism because they produced a textual space representing the experiences and perspectives of lesbian feminists. That is, as part of their cultural activism, they have turned to the past to make lesbianism visible in the present and generate the potential for future encounters. Although the historical conditions giving rise to this fonds are different from those grounding Bill Bissett's fonds, the work of Press Gang's collective demonstrates that they valued their history, and they sought to preserve materials documenting the lives of some of Vancouver's lesbian feminists, women of colour, and First Nations writers, who continue to be marginalized today, in order to legitimize their lived experiences.

Though the collection preserves the press's history and creates the possibility for new knowledge to emerge, the Press Gang Publishers and Printers fonds at SFU maintains the silence of some more marginalized members of the press. In their efforts to protect the identities of some of the members of the collective, SFU's archivists have created barriers to access the materials in the Press Gang fonds. Specifically, to access these materials, one must go through a rigorous ethics application and respect the rules established by the archivists. As Canadian literary scholar Andrea Beverley argues in her analysis of silence in the archive in relation to the anonymity of one member of the "Telling It" conference, "the rules governing access to archival fonds shaped the way in which I read their content. Subsequently, I made decisions about the extent to which that content would shape my understanding and presentation of Telling It" (160). In the case of this dissertation, when I kept women's names anonymous in Chapter 4, such as the name of a woman of colour who critiqued the whiteness of the press, I safeguarded the person's identity and affirmed their right to remain

anonymous. Doing so protects the writer from any possible social repercussions that could arise from a reader learning about their critique of the collective in this dissertation. Although ethical restrictions limiting the ways that archival materials can be accessed and discussed are important, especially because they protect many of the artists represented in the archive continue to be marginalized today, they also maintain silences and limit the critique that I can produce about some of the racist issues at the press. While some women sought to preserve and share their content with the public, other members have chosen to remain anonymous. As a researcher engaging with the content in the archive, I have gained knowledge of the identities of artists and members of the wider community, yet I cannot provide these specific details. As this case shows, Press Gang's lesbian-feminist archive is a site of contestation.

Beyond used bookstores, personal gifts, and university archives, blewointment press's and Press Gang Publishers's works continue to be circulated to members of Vancouver's LGBT2QIA+ communities in radical literary spaces. Specifically, Vancouver's Out on the Shelves Library at UBC makes books by blewointment press, bissett, and Press Gang Publishers available to LGBT2QIA+ readers for consultation.⁵⁸ As Vancouver's only self-identified LGBT2QIA+ library, Out on the Shelves seeks to "foster a free, accessible, and safe space for LGBT2QIA+ people and their allies to discover and share stories and resources centering on [their] experiences" ("Out on the Shelves - About"). Moreover, it places emphasis on recognizing the intersections of people across "multiple communities and identities" (Out on the Shelves "Out on the Shelves - About"). Under the auspices of this library, the two presses' works are re-contextualized by the current needs and concerns of LGBT2QIA+ people. As the library states, it seeks to "empower and support [readers] by providing

⁵⁸ Out on the Shelves at UBC was started by members of Vancouver's lesbian and gay communities, including volunteers, librarians, and librarians in training, during the 1980s. Publications include two poetry collections by bill bissett (one by Talonbooks and one by blewointment) as well as twenty-six books by Press Gang.

access to materials that reflect their realities” (Out on the Shelves “Mission”). Queer libraries, which acquire copies of these presses’ books, make them available for circulation to a new queer readership and create the potential for renewed engagement. By being included in this library, blewointment press’s and Press Gang’s works potentially gain a new readership amongst contemporary readers, who are interested in the work of earlier cultural activists. Though the social contexts of lesbian and gay liberation movements (1960s-1980s) and today’s context are historically different, homophobia, anti-queer violence, and social discrimination based on sexuality, gender, and race persist in a heteronormative society. Out on the Shelves continues blewointment’s and Press Gang’s legacies by making their books available, thereby increasing the visibility of radical sexual identities and teaching readers about lesbian and gay histories. For this reason, I claim that, by being included in this library, the two presses’ earlier publishing goals continue in this new literary space: their books help readers become empowered and feel as though they are part of a reading community.

5.4 From Public Memorials to Public Burnings: How the Public Remembers

In the previous chapters, I demonstrated the influence of blewointment and Press Gang on members of counterpublics. Here I look at their influences beyond the periods that I previously covered: 1983 (blewointment) and 1989 (Press Gang). Members of the public have celebrated and contested the legacies of blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers. These responses form a spectrum that ranges from the very positive to the very critical. On the celebratory end, the City of Vancouver created two public memorials for bissett in the late 2000s and 2018. In 2012, the queer daily periodical *Xtra* included the beginning of Press Gang Publishers on their list of lesbian milestones in the city of Vancouver (“Timeline of Lesbian Milestones in BC”). Conversely, First Nations members of the Press Gang community have critiqued the way that white members of the Press treated First Nations writers (Maracle, “Change the Way Canada Sees Us” 54). Also, Vancouver bookstore owner Bill Hoffer, who had previously been very critical of and called for a

stop to government grant subsidies for small presses and artists, proposed a book burning of blowout press books in 1992 (Fawcett “Remembering Bill Hoffer”; Hoffer “The Great Bill Bissett Burn-Out”). Not every cultural activist’s efforts have been remembered publicly (e.g., men are more represented than women), nor have they been remembered in the same spaces (dominant publics vs. LGBTQI2S+ publics) or in the same ways (public written displays vs. oral histories). These varying responses highlight the ways that these presses have either become part of dominant public understandings of Vancouver or have remained part of counterpublic narratives, while also being contested by more marginalized members of the public.

Given these dichotomous responses, I suggest that these public memorials and critiques show how public understandings of earlier and current LGBTQI2S+ activist efforts have shifted over the last forty years, while demonstrating how these histories are distorted by members of the public choosing what they deem to be valuable. For instance, in her analysis of the legacy of the women’s movement, Victoria Hesford argues: “The moment the movement became ‘history’—was taken note of and its events recorded—was also the moment when that history was formed through distortion and elision” (17). Hesford seems to suggest that public understandings of the movement’s history are not neutral, as only specific aspects are preserved within the public’s memory, while other aspects are distorted or occluded. Moreover, these cultural memories likely reflect larger structural issues within our society. As ageing-studies scholar May Chazan argues, within current understandings of activism, the contributions of older women and women of colour are often erased in favour of colonial, Eurocentric, heteronormative, ableist, and youth centric narratives (3, 7). Chazan suggests that “the erasure of older women’s roles within social movements is likely tied to ... dominant perceptions that activists are necessarily (or even usually) young” (7). Similarly, OmiSoore H. Dryden and Suzanne Lenon have demonstrated that the proliferation of homophobic discourses has been reshaped in ways that continue to oppress people at the furthest margins of society: women,

women of colour, First Nations women, and lesbians (5-6). As Chazan, Dryden, and Lenon show, the discourses that allow us to learn about LGBTQI2S+ activists and their histories reflect the accomplishments of more socially privileged members of society, while further erasing more marginalized members' contributions and concerns. The following analysis of the public memorials and critiques of blewointment and Press Gang offers an opportunity for a critical evaluation of their legacies within Vancouver's lesbian and gay liberation history to better understand their contested points.

In 1984, a year after the end of blewointment press, Vancouver's artistic community came together to organize a major solo exhibition of bissett's work at the Vancouver Art Gallery (hereafter VAG). This exhibition brought public attention to the artist's body of work at a major art institution shortly after his work was debated in the House of Commons. The exhibition was supported by the contributions of gay artists in Vancouver, such as curator Scott Watson, who organized the exhibition with bissett. Steve, a member of Vancouver's visual arts community, remembers that the exhibition was intended to change the artistic conversation surrounding bissett's works because, as he states, Watson saw the leading members of the arts community (e.g., Alvin Belkin) "as perceiving bill predominantly as an interesting writer who made uninteresting amateur paintings so [their] exhibition was meant to change that view of bill." Although the exhibition focused on his paintings and not his poetry per se, bissett's visual art, like his poetry, represents a queer aesthetic on canvas (Peters 39-40). Moreover, though the exhibition did not articulate a gay perspective, gay kinships were instrumental in the organization of this exhibition because it relied upon several gay members of the community to arrange loans of his visual art. For instance, paintings were loaned to Watson by gay writer Stan Persky and gay poet Allan Rosen, who had contributed to blewointment press. When pressed about its influence on the artistic community, Steve stated that the exhibition changed the view that bissett was producing uninteresting visual art and brought greater public attention to his

work. The success of the exhibition reflected a shift in public consciousness as it brought bissett's subversive work to the general public, shifted the dialogue surrounding his work, and made the work by members of the gay community visible within a major arts institution.

More recently, public memorials that celebrate bissett and blewointment press have become a part of Vancouver's public cultural heritage efforts. Specifically, the City of Vancouver installed two public memorial signs on poles in the city: one was installed in downtown Vancouver on Hornby Street outside the VAG in the late 2000s and the other was placed in Kitsilano on Yew Street in 2018.⁵⁹ The sign's text as well as its physical material symbolically and literally place the artist and the press in the city's public space. The sign in downtown Vancouver documents bissett's cultural activities as a poet, artist, and publisher, his 1984 exhibition at the VAG, his troubles with Parliament between 1978-1979, and the poetry reading series organized in part to support him ("bill bissett"). By focusing on bissett's career, the sign creates public knowledge and potentially generates discussion about some of the issues that he faced as an artist. For instance, the sign states that bissett's poetry was "the subject of a six-month brouhaha in Parliament in 1977-78 over the fact that taxpayers were subsidizing allegedly profane poetry" ("bill bissett"). In so doing, the sign participates in what Erin Wunker and Travis V. Mason call a public poetics because it "attempts to deliver poetry to a public and to generate discussion about poets and the work of poetry" (4). The sign brings to the public's attention the "brouhaha" of the accusations against the Canada Council for funding pornography, which cited bissett's poetry as evidence of misused funds. Yet, while it alludes to the Parliament's homophobia, the sign does not address the homophobic nature of this "brouhaha." Instead of discussing homophobia, the sign vaguely refers to the political issue as a critique of the "profan[ity]" of his work. The sign's use of the word "profane" without any mention

⁵⁹ I am grateful to Morgan Harper and Emma Middleton, who serendipitously found the signs near the VAG and in Kits, respectively, took pictures of them, and sent them to me.

of homosexuality suggests what is permissible within the heteronormative public sphere: bissett is a subversive poet worthy of celebration, but his homosexuality must remain covert on the public sign. Another possible reading of this description is as a disavowal of Vancouver's past homophobia. That is, whereas bissett would have previously been marked as socially deviant because of his homosexuality, he has now become a celebrated gay figure that represents an image of liberalism, openness, and gay positivity for the city, thereby effacing the place's historical mistreatment and abuse of homosexuals. While the sign participates in a public poetics by discussing and vindicating bissett's cultural contributions as a member of Vancouver's cultural history, it paradoxically reproduces a homophobic discourse by closeting his sexuality and disavowing its past homophobia.

In 2018, the City of Vancouver developed cultural initiatives to celebrate the centennial of its Kitsilano neighbourhood. These efforts included a public memorial that features a poem by bissett titled "Kits," which documents the origins of blewointment press and explores Kitsilano's lived conditions during the 1960s. As the speaker states:

ther was a kafay on fourth wher we wud
all meet n compare notes on th nites b4 n
talk abt th galleree we made happn on
lowr fourth ave call th mandan ghetto. ("KITS" 8-12)

By bringing this history to the public's attention today, the poem participates in a public poetics that acknowledges the collaborative work produced by the press and remembers the collective's social and creative places in the neighbourhood. Yet, the poem's speaker is also critical of the neighbourhood's earlier social inequality. As the speaker states,

thru all ths evreewun was getting busted all
th time ther was a lot uv tragedee big
teers n manee troubuls jail time 4 lots uv

peopul sum deths from strongr drugs but
most peopul wer reeelee onlee toking
weering beeds going 2 th health n sandal. (15-20)

The poem highlights some of the social difficulties experienced by members of the neighbourhood's counterculture, including being arrested for drug possession. Though the poem does not mention his experience explicitly, bissett was also arrested for drug possession in the 1960s, which led to the police surveilling him for many years (Betts, *In Search* 6; Ben). The poem's critique of the city's police surveillance of subversive members in the Kitsilano neighbourhood is evident when the speaker mentions that "evreewun was getting busted." Yet, it does not provide insight into the homophobic social relations at the time, which bissett experienced while living there (Mount; Ben). Potentially, only an informed reader, such as a member of the counterpublic, would understand the covert meaning behind bissett's poem: people were surveilled because of issues that were more significant than "taking," such as homosexuality. This memorial suggests a shift in public consciousness because it brings attention to the relationship between the press and the neighbourhood, which has become more palatable for the general public. While it may make the artist's and the press's ties to homosexuality covert, an informed reader could still understand the memorial's allusions to the more violent nature of police activity in the neighbourhood.

The legacy of blewointment and Press Gang can also be seen in its earlier influence on other small presses in Vancouver. Specifically, New Star Books, which began in the 1970s as a development of *The Georgia Straight Supplement*, was indirectly influenced by the two presses. Like blewointment and Press Gang, New Star focused on publishing radical political works, and the press "was really in the forefront of the presses who were doing books that were explicitly making interventions into the ways that we live our lives" (Russell). New Star collective member Russell admits that, although he does not see blewointment and Press Gang as having a direct influence on

the press, they have had an indirect influence.⁶⁰ As Russell states, “I think of them more as being on parallel tracks like social overlaps among authors. I see it more as working on parallel tracks and feeding into each other. The influence is there but that’s because everyone was looking to their left and right to see what everyone was doing.” As he suggests, New Star gained insight into how to run a small press by learning from other small presses, such as blewointment and Press Gang, and modeling their practices, while focusing on their individual goals. By being part of a small-press movement in Vancouver that was invigorated by projects such as blewointment and Press Gang, New Star developed into the press that still exists today.

Yet, blewointment press has not been respected by all members of Vancouver’s literary community. Amongst some of the more violent posthumous responses to blewointment press is bookseller Bill Hoffer’s proposed book burning of the press’s books. Hoffer, as Vancouver writer Brian Fawcett describes him, was “the brilliant, unbalanced man who was the star of Vancouver’s antiquarian and cultural book trades until he turned on both ... in the late 1980s” (“Remembering Bill Hoffer”). In 1987, Hoffer wrote the introduction to John Metcalf’s *Freedom from Culture* in which he “pulled out all the stops, demanding that grants cease, subsidies to publishers be curtailed, and the guilty criminals be rounded up for re-education” (Fawcett “Remembering Bill Hoffer”). That is, Hoffer was extremely critical of small-press publishing efforts in Vancouver and the public support that they received through government grants. In the same vein, in 1992, Hoffer produced a catalogue of the materials held in his book warehouse titled “STIGMA: CANADIAN LITERATURE,” which included bissett’s *sunday work* published by blewointment press in 1969. The catalogue describes the book as “physically produced at Intermedia in an edition supposedly of 500 copies. One suspects there were fewer, but any number are too many” (Hoffer *List 80 Canadian*

⁶⁰ Russell’s name has been changed to protect his anonymity. As I explained on pages 13-14 of this dissertation, with the help of Baby Name Voyager, I chose a pseudonym with the same first letter of the person’s real name that was common at the time that the interviewee was born.

Literature 4). As the cheeky listing suggests, Hoffer was critical of the immense body of work produced by Blewointment Press. This criticism may explain the advertisement for a proposed book burning in the same catalogue. The advertisement states:

Goodbye to all that! The Great Bill Bissett Burn-Out. We are pleased to announce that the entire stock of Blewointment Press publications in our warehouse will be disposed of, this Fall, in a joyous conflagration. This black-tie-only event will take place in the parking-lot beside the store. Anyone wishing to receive an invitation to the burning should r.s.v.p. with the cover of a Bill Bissett book or a reasonable facsimile thereof. (65)

This advertisement demonstrates that, years after the press's closure, a bookseller who had previously sold copies of Blewointment books proposed to conduct a violent act of censorship against Bissett's body of work. It describes the proposed public destruction of Blewointment Press's body of work as a "joyous conflagration," while invoking the cultural elite's violent censorship of marginalized writers by describing the burning as a "black-tie-only event." The double meaning of "Bill Bissett Burn-Out" describes the book burning and becomes an ad hominem attack on Bissett by calling him a "Burn-Out." In a conference paper on Hoffer's work as a bookseller, Cameron Anstee confirmed that Hoffer's "colleagues correctly noted the horror of such an idea" and that "[t]here is no evidence that such an event ever took place," but "Hoffer nonetheless gleefully advertised it within a catalogue that listed Bissett items for sale." Though there is no evidence of the event taking place, Hoffer's proposed book burning is an example of a polarizing response to the press in Vancouver. This proposed book burning, which stands in stark contrast to the VAG exhibition and public memorials discussing Bissett's work, demonstrates that some members of the literary community were very critical of the press and sought to incite violence against the publisher's work.

Press Gang, on the other hand, has been mostly remembered by women and members of Vancouver's counterpublic. During the 1990s, women from Vancouver's women's movement

community acknowledged Press Gang's contributions to the city's feminist and lesbian-feminist communities. For instance, in 1995, feminist newspaper *Kinesis* published an article recognizing Press Gang's unparalleled success in promoting the interests of women, including lesbians, in Vancouver. Celebrating the press's 20th anniversary, Emma Kivisild attests: "The chorus of th[e] voices [published by Press Gang] has become an invaluable addition to small press publishing and a transformative force for the legions of women reached by Press Gang Books. For feminist writers, the press represents an opportunity to speak out without compromise" (21). By arguing that the press was a "transformative force" in the women's community, Kivisild here suggests the press's incredible influence in establishing a new site of cultural production that reflected lesbian-feminists' values, changing who had the opportunity to be published, and motivating other women, including herself, to write and communicate their radical values. Yet, this article romanticizes Press Gang's history and overlooks the press's many issues. For instance, it does not consider how the press had been accused of appropriating First Nations women's voices during its first phase (e.g., the *Daughters of Copper Woman* incident), the predominantly white makeup of the collective, or its publication of only one text by a woman of colour during its first phase. Of course, Kivisild may not have known about the ongoing issues between the press and women of colour at the time of the article's publication, which I discussed in Chapter 4. However, her celebration of the press's "chorus" of "voices" reflects a white-centric perspective of the women's movement at the time, as it overlooks many of the issues at the press, which other reviewers had previously discussed. The *Kinesis* article, while rightfully acknowledging the press's many contributions to the women's community, perpetuates the occlusion of the known racist issues that surfaced during the press's second phase.

Part of Press Gang's legacy can also be seen in the press's socio-literary activities during its third phase. In 1989, Press Gang Publishers and Press Gang Printers separated, the former became

Press Gang Publishers Feminist Cooperative and focused entirely on its publishing efforts and the latter would eventually close its doors in 1993. During this last phase, the Press Gang Publishers collective continued the work of second-phase members and responded to a shift within the women's community at the time. Specifically, during its second phase, the majority of its publications reflected the experiences of white women. This limited perspective was symptomatic of a larger issue within lesbian liberation movements at the time, which were dominated by white women. While white lesbians had begun to assert their presence in the 1970s and 1980s, lesbian and two-spirited women in urban areas across Canada began to articulate their sexual identities alongside their Indigenous identities (Justice, Rifkin, and Schneider 9). During its third phase, Press Gang Publishers sought to continue the cutting-edge work that they had begun earlier on. As managing editor Barbara Khune stated in 1995, "Yes, things have changed ... Some larger presses are developing lesbian lines of books ... But particularly some of the more radical books we've done might have had trouble finding another publisher, small or large. At Press Gang we consider things like 'this is a real first, nothing like this has been done'" (qtd. in Emma Kivisild 21). From 1990 to 2003, Press Gang more than doubled its number of publications by publishing forty-five works, including fifteen by white lesbians, four by First Nations lesbians, two by lesbians of colour, three by heterosexual First Nations women, two by a Métis writer, two by heterosexual women of colour, and one by a transgender man. These publishing efforts peaked in 1995-1996 when the press published twelve works, which contributed to what Linda Christine Fox argues is the biggest boom in queer literary production in Vancouver (109). This rich body of work is ripe for a historical analysis of the press's contributions to a historical shift within LGBTQI2S+ activism in the 1990s, which Fox's dissertation completes in part and is beyond the scope of this thesis. Yet, it is worth asking, what made this shift possible? This increase in works by First Nations women and women of colour reflects the earlier momentum of the press and a shift in the collective's values. The collective

was not only responding to but also helping push and shape this social shift within Vancouver's feminist and lesbian-feminist communities by publishing the work of marginalized women at the furthest periphery, such as lesbian women of colour, First Nations and Métis women, and trans writers.

The legacy of Press Gang, as a collective, remains a part of the city's counterpublic consciousness. Specifically, the press continues to be celebrated by aging radical artists living in the city. In 2012, the Queer Imaging and Riting Kollektive (Quirk-e) discussed Press Gang's involvement in Vancouver's lesbian liberation history by acknowledging the press's contributions to the city's lesbian liberation movements. Quirk-e is an organization of "seniors and Elders and professional artists, who together develop an arts practice that focuses on the creative expression of ideas and issues that are important to them" (Quirk-e "Our Mission"). In its "Timeline of Lesbian Milestones," Quirk-e states: "[w]e have quickly put together a list of people and events that begins to give a sense of how active lesbians in BC have been in shaping and strengthening the queer movement." It identifies Press Gang's beginnings in 1974 as a "feminist publishing and printing collective, with a distinctly lesbian sensibility" as an important moment in Vancouver's lesbian liberation history. By explicitly mentioning the press and discussing its social contributions, the article has a dual effect. First, it highlights the way that Press Gang remains significant to elder activists and artists working in Vancouver by vouching for their legacy as significant contributors to the "strengthening" of Vancouver's "queer movement." Second, the publication continues Press Gang's legacy in Vancouver by shedding light on and remembering the work of older women, who may no longer be actively involved in LGBTQI2S+ activist efforts. That is, *Xtra* restores Press Gang's public visibility by sharing its history with current LGBTQI2S+ readers and creating the potential for a renewed engagement between their readers and the press's works. This timeline

shows that, with the efforts of aging activists, Press Gang has recently re-emerged within Vancouver's LGBTQI2S+ counterpublic consciousness.

Press Gang's legacy continues to be felt in the cultural activism of artists who were originally members of the press's community. Specifically, the values that the press promoted earlier on (e.g., anti-racism) continue in the current work of aging cultural activists. For instance, in an interview, Evelyn spoke about the ongoing influence of Press Gang Publishers on her work. As Evelyn indicated, "being part of the women's movement (and part of the social justice movement) influenced my cultural practices. Press Gang was part of that movement. We all influenced and supported each other." Evelyn was part of the group of women that supported the development of Persimmon Blackbridge and Sheila Gilhooly's "Still Sane" project, as she "watched and supported the project as it grew, and participated in fundraising and promotion of the project" (Evelyn), and she asserts that "this is still one of my very treasured books." Evelyn was an active contributor to Vancouver's earlier women's movements of which Press Gang was a part of, influenced the work that the press published, and was ultimately influenced by the work. More recently, Evelyn has collaborated with other cultural activists by co-producing patchworks, which reflect themes of "peace and justice" in Palestine (Evelyn). Although she did not indicate an explicit connection between Press Gang's influence and her current projects, Evelyn's current work shares affinities with her earlier collaborations with Press Gang because it reflects both an anti-racist and collaborative approach to art and activism to promote the value of peace between racially divided communities. As an aging activist, Evelyn's work reflects her current concerns, her lifelong cultural activism, as well as the lasting influence of her earlier feminist community, which includes Press Gang. This work demonstrates the way that Press Gang's earlier cultural activist projects inform feminist and anti-racist social justice efforts today.

Since Press Gang's closure, members of Vancouver's creative community have mourned the loss of the city's sole women-only creative space and been galvanized to increase female-led artistic interventions. From 1974 to 2003, the press played a central role as a creative and critical force for women artists working in Vancouver. However, following its closure, there has been a void in the women's community, which has been felt by some of Vancouver's female writers. In a 2012 interview, poet activist Rita Wong spoke to the importance of Press Gang as a creative space that "worked with a lived understanding and a systemic analysis of [gender]" (Wong).⁶¹ In the interview, Wong reflected upon a moment of clarity at a fundraiser for artists who lost royalties following the press's closure. As she states,

In 2003, a group of Press Gang authors, mourning the loss of the publisher (which resulted in authors like Ivan Coyote, Lee Maracle, and many others not receiving the royalties they were due), gathered and held a benefit ... That night crystallized for me why it's important to work with women at the centre of what you do; I felt a sense of inspiration and connection that still fuels me today. I'm not idealizing that history, because there were many difficult things about it as well, and a huge learning curve involved, but I also appreciate how much a committed group of women were able to accomplish within and/or despite the limits of their resources and abilities. When those presses closed, they left a tangible absence, a big gap that has not been filled by other publishers, notwithstanding efforts by Leaf Press, milieu, McGilligan Books, Inanna, etc. (Wong)

As Wong shows, Press Gang's closure resulted in the elimination of a radical space of production and social space for women across different identity boundaries (e.g., class, sexuality, ethnicity).

⁶¹ While Chapter 4 does not address the third phase of Press Gang (1990-2003), it is worth mentioning that Wong published her book of poetry *monkeypuzzle* with Press Gang in 1998, a period that incorporated more and more work by women of colour, while continuing to publish material by lesbians. Also, in the interview, Wong addressed the imbalanced number of male-dominated creative communities in Vancouver in contrast to the number of communities led by women.

Press Gang's influence continues to be felt today because Wong's work continues to be "fuel[ed]" by "a sense of inspiration and connection" that she felt when the press closed. Inasmuch as Vancouver's women's community lost an important cultural activist space, its legacy can be seen in the inspiration that its closure has had on cultural activists living in the city, who currently fight for new women-led artistic initiatives.

While Press Gang continues to be remembered as an important contributor to lesbian and women's liberation movements in Vancouver, its fraught relationship with First Nations and transgender writers during its closure cannot be overlooked. Specifically, Sto:Loh writer Lee Maracle, Menominee two-spirit poet Chrystos, and transgender writer Ivan Coyote were the most financially affected members of the press's community during its closure in 2003. As Lee Maracle states, "when Press Gang went out of business, the three people who endured the biggest losses were myself, Chrystos, and Ivan Coyote. There's a whole lot of politics around that. Chrystos is Aboriginal and Ivan is transgendered, so I don't know what that's all about, but anyway, we lost tons of bucks. Everybody else lost in the hundreds, but we lost in the thousands" (54 "Change the Way Canada Sees Us"). Maracle's critique suggests that her experience as well as that of other First Nations writers is a result of racist politics at the press. Wong corroborates Maracle's point by stating, "authors like Ivan Coyote, Lee Maracle, and many others [did] not receiv[e] the royalties they were due." Arguably, First Nations writers losing money "in the thousands" and not being given "the royalties they were due" was a symptom of racist power structures at the press that placed women of colour and First Nations women at the margins within lesbian-feminist communities. As mentioned in Chapter 4, women of colour critiqued collective members during its second phase for exploiting artists of colour for the benefit of their white privilege (Author 02). Women of colour and First Nations women have historically fought to hold more space within LGBTQI2S+ communities, and more recent lesbian, queer, two-spirited trans women of colour, and First Nations activists argue

that this racism continues. Maracle's testimony therefore complicates the legacy of Press Gang Publishers because it publicly protests the press's potentially racist politics and demonstrates the social justice work that still needs to be done to create a more equitable LGBTQ2+ community for First Nations and transgender artists.

5.5 Final Thoughts

Throughout this chapter, it has been my primary objective to illustrate the ongoing influence of blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers upon LGBTQI2S+ members of the public. First, I showed how the oral histories that I developed with members of blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers composed an oral archive documenting the lived experiences of members of these presses. This archive, as I argued, serves a social justice purpose by bearing witness to these artists' histories that may previously gone unheard, reframe their earlier efforts, and demonstrate the difficulty of retelling these histories. I also spoke to the importance and limitations of this oral archive in preserving and circulating the oral histories of these presses' members to potential readers. Second, I demonstrated how these artists' publications have been circulated in new ways. For instance, previous members of the presses have donated their press's materials to university archives or sold their printing rights to new publishers, which now make their materials available to readers and researchers in different sites. Similarly, some members of the general public have anthologized some of these presses' works, others continue to sell their works through used bookstores, and some include them within queer libraries, which gives older and younger queer readers access to these books. These new modes of circulation enable the works to continue to be circulated beyond the presses' production lifetimes and to maintain a currency within queer counterpublics, yet they ultimately change the context in which these works are understood. Finally, I highlighted the spectrum of responses from readers, community members, and antagonists to blewointment and Press Gang. For instance, I showed that readers continue to turn to these books as

a means of gaining new insight into the efforts of the time, researchers have actively produced public memorials of these presses' efforts, and polemics have proposed book burnings. Ultimately, this chapter's overall objective has been to demonstrate the legacy of the two presses as cultural influencers of Vancouver's lesbian and gay liberation movements.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, I have asked “to what extent did Vancouver’s blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers influence the city’s lesbian and gay liberation movements?” To answer this question, I set out to examine the development of small presses alongside the formation and evolution of lesbian and gay liberation organizations on North America’s west coast (e.g., Daughters of Bilitis and Gay Women’s Liberation Group in the Bay Area; ASK, GATE, and Women’s Caucus in Vancouver). First, I demonstrated that queer-friendly small presses were generative of radical social spaces for queer people and productive of counter-discourses that challenged homophobia. Afterwards, in Chapters 3 and 4, I produced case studies that focused on how blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers contributed to gay and lesbian liberation movements, respectively. As these case studies emphasized, these small presses generated anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, and anti-racist social spaces for gay men, lesbians, and heterosexual feminists where they could socialize and produce radical books. As part of this analysis, this study has also shown that these presses utilized alternative methods of circulation to disseminate their works and reach queer readers, leading to the growth of queer counterpublics within and beyond Vancouver. Finally, in Chapter 5, I traced the legacies of the two presses. As I demonstrated through my analysis of the oral histories that I produced with members of the collectives, these presses’ cultural activists continue to value their earlier social justice efforts. I also showed that the presses’ publications have been preserved within university archives, sold at used bookstores, and shared with queer readers at LGBT2QIA+ libraries, creating new opportunities for engagement between the works and the readers. As I argued, these new opportunities for engagement transform the meaning of these texts, as some of the works have become rare commodities within used bookstores and important resources for younger LGBT2QIA+ readers at the Out on the Shelves library, while these presses’ archived materials become part of powerful sites of knowledge formation at universities.

Ultimately, this project was conceived to evaluate the two presses' ongoing influence on LGBTQ2+ communities, while speaking to some of the backlash and critiques that they have received.

Though this dissertation has argued that these small presses had a positive influence on members of counterpublics, this study has also sought to avoid romanticizing these collectives' "achievements" by demonstrating how their contributions are intertwined with their inability to advance social justice for all. Here, I am echoing the work of Victoria Hesford on the women's movement's legacy in which she asks, "[h]ow do we keep knotty achievements, as well as the difficulties and failures, of a movement like women's liberation ... in critical sight while paying it the kind of loving attention needed to conjure up its complex eventfulness?" (14). In the case of this dissertation, how have I kept the "knotty achievements, as well as the difficulties and failures" of blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers "in critical sight while paying [them] the kind of loving attention" that they deserve for challenging homophobia? In this conclusion, I follow Hesford's lead by returning to this dissertation's original question and evaluating the extent to which blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers influenced lesbian and gay liberation movements in Vancouver and beyond. On the one side, I have demonstrated that blewointment and Press Gang contributed to ongoing lesbian and gay social justice initiatives by generating social spaces for queer people, publishing radical texts, and positively influencing LGBTQ2+ readers. On the other side, I troubled these presses' contributions by arguing that, in spite of their anti-racist stances, both presses' collectives were predominantly composed of white people, which begs the following question: how might these presses in fact reflect the larger racist structural issues within the dominant lesbian and gay liberation movements of the time? For instance, one cannot overlook blewointment press's publication of sexist content (e.g., Bertrand Lachance's "th whores of Granville street") or Press Gang's publication of material that appropriates First Nations stories (e.g., Anne Cameron's *Daughters of Copper Woman*). Though other cultural activists, such as Audre

Lorde and members of the Combahee River Collective, had already developed at the time an intersectional framework that addressed issues of appropriation and sexism with gay communities, blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers did not immediately address issues of difference amongst lesbian and gay communities' constituents. Throughout this conclusion, I will contend that, this dissertation has demonstrated that blewointment's and Press Gang's cultural contributions were integral to the advancement of lesbian and gay liberation movements in Vancouver. Yet, much like lesbian and gay liberation movements' political communities, which were predominantly dominated by white, cisgender men, these presses' collectives were unable to further critique issues of structural inequality (e.g., gender and racial inequality).

This dissertation's first major finding was that blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers generated unparalleled opportunities for gay and lesbian artists to socialize at a time when queer people were forced to make their sexuality covert to pass within a heterosexist society. As I argued, Vancouver was affected by Canada's Cold War on queer people, which Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile demonstrate, "made use of and intensified the social space of the closet in order to organize national security campaigns" (48). Though this "national security campaig[n]" limited social spaces for queer people, lesbian and gay social networks fought for safer social spaces of their own (T. Warner 49-51). I have shown that, like these social networks, blewointment press was a queer common ground including gay men, lesbians, and feminist women and Press Gang was a women-only community, led by many lesbian feminists. Within these presses, queer artists were able to meet, research and discuss radical perspectives about homosexuality, sexism, and racism, learn how to produce books, and develop strong personal relationships (Hauser "Letter to bill bissett"; Ben; Lynn). Through my analysis of collective members' oral histories in Chapter 4, I demonstrated that Press Gang enabled its constituents to develop lifelong relationships. In light of the limited possibilities for queer people to meet and socialize at the time, as well as the risks of doing so (e.g.,

being outed; being incarcerated in psychological institutions), their more recent testimonies spoke to the importance of Press Gang as a space in which women could create a long-lasting community and circumvent social structures that did not permit homosexual romantic and sexual relationships between women. This analysis of small presses furthers our understanding of queer communities and networks in Vancouver because it demonstrates that these socio-cultural spaces generated queer communities that were an essential part of lesbian and gay liberation movements in the city.

In light of my analyses of these presses' social values, this study's second major finding was that these collectives produced and published radical queer works that contributed to the proliferation of anti-homophobic discourses at the time. While many lesbian and gay liberation political organizations during the 1970s and 1980s disseminated discourses that normalized homosexuality, Tom Warner argues that there was an alternative strand of liberation movements that sought to embrace stigma (185). For instance, Vancouver's gay publication *Your Thing* embraced the stigma of homosexuality by documenting the "dirty" events happening in the city's gay bar scene and providing overt sexual advice. My analysis of the two presses' publications demonstrated that a similar phenomenon was occurring in these presses as they published works that embraced stigma as an aesthetic practice and challenged heterosexist norms. As I argued, these works form a poetics of sexual disgust that adapts modernist aesthetic strategies and redeploys disgust imposed onto queer people by a homophobic society to thwart the social construct of the "closet." These works, as my investigation emphasized, documented the lived experiences of queer people, explored queer sexual practices and their stigma, invoked humour at the absurdity of a homophobic agenda, and bridged boundaries between identity politics. This theorization of sexual stigma proved to be fruitful in my analysis of these presses' works and could be useful to other researchers examining other queer works from British Columbia, such as Daphne Marlatt's *Touch to My Tongue* (1984), Jane Rule's *Lesbian Images* (1975), and Phyllis Webb's *Naked Poems* (1965). Moreover, this type of analysis

could build on Don McLeod's finding that Webb's and Rule's works were important to lesbian readers in Canada (58, 196). Overall, my analysis of publications by Blewointment and Press Gang will be of interest to scholars examining lesbian and gay liberation movements and its discourses because, as I demonstrated, these small presses' works intersected with these movements by embracing stigma, protesting sexual oppression, and challenging heterosexist power structures closeting queer people.

This study's investigation of Blewointment's and Press Gang's methods of circulating their works in the public revealed that both presses did so through a "Do-It-Yourself" approach. Since major publishers, who had wider distribution channels to sell their works, would not sell the more radical works published by Blewointment and Press Gang, these presses developed important strategies to make their works accessible to their reading publics who needed them the most. As Chapter 3 demonstrated, at Blewointment press, Bissett would sell his works door-to-door, give them away for free to the public, and read poems at public readings and at protests organized by lesbian and gay political activists. In so doing, he developed a gift economy, directly supported lesbian and gay liberation movements, and created a direct relationship with readers. Similarly, in Chapter 4, my investigation of Press Gang's modes of circulation revealed that the collective members of the press protected their readers from being publicly outed and provided important resources for women. For instance, collective members sent their books using discreet packaging and made them publicly available at lesbian and women's community centres. Members of Press Gang were also aware of the importance of creating a dedicated readership of lesbian works to increase knowledge about lesbianism (Hughes, Johnson, and Perreault 171). Though these presses developed different strategies, they also shared overlapping modes of circulation. For instance, they were both supported by a network of cultural activists, such as independent booksellers and queer periodicals, which helped the presses make their works available to the general public. Taken together, these findings

demonstrate that, by deploying these methods of circulation, blewointment and Press Gang made its works accessible to a queer readership during the 1960s-1980s, thus contributing to the ongoing counterpublic dialogue that analyzed sexual oppression, spoke about queer people's experiences, and drew attention to the importance of forming queer communities.

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that the presses' cultural initiatives led to the development of significant public dialogue about queer poetry and to the formation of supportive reading communities. Specifically, my study developed its analysis of modes of circulation into an evaluation of the presses' formation of queer counterpublics, whose existence, as Michael Warner postulates, rely on strangers continuously circulating and engaging with radical discourses ("Publics and Counterpublics" 420). For instance, when the Canada Council was accused of funding pornography for supporting blewointment press, members of Vancouver's literary community, including many gay readers and artists, developed "th frends of blewointment" subscription group, which donated money to the press in exchange for a lifetime subscription of the press's publications. In addition, to support bissett and blewointment press, the Vancouver Poetry Centre organized British Columbia's largest poetry reading series, which further disseminated gay works. As a public set of events, the readings fostered dialogue in which the public and artists discussed issues affecting Vancouver's marginalized communities. Similarly, at Press Gang, the publication of Nym Hughes, Yvonne Johnson, and Yvette Perreault's *Stepping Out of Line* enabled the collective to establish a reading tour and series of lesbian-feminist workshops in which lesbian members of the public could meet, discuss their lived experiences, empower themselves through education, and become less isolated. My analysis also expanded upon Michael Warner's theorization of counterpublics, which focuses on the relationships between strangers, by arguing that members of the two presses' counterpublics developed more personal relationships with the presses. For instance, Press Gang attracted many of its readers to its collective, who in turn contributed to the

press's cultural activism. Whereas previous studies of the presses have focused on the presses and their collectives, this analysis of blewointment press's and Press Gang's counterpublics advances the debate about their socio-cultural contributions by asserting their influence upon reading communities in Vancouver.

As I sought to trace the legacy of these presses, my research also revealed that members of the public currently have access to these presses, their materials, and their histories through new modes of preservation. Chapter 5's production of oral histories with members of the two presses' collectives helps document, valorize, and preserve the material conditions grounding the presses, collective members' experiences working with political organizations, the systemic oppression that they experienced, and the ongoing importance of bonds formed while working at the presses. Also, the oral histories demonstrate the difficulties of reconstructing the past as well as differences between ageing and younger activists' understandings of LGBTQI2+ communities' core concerns. In short, by producing these oral histories, this study contributes to a greater understanding of how these cultural activists' experiences at blewointment and Press Gang continue to inform their lives today. Conversely, the chapter's focus on new sites of preservation, such as used bookstores, university archives, and queer libraries, demonstrates how they provide access to the presses' earlier materials, while shifting their discursive meanings. For instance, used bookstores have transformed some of blewointment press's publications into rare commodities by increasing their cost on the market. University archives, as contested sites of preservation, cultural capital, and silences, simultaneously provide better insight into these presses' past, while creating barriers to access or to narrativize their histories. Queer libraries, like Out on the Shelves, best reflect the presses' original imperatives of increasing knowledge about queer sexualities by making works available for members of Vancouver's LGBTQI2+ communities. Through this analysis of new modes of

preservation and circulation, this study has raised important questions about the nature of how the public continues to engage with these presses' works within new discursive contexts.

The ongoing legacy of *blewointment* press and Press Gang Publishers is supported by this study's analysis of more recent public responses to the presses. As Chapter 5 demonstrates, whereas some members of the counterpublic continue to acknowledge the press's important contributions, other members critique the presses' limitations. *blewointment* press's legacy, I argued, can be seen in bissett's solo exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1984, oral histories by gay readers who remember the press's publications importance in their early lives, and, most surprisingly, the City of Vancouver's recent adoption of bissett into their cultural heritage. However, in 1992, bookseller William Hoffer, who was especially critical of small press publishing and the grant funding that these presses received, proposed a book burning of all *blewointment* press and bill bissett books. As this polarizing response highlights, the beloved press was also critiqued by members of the city's literary community. Similarly, Press Gang has been remembered fondly by many members of Vancouver's counterpublics for its contributions to the city's lesbian liberation movements and women's communities. Yet, in spite of being a source of inspiration for many lesbian feminists in the city, the press was also a divisive site of cultural production. For instance, Lee Maracle, has been critical of the press's treatment of First Nations and transgender writers. More broadly, Chapter 5 contributes to the ongoing debate about homonationalism and homonormativity by showing how the presses have been adopted by the dominant public, which disavows its past homophobia, normalizes homosexuality under a specific set of conditions: whiteness, maleness, and upper-middle classness. Scholars, including myself, must continue to trouble the public's recent adoption of a gay positive identity that privileges gays and lesbians who are closest to the centre of power, while marginalizing queer people who are at the furthest periphery.

Chapter 5's findings contribute to an ongoing dialogue about normativity and privilege within LGBTQ2+ communities. Recently, members of LGBTQ2+ communities have asked "has the LGBTQ movement failed" (Robinson et al.) and suggested that the movement has failed the most marginalized members, such as First Nations people, people of colour, differently abled people, the homeless, and transgender people. Other members of these communities have turned to past efforts as models for their intersectional activism in order to address these issues ("The March on Pride"). Based upon this study's findings, I suggest that we need to be skeptical of the two presses as models for queer activism. Although the presses' discourses at the time were radical and the source of public backlash (e.g., the House of Commons debate surrounding blowout press), I ask, how does examining these presses through an intersectional framework produce radical insights for current LGBTQ2+ activists? Do these presses' contributions remain radical? For instance, with the decriminalization of homosexuality, the adoption of human rights that protect queer people against sexual discrimination, and the formal apology against public servants issued in 2017, how has the dominant public potentially assimilated these presses within their gay positive identities? I must concede that, since the City of Vancouver disavows its past homophobia in its public celebration of Bill Bissett's work, his publications may no longer have the same radical importance for queer activism. However, the gay community may choose to reclaim the work, and use it as an opportunity to analyze the city's disavowed past homophobia. Despite the exploratory nature of these questions, my study presented several critiques of the presses that contribute to ongoing debates within LGBTQ2+ communities.

Despite highlighting their contributions to the creation of anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, and anti-racist, queer social spaces and discourses, I have critiqued the presses' collectives for not adequately reflecting racialized people's perspectives. Chapters 2 and 3 examined the limitations of these presses' social justice objectives by demonstrating that only white artists worked at

blewointment press and only one First Nations woman worked for Press Gang, and her tenure with the collective was short lived (Norma). As I emphasized, in spite of their mandates to produce radical spaces that promoted what we now call intersectional values, their collectives resembled the communities of lesbian and gay liberation political activists at the time, which predominantly excluded the concerns of racialized people. Reflecting upon the lesbian and gay liberation movements of the 1970s and early 1980s, Tom Warner argues that “a researcher would be hard-pressed to find on advocacy agendas any issues of direct concerns to native gays and lesbians, or to gays, lesbians, and bisexuals of colour, or even any discussions of racism at the several national and regional conferences” (183). My case studies contradict Warner’s claim because they demonstrate that anti-racism was an essential value to both collectives and highlight that they researched and discussed racism. However, through my study’s intersectional framework that analyzed the interconnected and overlapping forms of social injustice, my analysis revealed that the collectives’ composition ultimately reflected the predominant whiteness of lesbian and gay political groups at the time. By examining the whiteness of the presses’ collectives, this study advances a more nuanced understanding of these collectives’ intersectional values because it demonstrates that, though the presses promoted proto-intersectional values, they did not effectively critique white privilege within their communities.

Moreover, this study demonstrated that the two presses published some works that further ostracized the most marginalized members within their communities. For instance, in Chapter 3, my analysis of blewointment press’s publication of Lachance’s “th whores of granville street” troubled the speaker’s attempt to build solidarity between gay men and lesbians. Specifically, my reading of the poem highlighted the ways in which the work uses masculinist language by calling the lesbians “whore” and “bitch,” reasserting a misogynist view. In Chapter 4, my critique of Press Gang’s publication of Anne Cameron’s *Daughters of Copper Woman*, which sought to make the oral stories

of First Nations women available for the public, while raising funds for First Nations organizations, highlighted a pivotal moment within Vancouver's women's community. The work received backlash from First Nations members of the women's community, such as Lee Maracle who accused Cameron of appropriating the voices of the women that she sought to represent and of occupying the limited space available to those women. Though the publication sparked important public debate about issues of difference within the women's community, especially as it pertained to colonialism and racism, *Daughters of Copper Woman* was a *coup manqué*. Much like my critique of the limitation of blewointment press's and Press Gang's proto-intersectional values, my analysis of these works reveals that the presses did publish masculinist and culturally appropriative works, respectively, that reflected some of the ongoing sexism and racism within lesbian and gay organizations at the time. In so doing, I sought to balance my analysis of the radical anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, and anti-racist works published by blewointment and Press Gang. This study's critique of the presses contributes to current debates within LGBTQ2+ communities that challenge how their communities perpetuate racist, sexist, transphobic, and ableist values in spite of their anti-homophobic activism.

To further critique the predominantly white perspectives of both presses and the predominance of men's perspectives at blewointment, I would have preferred being able to interview more women and people of colour, who were associated with both presses. However, my snowball sampling approach created an obstacle. Though my approach enabled me to promote my call for oral histories in a public setting, my ethics application did not allow me to contact members of the presses or readers of the presses directly. The sample of perspectives that I gathered did not reflect the diversity of experiences that I sought to encapsulate because I was only able to interview white cultural activists and readers. Though their oral histories are rich in contextual information, and I firmly believe in the importance of listening to their histories, it also created a limited perspective

about racial issues within the two communities. Preferably, I would have had the opportunity to meet with Daniel David Moses, who published with blewointment, and asked him to expand upon his claim that “thanks to bill bissett’s blewointmentpress, *Delicate Bodies* [became my first book] that seemed to represent with some clarity what I guess I’d call my poetic voice and my particular poetics” (*Indigenous Poetics in Canada* 134). In what ways did blewointment make this possible? Similarly, my study could have benefited from meeting with Lee Maracle or Chrystos, who published with Press Gang, to better understand their perspectives about the press. Perhaps, Maracle could have expanded upon her critique of Press Gang’s treatment of First Nations women and transgender men. I list these artists here not as possible tokens of diverse perspectives, but rather as examples of artists’ who have publicly spoken about the presses and whose perspectives need to be heard to further develop this study’s examination of the presses’ anti-racism. That is, more oral histories from non-white members of the two presses’ communities would establish a greater degree of accuracy on this matter.

Similarly, another set of oral histories that I could not incorporate into this study were those of blewointment’s female collective members. Specifically, because the snowball sampling approach required interviewees to contact me, I was not able to directly contact the women who were actively involved at the press. Moreover, when one female member contacted me, they were unable to participate due to ongoing health issues. As a result, my narrative has relied more heavily on gay male members’ histories. Though I believe that it would have been more fruitful to hear different perspectives, especially from female members, these artists’ reasons for deciding to abstain from my study are fully warranted. In light of this situation, I now wonder: what might have this collective member shared about the gender relations at the press? What were the gender dynamics at the time from a woman’s perspective? Though my work has tried to address this gap by including findings from the bill bissett fonds, it was impossible to fully assess the gender dynamics at blewointment

press from a female member's perspective; therefore, it is unknown if the female collective members at the press remember the social dynamics differently from the way that male members have described them.

If the debate about the presses' contributions to lesbian and gay liberation movements is to be moved forward, a better understanding of the intersection between the presses' discourses with those of other queer publications needs to be developed. To advance this analysis of the presses' contributions to lesbian and gay liberation movements' discourses, scholars could supplement this study's mostly analogue analysis with digital analyses of both presses' entire set of works. For instance, future researchers can adapt digital approaches to produce a "macroanalytic" (Jockers 58) reading of the works, which has been deployed Matthew L. Jockers's in *Macroanalysis* and Franco Moretti's *Distant Reading*. As Jockers and Moretti point out, the close reading offers only a limited perspective of texts' functions, and larger scale studies can facilitate research that identifies greater trends in writing, especially literary movements. This approach has already been fruitful in other analyses of little magazines, as demonstrated by Jeffrey Drouin's analysis of the *Little Review*, which employs a mixture of close and distant reading approaches. In the case of an analysis of queer small press publications in Vancouver, future researchers could mine the presses' body of works to find patterns in the frequency of their queer poetics by creating topic models, generating topic models from queer publications published in Vancouver at the same time, and comparing them to identify intersecting points. By emulating this approach to analyze queer small presses in Vancouver, I postulate that a researcher may further advance the debate about the intersection between Vancouver's small presses and the city's lesbian and gay liberation movements. Thus, I recommend to future researchers that they build on my close reading of the presses' works by producing a "macroanalytic" reading of their works to further advance the debate about the presses' contributions to Vancouver's lesbian and gay liberation movements.

Ultimately, this dissertation's examination of blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers's influence on lesbian and gay liberation movements makes several contributions to the current body of literature. First, while scholars had previously highlighted the importance of sexuality to bissett's work and that blewointment had published several gay poets, my study has demonstrated blewointment's contributions to gay liberation movements. Specifically, it has emphasized that blewointment press played an integral role in the development of gay radical discourses, affected gay readers in Vancouver and beyond, and contributed to the development of public discussions about homophobia in Canadian society and culture. Second, though scholars previously knew that Press Gang significantly contributed to feminist literary production and to lesbian literature in the 1990s, this study has demonstrated how integral the press was to early lesbian liberation movements in the city. As I have shown, the press generated a social space grounded in the experiences of lesbians, produced lesbian-feminist texts that contributed to the growth of lesbian-feminist dialogue in Vancouver, and facilitated proto-intersectional dialogue during the 1970s-1980s. Third, although no prior studies extensively examined the legacy of these small presses, this dissertation has produced new dialogue about these small presses' importance to ongoing, intersectional debates within LGBTQ2+ communities. Thus, this dissertation demonstrates that, though their histories deserve to be further troubled, blewointment press and Press Gang Publishers significantly contributed to the advancement of lesbian and gay liberation movements in Vancouver.

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