

Acknowledgments

The process of researching and writing this book has often felt like a solitary one, the result of many months spent hiding away in my office, pouring over documents, delving deeply into archives, and thinking about the relationship between technology, sexuality, and this odd thing we call *history*. In reality, this project has come into being through the generosity and support of many people—in no small part because much of my work has taken place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these people have been my collaborators, colleagues, and friends. Others have been archivists and librarians. A number of others have lent me their assistance even though we have no official professional ties. For a number of years now, I have been that stranger on the internet sending cold-call emails about sex dolls to anyone I had reason to believe might hold a clue I could use in my search for the *dames de voyage*. To my great benefit, almost all of them answered, and I learned something new from each one.

A number of the scholars whose work I discuss at length in the early chapters of this book have generously replied to my queries about their sources and shared with me some of their unpublished works. Among these are Cynde Moya, Anthony Ferguson, David Levy, Amy Wolf, and Hallie Lieberman. I am also grateful to Minsoo Kang for his thoughts on the veracity of the tale of the *dames de voyage*, as well as to scholars and archivists of maritime history Gina Bardi, Peter Kasin, Gibb Schreffler, and Amy Parsons for their expert guidance. My thanks to Andrea Horbinsky and Zoyander Street for their assistance with my research into the textual lineage behind the story of the “Dutch wives,” specifically in verifying my readings of Japanese-language texts. Relatedly, thank you to Kathryn Levine and Aubrey Gabel for indulging me and reading a schlocky serialized short

story from the 1890s so that we could double- and triple-check the context meaning of references to *dames de voyage*.

Thank you to Elizabeth Losh and Celia Pearce, the editors of the *Media Origins* series, for believing in this project even in its nascent stages and for supporting my vision of a book that is somehow simultaneously quirky and serious, highly specific and extremely wide-ranging. My gratitude also goes out to my editors at the MIT Press, first Doug Sery and now Noah Springer, for their encouragement and support through the publishing process. I am thankful for the work of my anonymous peer reviewers, who offered feedback at multiple stages, including during the hubbub of the pandemic. Their feedback on the original full draft of the manuscript, which was admittedly still rough, was invaluable. I am especially grateful to my most exacting reviewer, whose careful engagement with the manuscript draft was exactly the push I needed to make this into the book it is today.

Librarians, archivists, and curators are the true heroes of this project. My enormous thanks to Jenna Dufour, research librarian for the visual arts at the University of California, Irvine. I have lost track of the number of times I have emailed Jenna in a state of exuberance or panic to ask for help tracking down some obscure sex-related document. The Humanities and Rare Books Reference Teams at the British Library, and Elias Mazzucco in particular, went above and beyond to help me track down the album of advertisements for sex toys discussed in chapters 2 and 4. Despite a series of obstacles, from pandemic travel restrictions to the realization that the documents in question were too fragile for reproduction or public viewing, the British Library staff was able to send photos at the eleventh hour that I was so happy to receive that I spent a whole morning alone in my office laughing with delight.

My thanks also to the staff at both the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives and the library at the University of California, Los Angeles, who valiantly ventured into the stacks to produce scans for me during pandemic lockdown. Whoever it is at the Internet Archive who decided it was worthwhile to preserve early rubber goods catalogs and minor works of German sexology in a meticulous array of published editions, you have contributed to this research in more ways than I am sure you will ever know. Many of the primary texts in this book, and especially those that reflect French popular print culture from roughly 1850 to 1920, come from the amazing digital archive Gallica, associated with the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*.

Additional archives and collections that I have drawn from include the American Periodicals Series database, the holdings of the British National Maritime Museum, and a wide range of print texts flung to the far corners of the American interlibrary loan system. To all who have worked to create and maintain those collections, my thanks.

Many colleagues and students have been instrumental in helping me develop my thinking about sex dolls, sex tech, and the history of sexual technologies. Thank you to Josef Nguyen for the chance to think alongside his developing work on sex dolls and consent. Thank you also to Bliss Cua Lim for suggestions of work that bridge the sex doll and broader artistic traditions exploring doll imagery. A special thank you to all of the members of the Critical Approaches to Technology and the Social (CATS) lab at the University of California, Irvine, which I co-run with Aaron Trammell: Ryan Rose Aceae, Kat Brewster, Amanda Cullen, Will Dunkel, Nazely Hartoonian, Ke Jing, Ian Larson, Rainforest Scully-Blaker, Bryan Truit, Isabelle Williams, and Cass Zegura. You are the best group of graduate students a proud faculty mentor could ask for, and your feedback has invaluable shaped my revision of this project. Kat Brewster is also the artist who created the original paintings of early sex toys found at a number of points in the book. Thank you, Kat, for your amazing work, which has helped bring this history to life.

I am grateful to others in my academic community for their support and guidance. Thank you to my colleagues in the Department of Film and Media Studies and the School of Humanities at the University of California, Irvine, whose warmth and enthusiasm for my work has been truly sustaining. Thank you to my department chair, Fatimah Tobing Rony, and to Dean Tyrus Miller for offering me a course release to make up for research time lost during the pandemic, which served as a major factor in allowing me to complete the revision of this project on time. Thank you to the UCI Humanities Center for awarding me a publication grant to assist with the cost of indexing and proofreading this project. Beyond UCI, thank you to Jacques Wernimont, whose book *Numbered Lives* precedes mine in the Media Origins series and who has been a role model in the work of writing feminist media histories.

In a sense, this book represents a coming together of numerous elements of my life that go back many years. For that reason, all of the people I should truly thank are too many to list here. I will, however, say thank you to the Comparative Literature program at the University of California,

Berkeley, where I earned my PhD. My mentors there taught me to close read the world around me as text. They also created an environment that fostered the foreign language skills I would later need to undertake such studious endeavors as discerning the difference between a sex doll made by a sailor and one made by a prisoner, or combing through old directories of the city of Paris to map a network of turn-of-the-century sex toy sellers. Thank you to those friends who have helped me grow my collection of antique vibrators over the years. Having firsthand knowledge of these material objects has helped me in ways I never anticipated when scouring estate sales for crumbling old sex toys tucked away in the back of closets.

I love writing, and I have loved writing this book. To be honest, though, I have also found it to be the hardest thing I have ever written. Often, working on it has felt like sitting at the bottom of a swimming pool, fully submerged, with the world above somehow very far away. Throughout this process, the people closest to me kept me grounded and reminded me that, though writing is my first love, there are many other things in the world worth loving. Thank you to Eli Peterson, who has listened to me with an exceptional amount of patience as I have rambled on about the minutiae of this project. His support, in both love and time, is absolutely what has made this book possible. Thank you also to Jonah Peterson. He cannot read yet but hopefully one day, years down the line, he will pick up this book and realize that this strange volume—with its sex dolls and its sailors and its dreams of remaking history—is what I was working on all those evenings he sat beside me and kept me company while I was writing.