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A FAUSTIAN EXCHANGE: WHAT IS IT TO BE HUMAN IN THE ERA OF UBIQUITOUS TECHNOLOGY?

Imaginary computational systems: queer technologies and transreal aesthetics

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Abstract Turing, like queerness, was invested in creating logics and codes, which are undoubtedly intertwined with his desires as a human, scientist, and homosexual. We are interested in Turing as a striking figure in queer and feminist histories, as the hidden queer figure behind the Apple logo and as a creator of logic and worlds (Halberstam in Fem Stud 17(3):439–460, 1991). In this paper, we first want to briefly highlight how Turing has been cast in queer and feminist histories and theories. Then, we will discuss how Turing's work and life have influenced our own artistic practices.

Keywords Art · Media art · Contemporary art · Queer · Feminism · Transreal · Queer technologies · Femme disturbance · Politics · Speculative design

1 Introduction

Becoming Transreal, Micha Cárdenas and Elle Mehrmand, UCLA Freud Playhouse, 2010 photograph by Tracy Cornish

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As a transgender woman and queer man, we are interested in Alan Turing's breasts—they provoke us—because they are a material site of a conflict between war, queerness, technology, and the state. Turing, a war hero for code-breaking during WWII, was convicted by British authorities of gross acts of indecency for being homosexual. Thus, while his computational research was prized, his homosexuality was punished by being forced to take estrogen hormones and implants.

We are particularly struck by the figure of Alan Turing at his death, a failure to the state: chemically castrated by the British government and forced to grow breasts, he committed suicide by taking a bite out of an apple laced with cyanide, based on his love of *Snow White*—what queer theorist Jose Muñoz might call a queer utopian performance (King forthcoming; Muñoz 2009). Still today, Turing remains a queer failure (Halberstam 2011), having been rejected from receiving a 2012 official pardon from the UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown, while his crucial contributions to computer science remain celebrated (Wainwright 2012).

When we look to Turing's work and his breasts, we do not necessarily think that Turing's work is queer—but that it can be queerly inflected. It is not because Turing was gay that he was creative in mathematics—but that his desires played a part in the construction of his research.

To ask whether Turing's homosexuality shaped his research, and as a result, contemporary computing, raises an interesting series of questions. Following that logic, one could similarly ask whether heterosexual mathematicians and scientists create models and technologies that are infused with heterosexuality. While materialist ontologies, such as the one proposed by French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1987), would reject the possibility of such essences infused into objects and concepts, we want to