

A Bibliographic Gathering: Reflecting on “Queer Bibliography: Tools, Methods, Practices, Approaches”¹

MALCOLM NOBLE AND SARAH PYKE

Abstract: In February 2023, we convened the first workshop dedicated to queer bibliography. The scholarship showcased during the symposium and emerging from it was and is significant, but perhaps at least of equal importance has been the development of a vibrant, supportive intellectual and practice-based community that has coalesced around this area. Such was the importance of this experience and meeting place that, by consensus, what was intended as a one-off workshop has inaugurated an annual, international movable conference. In this article, we reflect on how the workshop and its arrangement responds and relates to queer and feminist critiques of higher education. Starting from marginal and precarious positions, we consider how we worked to build a safe space for discussion and to foster a community of care. We explain how together, as well as producing scholarship, we endeavored to practice radical openness and create the conditions for queer thriving.

Keywords: queer bibliography, precarity, neoliberalism, care

Introduction: a gathering

For bibliographers, a “gathering” has a specific meaning, relating to a part of the physical book. As John Carter reminds us, a gathering is “the group of leaves formed after the printed sheet has been folded to the size of the book and before it is collated, that is, combined in proper order with its fellows for binding” (Carter and Barker 2004, 113). Pick up the volume closest to you, and you will see what we mean. Examine closely the fore-edges of the book and the place where the pages meet the spine. Notice

1. We received three generous and helpful peer reports: two were anonymous and one from Kadin Henningsen who waived his anonymity. We would like to thank all our reviewers.

how they are bunched together in little groups, side by side. Separate out one of these bunched-together groups (also known as quires) from the rest; count the pages; see how the first and last enclose those in the middle. Typically, a gathering of eight leaves (or sixteen printed pages) is printed on a single sheet, folded three times. Then, it is bound with the other gatherings that make up the book, cut and trimmed. *Bibliography* can mean the list of works consulted (see the end of this article) or the scholarly study of these material details. In this article, we exploit the double meaning of the term *gathering*, as one which brings together participants in a shared endeavor and also separates them into a distinct community. And we suggest, too, that a gathering—or quire—has queer potential.

Between Friday, February 3, 2023, and Sunday, February 5, 2023, we convened a symposium titled “Queer Bibliography: Tools, Methods, Practices, Approaches.” Originally, we had aimed for a handful of other speakers, which, with our contributions, might make for a plausible edited collection proposal. However, the workshop garnered interest at a level and of an international character we had not anticipated, particularly from North America. It brought together around two dozen speakers, respondents, and panelists, with online attendees totaling approximately one hundred. A planned hybrid day originally 1 day only eventually stretched to two hybrid afternoons plus a third day collaboratively making a conference pamphlet at the London Centre for Book Arts. Following the conference, we were invited to edit a special issue of *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*. Through this process, our attention was increasingly drawn to a peculiar Möbius-strip effect, in which we were asked to define a field *as if it already existed in disciplinary terms*, while the central motivating force behind our efforts to gather these people in this place was the conviction that, while the work and the thinking existed, “queer bibliography” as a sanctioned, codified entity did not.

Here, we think through the symposium as a bringing-together, in terms of fostering queer community with care. We were aware of expending unanticipated emotional labor but also of the event’s energizing effect. But we also consider our own precarious positions in relation to wider disciplinary structures and norms. What might it mean to contribute to the establishment and stabilization of an emerging subject area, as two precariously employed early career scholars perpetually navigating academia’s margins? Meredith L. McGill notes “the very looseness of the pamphlet, the provisionality of its binding, which permits it to be bound and rebound in variable combinations, and its tenuous relationship to publishing’s gatekeeping and authorizing structures” (2021, 84). She observes how these print objects, made from one small gathering, “can illuminate worlds of print that are obscured or subordinated when critics take the finished book as a norm for literary study” (87). Working through participant feedback alongside our own reflections, we were left with much to process; this article, ordering and gathering our thoughts together, is our attempt to do that. We begin with an outline

of queer bibliography, followed by a reflection on academic precarity and what, if anything, it might offer, before examining the organization of our event in light of participant feedback.

What is queer bibliography?

“What does it mean,” asks Rita Felski, “to recognize oneself in a book?” (2008, 23). Reading is a powerful form of self-fashioning for many people whose identities are marginalized, not least for those readers searching for textual representation of non-normative sexualities and gender identities, however coded or subtextual. Felski offers some archetypal examples, including Radclyffe Hall’s 1928 novel, *The Well of Loneliness*: “[s]uch episodes show readers becoming absorbed in scripts that confound their sense of who and what they are. They come to see themselves differently by gazing outward rather than inward, by deciphering ink marks on a page” (2008, 23). What Felski gestures towards here, without making explicit, is that in some cases, the book-as-object may become as invested with queer meaning as the text itself. Lesbian author Lee Lynch, for example, describes encountering Ann Bannon’s lesbian pulp paperbacks as a young teenager: they “were so well loved I never even read one until later. Some treasures were so priceless no one would lend them” (1990, 43). The discipline of bibliography is concerned with the study of the physicality of these marks, pages, and textual artifacts. But until recently, the preoccupation of generations of queer readers with the material evidence of queerness, in these same physical forms, has been maintained as an amateur practice rather than an academic one.

Emerging in the nineteenth century, partly from elite collecting culture, bibliography’s norms, concerns, and practices tend to reflect the values of that period, and of the wealthy, white men responsible for its inception and growth. As Matt Cohen writes, bibliography has “for the most part functioned within a colonialist set of assumptions about its means and its ends” (2020, 181). Feminist, Black, Indigenous, and decolonial bibliography has begun to critique these norms, recovering both historical textual artifacts produced by, and the labor of, women and Black and Indigenous people of color—unsung authors, editors, printers, librarians—as well as venturing significant methodological challenges to established modes of academic attention and study. Furthermore, the homosocial connections between noted bibliophiles have begun to be traced via book-plates, lending records, and collecting histories.

Yet bibliography as a scholarly formation has been remarkably impervious to discussions of queerness. Despite book history’s broader position as an “interdiscipline,” in Leslie Howsam’s term, “an intellectual space where like-thinking scholars bring their differing mindsets and methodologies to bear on material texts” (2016, 11) and the

fact that queer subjectivities and theories have been mediated by and through print—for example, queer studies has relied heavily on close-reading—queer bibliography has remained largely uncoded, as something practiced in the vernacular, felt as much as thought, intuitive as much as intellectual. We have termed this “queer vernacular bibliography” while advocating, as an addition, for queer critical bibliography (Noble and Pyke 2024).

Queer critical bibliography draws strongly on other radical bibliographical traditions and practices. Our approach to queer bibliography is explicitly informed by praxis-seeking feminist bibliographers (Ozment 2020; Werner 2020). It owes much to Black bibliographical approaches and labor, and their critical reframing, in a long tradition spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, encompassing the crucial work by Black women librarians in the mid-twentieth century in the service of racial emancipation and social justice (Goldsby and McGill 2022; Nelson 1996; Silva et al. 2023; Spires 2022a, 2022b). Having recently explicated the need for queer bibliography and its relationship to other critical bibliographies, we do not seek to restate these arguments here (Noble and Pyke 2024), but it may be helpful for us to provide some wider context.

In recent years, critical bibliography has sought to reappraise and remake bibliography and its practices. A young field’s definition is already contested, but Lisa Maruca and Kate Ozment’s definition introducing a special issue of *Criticism* on the topic is a useful one, positioning “critical bibliography as the intersection of critical theory and bibliographic study” (2022, 231). If bibliography appears stuffy, this lets in some air. Within this framework, queer critical bibliography certainly can mean the application of queer theory to bibliographic and bibliographical inquiry and methods, but the designation *queer* can also describe the material being consulted, or indeed those doing the bibliographic labor and the embodied experiences therefore brought to the library table. Cohen’s expansive reappraisal of bibliography, with ramifications far beyond the questions of how the work of the field might be done in decolonial and Indigenous ways, considers how bibliography itself has been pushed to the edges of scholarly discourse. Its “practitioners,” having “been at times in something of a marginalized position themselves in their departments or professions,” have as a result, he argues, “developed unique tools, passions, and intellectual focuses with decolonial potential,” though that potential may be yet to be realized (Cohen 2020, 181). This recentering sits in contrast to bibliography’s colonial logics and underpinnings. We agree, both with Cohen’s emphasis on marginalization—bibliography-as-niche-interest—and with the suggestion that this position of precarity enables a potential re-making of tools, methods, practices, and approaches towards more radical ends. Cohen’s example leans towards marginalization in intellectual terms rather than the grubbier, material ones of hourly paid and fixed-term contracts, expiring institutional affiliations, piecemeal

library access, and email switch-off, which we are also concerned with and would like to draw attention to here. But after all, these two states are hardly unconnected.

We met after Malcolm had given a conference paper discussing potential methods for queer bibliography (Noble 2024), and Sarah had just finished a PhD on queer reading (Pyke 2020). Approaching, in ebullient and eager collision, from different disciplinary traditions—history and literature—but with intertwining preoccupations and research questions, we were curious about the lack of citable material on and disciplinary engagement with queer critical bibliography. Shortly after we crystallized this curiosity in the form of a call for papers, Christopher Adams outlined what he calls “a small and still nascent field of queer book studies” focused on ways in which “when that text is or is perceived to be in some way queer: content shapes materiality” (2022, 542). Yet while Adams was able to point to an exhibition catalog and in anticipation of an edited collection in press, the most concrete evidence in many ways was a taught course. He also offered a proleptic nod to our workshop (542). Much of that to which he referred was around “understanding the book as a queer object,” which does not in and of itself necessarily entail a queering of bibliographic method. This is not, of course, because the work was not and is not happening. Academic publishing timescales have much to answer for here. Trans bibliography—as a distinct, separate but connected subfield—is comparatively more established (Craig, Estill, and May 2023; Sargan 2023), perhaps unsurprisingly, given the way books and presses are often taken as analogous to bodies, both from positions of trans critique (Henningsen 2016) and feminist ones (Maruca 2003). Adams’s article was in press during the time of our meeting and first conversations, Heidi Craig, Laura Estill, and Kris May’s (2023) piece while our CFP was circulating. Although we could not cite this scholarship at that time, our hunch was that it was out there, along with much other thinking on queer and trans approaches to material textuality. (Indeed, Craig, Estill, and May spoke at our event; their manifesto has now been published in *Textual Cultures*: “A Rationale of Trans-inclusive Bibliography.”) Our gathering brought together scholars and practitioners in a public conversation that, as we have noted above, was surprising in its belatedness. Folded into this question of precisely why this conversation had not happened previously was an attendant question: Why were we, marginal figures that we were, its catalysts?

Hopes and refusals

Reflecting on Queer Bibliography—capitalization here designating everything to do with our conference, the subsequent network, the annual series of events, the community built—we began to wonder whether precarity might sometimes, in certain circumstances, offer something of a position of strength or power. This is not an attempt

to occupy the position of the ideal academic subject, “enterprising, highly productive, competitive, always available and able to withstand precarity,” as the feminist collective Res-Sisters put it (2017, 268). Indeed, portions of this article were drafted while once again at the sharp end of early career uncertainty and revised in that peculiar lull between paid positions. For the record, I (Sarah) first wrote this paragraph in the afternoon after a 9 a.m. job interview, which followed sharp on the heels of an evening event the previous night (a rare paid opportunity), in the last three months of a fixed-term contract. Four years since receiving my PhD, with four roughly one-year posts (some fractional), a six-month fellowship, some freelance work, adjunct hourly paid lecturing, and no permanent position in sight, the familiar rollercoaster of applications and interviews had begun again, and I had, at the time of writing, the same faintly sick feeling in my stomach. (As Malcolm makes final edits, it is with the same gut-felt anxiousness, after a lunchtime job interview, which has made meeting the deadline difficult.) But without excusing structural inequalities or institutional indifference, and while acknowledging that “my” precarity is only bearable due to relative economic privilege and the base-level stability provided by the kinship structures that sustain me, is it possible to reclaim precarity as a useful kind of outsiderliness, a nothing-to-lose courageousness, a “why not?” or “just because” response to the justificatory demands of the institution?

In the months between our first meeting and the conference itself, when we were conspiring on our call for papers, circulating it, building momentum and our networks, gathering participants, and applying for funding, we were either working outside universities or employed on fractional, fixed-term contracts or short-term fellowships. For six of the eight months between releasing our call for papers and the conference itself, precarious work meant we were not only in different cities but different countries, our connection reliant on disrupted Zoom calls (from personal accounts, naturally) and WhatsApp messages. When Yvette Taylor, Matt Brim, and Churnjeet Mahn write of our “shared states,” and of the “queer academy as the primary site of our shared exhaustion and inequality,” it throws into relief a paradox of precarity (2023, 1). Naming it is to see how ripples widen outwards from the university in concentric rings, like a stone thrown into a pond: it is always possible to be in a state more removed, more on the outside of things. (We think again of Cohen’s bibliographer-scholar, on the outside of their “department [. . .] or profession.” Without the former, it is all too easy to lose confidence in a claim to the latter, after all.) Neither of us at that time felt held by any one institution, perhaps even on the verge of being pushed out of the academy all together. In an environment where “contract type” or “institutional location” can become almost as much of a marker of “otherness” as gender, class, sexuality, or race, as the Res-Sisters note, recording how loosely we were bound by either seems significant (2017, 269). There are nuances here that are often occluded by the professional apparatus of conference name badges or affiliations given in speaker biographies or published work.

Nevertheless, we benefited from institutional and disciplinary affiliations and associations. The Institute of English Studies at the School of Advanced Studies offered a room and, significantly, the hybrid setup and the expertise required to facilitate our using of it. Senate House Library offered a handling session and sponsored tea and cake. The Bibliographical Society (of London) offered a subvention for postgraduate travel and attendance. This support disappears in many cases upon graduation. Erin McGuirl, executive director of its transatlantic counterpart, the Bibliographical Society of America, reached out with grant information after we had shared our call, in line with their Equity Action Plan (Bibliographical Society of America 2020). We might be circumspect about these kinds of institutional projects generally, but this was a rare example of an action plan delivering an action, and the support was welcome, especially given it was an overseas event. Indeed, we were sufficiently emboldened by this new approach to simply saying we would do something and figuring out the details afterwards that we went back to the Bibliographical Society and asked for a second grant to supplement the conference subvention. Exceptional support meant that it was possible for us, ultimately, to offer the entire two days of discussion and one-day practice-based workshop for free.

While not employed by any of these bodies, we managed to occupy enough scholarly space to be taken seriously by them, while at the same time finding a certain lightness in having no ties to any one institution. We were doing just what we wanted to do because we believed in it and wanted to see it emerge in the world. The experience of precarious work, in the sense of scrambling for the fixed-term contract or the hourly paid teaching, is something like crossing a swamp by laying out your path in front of you as you go, throwing down planks provided piecemeal by sources you are grateful for but know you cannot trust in the long term. A function of precarity has been to turn much previously professional work—that which over and above all else is characterized by the remuneration for which it is done—into tasks completed unpaid and therefore amateur. For Carolyn Dinshaw, the attachment is keen as individuals are “personally invested” (2012, 22). Working hard outside of what she names as the “measured, regulated time of paid work and the time-intensive labors of the home,” we were, in a sense, practicing a kind of queer amateurism, “laboring in the off-hours,” as Dinshaw puts it, “a different kind of time in which one labors, but labors for love” (5). The affective experience, as well as of lightness, was—yes!—also one of delight. Perhaps we were, as the Res-Sisters worry, “reproducing and sustaining the very systems that trouble us [. . .] justified as a ‘labour of love’” (2017, 269). But perhaps appreciating this and doing the work anyway is what Taylor, Brim, and Mahn call “queer pragmatism,” “a participative practicality” that they also term “getting by” (2023, 4).

With the disciplinary and institutional guardrails out of reach, this slantwise approach to academia in general allowed us to focus on knowledge-making, sharing of

experiences, and building communities of knowledge and of practice both inside and outside of the institution. While we had both been focused on inclusivity in the lead-up to the event, that we may have in some way benefited from our own exclusion did not occur until the first day of the conference was underway. Responses from our participants were earnest, heartfelt. There was gratitude for making it happen. *This couldn't have happened before now*. It seemed that by operating from our own positions of queer precarity, we had managed to begin to build solidarities within “states of flux, insecurity and uncertainty” (Taylor, Brim, and Mahn 2023, 1). But there was certain disorientation, too, in hearing the organizing team thanked by polite participants. Beyond the calm, friendly, and supremely competent support offered by the Institute of English Studies’ Institute Manager Eleanor Hardy, there was no wider team. More than that, precarity’s affective payoff is to encourage you to linger on the fact that there is no team because you are not invited to be part of one. What the academy might subsequently seem to welcome in—by way of commitment to further events, publications, special issues, calls for papers, courses, and increased institutionalization of terms—is what has been produced in the face of its seeming indifference.

This experience might have been one of continued doubling and estrangement, then, if it were not for the experience of building a community that seemed to bridge these dividing binaries: inside/outside, student/staff, adjunct/permanent, professional/scholar, artist/academic. Together, we were forging new ground on which to stand solidly, together. It is possible, as Silvia Schiltermandl, Gulsin Ciftci, and Jennifer A. Reimer suggest, to “relinquish victimhood for agency-within-precarity” (2022, 2). What we were left reflecting on was the other side of this success: Who remained under-represented, left out, marginalized? And what does it mean to build on the successes of a queer endeavor, without leading to the further marginalization of those who were not sufficiently brought along with us? Our task, then, following a transformative three days was to nourish and protect what had begun to feel like a newly restorative place of possibility within contemporary academia, a place we wanted to think, write, work, collaborate, and speak from. We endeavored—and still two years on, endeavor—to do so in parallel with the university, half-in and half-out, navigating its continuing “hopes and refusals” (Taylor, Brim, and Mahn 2023, 2).

Fostering community

Despite our positions of precarity—or perhaps because of them—we felt a considerable responsibility as organizers. We wanted to welcome a mixed group, including librarians, archives professionals, academics from various fields and all career stages, and practitioners, inviting them to come together in intellectual exchange to consider what queer

bibliography might be, some tools and methods for approaching queer book-objects of all kinds, and how queer theory can inform bibliographic practice. Bibliography is, by its definition, interdisciplinary, and also loosely and messily connected to neighboring fields such as textual criticism and book history: David L. Vander Meulen terms them “parts of a common enterprise, each employs distinctive approaches and makes unique contributions” (2009, 113). Nobody’s “home” discipline is bibliography, and by its nature it serves as a meeting place for different disciplinary traditions; indeed, it is herein that much of its power lies. Bibliography gathers people, expertise, and material. Any workshop in this field has the challenge of being sufficiently defined. It must be coherent, a space with sufficient elements in common for dialogue to work, but also open to as many as possible as a matter of ethics. On this note, we realized and were mindful that many colleagues were going to considerable expense to attend in person for three days despite our mitigations in terms of conference fees.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 made visible how dependent on others we all are. As Lynne Segal puts it, “[a]t every state of life, we lean upon others for recognition and sustenance” (2023, 2). Questions of what this labor and care mean have been the subject of discussion by feminist scholars critiquing the neoliberal academy. Maddie Breeze and Yvette Taylor have reflected on the nature of their labor as feminists asking how care can be figured in a way so as to “resist recapture by greedy institutions ever hungry for feminist, as well as feminized, labour” (2020, 49). Considerations of this nature framed both our approach and reflection. For example, wanting to keep discussions that sometimes touched on very personal areas safe, respectful, and inclusive and to protect the new shoots of works in progress, first articulations, and new theorizing, we decided against recording any session, bar the final roundtable.

First, we acknowledged explicitly from the start that a dangerous and highly transmissible virus remained pandemic and that queer communities are disproportionately likely to encompass immunocompromised people or those frequently exposed to the especially vulnerable. The importance of this was underscored by the announcement by the organizers of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing (SHARP) conference held in Amsterdam in July 2022 that “[n]umerous in-person attendees are now reporting positive COVID-19 tests” after an event with few apparent measures in place (SHARP News 2022), a sobering reminder as we prepared to circulate our call for papers that we did not wish to host a superspreading event. However, we also accept value in occupying the same space for fostering dialogue and building community. We therefore arranged all paper sessions as hybrid, with in-person participants agreeing to various mitigation measures: ventilation from open windows, proper and provided FFP2 masks (the equivalent of KN95 in the United States), and half-capacity occupation of venues. We timed sessions so as to preclude catering beyond light mid-afternoon refreshments; we did not arrange any group suppers either. Those

with symptoms were asked, and easily able, to instead join by video call. Simple measures were, apparently, successful, as we are not aware of any cases as a result. These, we hoped, would be what Hil Malatino in *Trans Love* describes as “practical manifestations of love in the form of care work” (2020, 1).

Second, we had an ethic of allowing as many voices as possible, as we share a strong dislike of gatekeeping that can exclude others even from apparently progressive areas of scholarly inquiry. With ten-minute provocations we made space for as many as possible. Summary presentations made for a denser format, but reading advance papers was designed to help attendees, especially virtual, to follow discussion. Even so we could not accommodate all and therefore invited those whose papers we could not fit into the program to act as respondents to panels so that they could speak too. In the same line, we eventually decided against having a keynote, wanting to close in a spirit of plurality and collective knowledge-making.

Third, as general point around the importance of questions of race to queer politics (Ferguson 2019) and specifically given the importance of Black liberation bibliography (Spires 2022a) to the discussion, we were keen to see papers and presenters be representative in intersectional ways, attentive to questions of race and class, as well as full-spectrum representation of genders and sexualities. We attempted to balance this in the program in two ways: by inviting some speakers whose work addressed questions of race and class directly and by questioning how different critical bibliographies might fit together with queer bibliography. Our attempts to broaden the program were only partly successful; some invited speakers had to withdraw. But the symposium closed with a roundtable considering the question of what an intersectional bibliography might look like, subsequently published as part of a journal issue arising from the symposium (Nishikawa, Ozment, and Fernández 2024).

We had also hoped to break down any barrier between “academics” and “practitioners” and between talking about bibliographic work and doing that work. A handling session at Senate House Library with items from the Haud Nominandum collection, assembled by Jonathan Cutbill—museum professional, bibliophile, and former director of Gay’s the Word LGBTQ+ bookshop in London’s Bloomsbury—let all participants explore, and touch, material from one of the UK’s most extensive and significant collections of queer print. This served a grounding function: for an hour, all were active bibliographers handling print material rather than sitting, talking about handling material. Remote attendees were able to see photographs on social media or enjoy a screen break. This also gave time to reflect on discussions about the emotional nature of queer bibliographic work. We had hoped to have book artists present, too, or participate in a roundtable, but those we approached either were unable to attend or sought remuneration. Given the tiny budget, this was outside the scope of what we might hope to do and points to questions about labor that are both complex

and simple to answer: simple in that all ought to be paid, complex in that finding resources to do that would have prevented anything other than a limited event that would thus exclude most of the voices. On balance, we consider that Queer Bibliography would not have been better served by a single remunerated roundtable. These are the compromises forced upon us by precarity and lack of resources for such work in wealthy institutions.

Furthermore, we sought a very practical element in making, together, a conference edition of the program and abstracts on the final day of the event. Facilitated by queer book artist Brooke Palmieri at the London Centre for Book Arts, this incorporated material provided by participants into an A5 risographed pamphlet, which we collaboratively printed, folded, stapled, and editioned—even designing, printing, cutting, and inserting a spontaneously designed errata slip. For the uninitiated, risographs use stencils and special soy-based ink in bright, stratifying colors that yield imperfect results. The distinct aesthetic associated with this has been important artistically and in countercultures (see, e.g., Komurki 2018).

The making session was by necessity a more relaxed occasion: only so many hands can work at once. It was restricted by its nature to those attending in person, but all participants had the opportunity to submit material to the conference edition and received a copy by post, pigeon, or otherwise. By this stage, all had given their papers, and having tangled with theorizing affect in bibliographic work and shared experiences of crying—in grief and joy—in the archive, this provided a space for those present to make, do, and share together. It was at once integral and peripheral, in that while papers were not being given, it gave a chance to reflect gently and casually. This was space vital to creating and cementing relationships. Some were entirely new and others were first in-person meetings after Zoom calls or social media contact, lending a particular emotional element to the event. The organizers—and present authors—met in person only for the second time.

Feedback and reflections

We invited feedback with a view to reporting on our activities, recording whether commenters gave permission for us to use their words and, if so, the form they wished their names to take or if they preferred anonymity. We quote from these a little here because, unbidden, they illustrate common themes around being brought together—gathered—and the unusual coherence of an interdisciplinary interprofessional group assembled for the first time. This is presented anecdotally rather than as a social-scientific sample; however, some gave permission to use and share their comments either anonymously or with attribution ($n = 8$). Some wished for more social

activities, which we could not have offered in terms of our organization capacity, or in line with our approach against COVID-19. A common theme was that it had been an unusual space. As Laura Estill put it, “This conference was affirming, engaging, and has my head spinning with ideas in the best possible way.” An anonymous attendee considered it “a transformative experience, even remotely . . . joyful and exhilarating in a way that academic conferences rarely are.” Another said “[t]here was a great mix of people from faculty to grad students, librarians, and independent scholars, as well as a range of queer and trans identities. I would have liked to have heard from more scholars of color and seen more use of queer of color critique.” We were keen to see as broad representation of the LGBTQIA2S+ spectrum as possible and shared concerns about questions of race.

J. D. Sargan suggested it “was a very significant event both for the academic conversations it brought together and for the international community building work that it did.” Another said that advance-circulated papers enabled “participants to make connections within panels and between different sessions, making the conference feel like a ‘whole,’ rather than a series of isolated parts. And the community spirit and supportiveness was out of this world: I’ve never felt a sense of togetherness like that in an academic setting before.” Finally, Shannon K. Supple said “[e]veryone attended seemed to join rigorous research with deep feelings of connection and feeling seen as human beings. It was a rare and special gathering.”

Aware that we wanted to capture something of what had occurred before, during, and after the event, we write this piece, too, in an attempt to preserve the “ephemeral steps that precede the formal work,” as the call for papers for this journal special issue put it (Rogers 2023). This seems particularly urgent when such discussions are elided in the “real” outputs of journal articles or bibliographical notes, as journal editors are unwilling to yield editorial space for “conference report” reflections or more ruminative pieces. The hundreds, if not thousands, of emails exchanged, the video calls, and the swiftly thumbed-out WhatsApp messages are one kind of material record of our “long process of thought, conversation, writing, and editing.” And yet the affective and relational aspects of this work also deserve careful reflection. These points of “connection, engagement, amplification, thinking-together across disciplinary spaces and ways of knowing”—and, we might add, of tension and of disagreement—do indeed, “shape scholarly thought” (Rogers 2023). Of course, in one sense, this work—of collaboration on an academic event—is so quotidian as to be unworthy of comment; after all it is *just part of the job*. And yet, when there is no job, and scant prospect of one in the kind of long-term and stable way that such a throwaway phrase suggests, it seems ever more important that this work is recognized and its less tangible and more ephemeral aspects recorded.

After gathering: dispersal and longevity

In book-making, the assembling of gatherings is a preparatory step to binding pages, so preserving the contents for future: unbound material is much less likely to survive in the long run. Gathering is therefore a prelude to dispersal. By the time this article is published, a second queer bibliography conference will have taken place at UCLA, organized once again predominantly by graduate students, and hosted by California Rare Book School, and preparations for a third conference in Newcastle in June 2025 will be well underway (here again, two-thirds of the lead organizers are doctoral candidates). We are looking still further forward to the University of Georgia, Athens, in 2026, as well as to proposals for future years beyond this, which it seems utterly hubristic to announce in publication. The idea has already acquired longevity that exceeds any confidence we have that we might still be scholars working in—or adjacent—to universities, though our commitment to this work will remain. What might the humanities look like in publicly funded universities on either side of the Atlantic in ten years?

Given the participation of historians and librarians, the archiving impulse—to which this article contributes—is perhaps unsurprising. There is a box containing some materials that will be passed to the next group for material to be added, so that it accretes over time. Our conference edition was given to all participants, but also to various institutional and teaching collections, in three countries so far, including Senate House Library and the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London; Harvard's Widener Library; Thomas Fisher Library in Toronto; the Tom of Finland Foundation's library and the ONE Archives in Los Angeles; and Rochester Institute of Technology and the Grolier Club libraries in New York (becoming, there, only its second risographed publication, defiantly inky and DIY). This does pose a question about how large the overlap in titles between the Tom of Finland Foundation and Grolier Club libraries is likely to be. As these copies are accessioned and become visible, by the care of specialist librarians' thorough cataloging, so do the networks through which they circulate. The copy in Senate House Library includes a covering note on the postcard with which it was dispatched to the library for archiving. The Grolier catalog notes the donor by whom its accession was facilitated. Gathering and dispersal are thus linked.

Dispersing ideas is a more important task. Our guest-edited special issue of *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* includes seven pieces: six developed from the forum alongside a co-written article. We are now working on an edited collection of essays. We remain committed to these ideas and, above all, to this community. The ongoing existence of queer bibliography in its future iterations, including the conference, related seminars, reading groups, and writing workshops, in the face

of personal, material, structural, and global uncertainties, feels queer in its stubborn persistence, growing in the cracks between disciplinary acceptance and dismissal, with shifting institutional (and financial) support, bound by an ever-growing community of scholars and practitioners committed to the work, even as they negotiate insecure employment prospects and academia's exclusionary practices. Precarity is often equated with the fixed term and the short term, but in community and with care, perhaps what is precarious can last. Perhaps, even, precarity is a possible condition for this kind of queer work, refusing institutionalization a way to ensure a longevity not guaranteed by a more assimilationist approach. In standing firm in our own vulnerable positions, we acknowledge this vulnerability's ambivalent nature as something we do not necessarily want to let go of; it is, as Schultermandl, Ciftci, and Reimer note, citing Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay (2016), a "'politically produced' condition" that "contains the potential for resistance and consequential social change for minoritized individuals and communities" (Schultermandl, Ciftci, and Reimer 2022, 2).

As we write, the future of higher education in the UK looks bleak, a collapsing house-of-cards undermined by financial mismanagement as more than seventy institutions enact redundancy processes and restructures (UCU Queen Mary University of London, n.d.). We watch with horror as US campuses act with the full force of the carceral and police state, violently repressing more than eighty legitimate, peaceful protests against US complicity with Israeli genocide against the people of Gaza. It feels, often, in these unstable times, as if the only solid ground under our feet is offered by the collective knowledge- and world-making we have been attempting. Reflecting on the Queer Bibliography symposium in the tired week following the February 2023 event, one of us (Sarah) wrote that what remained after the event "is the sense of one big collective exhalation, a loosening of tension, shoulders down. No throat-clearing or defensiveness necessary. Everybody somehow, remarkably, on the same page" (Pyke 2023). To have gathered in this way remains a privilege, a high-water mark, and we record here the process of its emergence in the hope that it will continue to flourish. To queer futures.

Author Biographies

Malcolm Noble is a member of Leicester Vaughan College and a freelance historian. He is interested in all aspects of queer bibliography. He has essays on affective bibliography forthcoming in *Gender and the Book Trades*, ed. Elise Watson and Jessica Farrell-Jobst, and on bookish scented candles in *The New Americanist*. His next book, *George Farmiloe & Sons 1823–2023: The First Six Generations of a London Family Business* will be published by the firm this year.

Sarah Pyke teaches children's and Young Adult literature at the University of Münster. Previously, she was Munby Fellow in Bibliography 2023–2024 at Cambridge University Library. She has taught at London Rare Books School, Anglia Ruskin University, and the University of Roehampton and has held fellowships at the School of Advanced Study's Institute of English Studies and Freie Universität Berlin. With Leila Kassir, she co-curated the online exhibition *Seized Books! LGBTQ+ books and censorship in 1980s Britain* for Senate House Library, University of London.

References

- Adams, Christopher. 2022. "'Could You Make It Rather More of a He and She Picture': Queer Texts and Dust Jackets in Mid-Twentieth Century British Fiction." *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 116 (4): 537–65. <https://doi.org/10.1086/722614>.
- Bibliographical Society of America. 2020. "Equity Action Plan." October 30, 2020. <https://bibso-camer.org/about-us/the-society/equity-action-plan/>.
- Breeze, Maddie, and Yvette Taylor. 2020. "Care(er)ing: Queer Feminist Career Cares." In *Feminist Repetitions in Higher Education: Interrupting Career Categories*, edited by Maddie Breeze and Yvette Taylor, 49–68. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53661-9_3.
- Butler, Judith, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay. 2016. Introduction to *Vulnerability in Resistance*, edited by Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, 1–11. Durham NC: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822373490-003>.
- Carter, John, and Nicolas Barker. 2004. *ABC for Book Collectors*. 8th ed. New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press.
- Cohen, Matt. 2020. "Time and the Bibliographer: A Meditation on the Spirit of Book Studies." *Textual Cultures* 13 (1): 179–206. <https://doi.org/10.14434/textual.v13i1.30077>.
- Craig, Heidi, Laura Estill, and Kris L. May. 2023. "A Rationale of Trans-Inclusive Bibliography." *Textual Cultures* 16 (2). <https://doi.org/10.14434/tc.v16i2.36763>.
- Dinshaw, Carolyn. 2012. *How Soon Is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Felski, Rita. 2008. *Uses of Literature*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Ferguson, Roderick A. 2019. *One-Dimensional Queer*. Medford, MA: Polity.
- Goldsby, Jacqueline, and Meredith L. McGill. 2022. "What Is 'Black' about Black Bibliography?" *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 116 (2): 161–89. <https://doi.org/10.1086/719985>.
- Henningsen, Kadin. 2016. "'You Deciphered Me and Now I Am Plain to Read': How the Body Is a Book." *Library Trends* 64 (4): 741–55. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2016.0018>.
- Howsam, Leslie. 2016. "Thinking through the History of the Book." *Memoires Du Livre/Studies in Book Culture* 7 (2). <https://doi.org/10.7202/1036851ar>.
- Komurki, John Z. 2018. *Risomania: The New Spirit of Printing*. Curated by Luca Bendandi and Luca Bogoni. 2nd ed. Salenstein, Switzerland: Niggli Verlag.
- Lynch, Lee. 1990. "Cruising the Libraries." In *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*, edited by Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow, 39–48. New York: New York University Press.
- Malatino, Hil. 2020. *Trans Care*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/23/oa_monograph/book/78334.

- Maruca, Lisa. 2003. "Bodies of Type: The Work of Textual Production in English Printers' Manuals." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36 (3): 321–43. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30053384>.
- Maruca, Lisa, and Kate Ozment. 2022. "What Is Critical Bibliography?" *Criticism* 64 (3): 231–36. <https://doi.org/10.1353/crt.2022.a899716>.
- McGill, Meredith L. 2021. "Books on the Loose." In *The Unfinished Book*, edited by Alexandra Gillespie and Deidre Lynch, 79–83. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nelson, Marilyn. 1996. "Seven Library Women Whose Humane Presence Enlightened Society in the Harlem Renaissance Iconoclastic Ethos." PhD diss., State University of New York at Buffalo.
- Nishikawa, Kinohi, Kate Ozment, and David Fernández. 2024. "Towards Intersectional Queer Bibliography: Three Perspectives from a Roundtable Discussion." *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 118 (2): 271–82. <https://doi.org/10.1086/730473>.
- Noble, Malcolm. 2024. "Affective Bibliography: Three Queer Approaches to Print." In *Gender and the Book Trades*, edited by Elise Watson and Jessica Farrell-Jobst, 468–84. Leiden: Brill.
- Noble, Malcolm, and Sarah Pyke. 2024. "Queer Bibliography: A Rationale." *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 118 (2): 147–69. <https://doi.org/10.1086/730427>.
- Ozment, Kate. 2020. "Rationale for Feminist Bibliography." *Textual Cultures* 13 (1): 149–78. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26954243>.
- Pyke, Sarah. 2020. "Textual Preferences: The Queer Afterlives of Childhood Reading." PhD diss., University of Roehampton. <https://pure.roehampton.ac.uk/portal/en/studentTheses/textual-preferences>.
- Pyke, Sarah (@pykelets). 2023. "Personally what'll stay with me from #QueerBibliography 2023 is the sense of one big collective exhalation, a loosening of tension, shoulders down. No throat-clearing or defensiveness necessary. Everybody somehow, remarkably, on the same page. And (this is a bit cringe but true)–." Twitter, April 11, 2023. <https://twitter.com/pykelets/status/1645875207200972802>.
- The Res-Sisters. 2017. "'I'm an Early Career Feminist Academic: Get Me Out of Here?': Encountering and Resisting the Neoliberal Academy." In *Being an Early Career Feminist Academic: Global Perspectives, Experiences and Challenges*, edited by Rachel Thwaites and Amy Pressland, 267–84. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54325-7_14.
- Rogers, Katina. 2023. "Call for Papers: Special Issue, 'On Gathering: Exploring Collective and Embodied Modes of Scholarly Communication and Publishing.'" *Journal of Electronic Publishing*, October 15, 2023. <https://journals.publishing.umich.edu/jep/news/106/>.
- Sargan, J. D. 2023. "What Could a Trans Book History Look Like? Toward Trans Codicology." *Criticism* 64 (3–4): 571–86. <https://doi.org/10.1353/crt.2022.a899738>.
- Schultermandl, Silvia, Gulsin Ciftci, and Jennifer Reimer. 2022. "American Studies as Vulnerability Studies: Introduction." *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* 4 (1): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.47060/jaaas.v4i1.195>.
- Segal, Lynne. 2023. *Lean on Me: A Politics of Radical Care*. London: Verso.
- SHARP News (@SHARPorgNews). 2022. "#SHARP2022: Numerous in-person attendees are now reporting positive COVID-19 tests. If you attended the conference in Amsterdam, please consider testing yourself regularly over the next few days if you haven't already started doing so. ❤️." Twitter, July 17, 2022. <https://twitter.com/SHARPorgNews/status/1548755800931422208>.
- Silva, Franciële Carneiro Garcês da, Dirnéle Carneiro Garcez, Diná Marques Pereira Araújo, Priscila Rufino Fevrier, and Gabriel de Melo Vieira. 2023. "The Contribution of 19th and 20th Century Black Bibliophiles and Bibliographers to the Construction of a Black Bibliography." *Ciência Da Informação* 52 (1): 192–204.
- Spires, Derrick R. 2022a. "On Liberation Bibliography: The 2021 BSA Annual Meeting Keynote." *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 116 (1): 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1086/718342>.

- Spires, Derrick R. 2022b. "Order and Access: Dorothy Porter and the Mission of Black Bibliography." *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 116 (2): 255–75. <https://doi.org/10.1086/719973>.
- Taylor, Yvette, Matt Brim, and Churnjeet Mahn. 2023. Introduction to *Queer Sharing in the Marketized University*, by Churnjeet Mahn, Matt Brim, and Yvette Taylor, 1–12. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003203254-1>.
- UCU Queen Mary University of London. n.d. "UK HE Shrinking." Accessed November 18, 2024. <https://qmucul.org/qmul-transformation/uk-he-shrinking/#current-redundancy-programmes>.
- Vander Meulen, David L. 2009. "Bibliography and Other History." *Textual Cultures* 4 (1): 113–28. <https://doi.org/10.2979/TEX.2009.4.1.113>.
- Werner, Sarah. 2020. "Working towards a Feminist Printing History." *Printing History* 27/28:11–25. <https://hcommons.org/deposits/item/hc:29031/>.

