1 Introduction

No technology is single use. Whether from hapless accident or deliberate tinkering, technology is always subject to forms of appropriation and play, misuse and reuse, often in ways that are unintended and unimagined by designers and inventors. This includes the Internet. Typically, narratives surrounding digital technologies include the military and Silicon Valley, elite knowledge workers and cutting-edge innovators. We tend not to think about bulletin board service (BBS) hobbyists (Driscoll 2014) or spammers (Brunton 2013), even though their experiments and communities were just as crucial to Internet development as efforts from college dropouts turned tech entrepreneurs. As technologies develop, dominant narratives and prescribed uses stabilize and take hold, promoting some people and uses while excluding others, and it is usually difficult to tell at the outset which practices will win out as "normal" and which will fade into obscurity.

Major players in the tech industry often share some key views about the devices and infrastructures at the root of their success and wealth: sharing is good, privacy is outdated, and technological development and corporate profit go hand in hand. As the web has become increasingly integrated into everyday communication, so has the reach of these narratives expanded, promoted by designers, users, and journalists who are looking to explain (and sell) technologies to themselves as much as each other. As a result, we associate digital technological innovation with revolutionizing workplace efficiency or the latest killer app. But there are other, less common stories of the Internet that we can tell, with different visions of how and by whom the Internet can be used.

For example, we think of social media as starting with Facebook, with roots in Ivy League universities and tech start-up culture. Yet long before Facebook was even a twinkle in a venture capitalist's eye, an international

collection of body modification enthusiasts had developed their own social media platform, which eventually included blogs, a wiki, online dating apps, pod casts, and tens of thousands of images and descriptions of piercings and tattoos. Their community was small but vibrant, foreshadowing many now familiar media practices, as well as many of the tensions around how to sustain a sense of community online.

People stereotype teens and college students as being beholden to their mobile devices and addicted to Facebook updates and Twitter newsfeeds. But what about a local punk community that develops a careful network of communication technologies—both analogue and digital—to manage information about an underground network of music shows? Secrecy and flexibility are crucial to allowing this do-it-yourself (DIY) community to maintain control over protecting its scene from unwanted attention, particularly from the police. Moreover, relationships to technology in this community buck the stereotype of young people as hyperindividualized and committed to a share-everything ethic of online communication.

Social networking sites have long been used as tools of self-promotion in business contexts, which is why we plead with young people not to risk future employment opportunities by posting pictures of late-night partying. Yet these same functions of self-promotion and networking are deeply appreciated by members of Brooklyn's drag queen community, many of whom are intensely businesslike in the ways that they manage their online reputation and image. Despite the fact that transgressive gender performers might seem outside the scope of mainstream social media, for Brooklyn drag queens, Facebook and Instagram are as necessary as wigs, heels, and lipstick.

This book offers alternative narratives of increasingly common technologies as a way of expanding our ideas about who uses the Internet and how countercultural communities develop practices that help them to sustain their group ethics and identities. By looking at countercultural experiences with digital technologies, I compare the imagined uses of the web to the lived and often messy practicalities, explore how experiences of otherness shape uses of and relationships to technology, and investigate the roles that are played by social media platforms in fostering (or fragmenting) community. I introduce three field sites—a social media platform for body modification enthusiasts called *Body Modification Ezine* (BME), an underground punk rock scene in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and a growing drag

community in Brooklyn, New York. Each of these communities has its own history, norms, values, and sociotechnical practices. In addition, each community sees itself as alternative, meaning that they seem themselves as challenging mainstream norms and values in some way. This sense of being alternative is important for community identity and also shapes their uses of and relationships to technology. By looking across these groups and seeing the similarities and differences that emerge, I craft an alternative set of narratives for the Internet as a tool of communication and community.

Rather than replacing popular tropes about the Internet and the ways that it came to be, I want to complicate them and perhaps call certain parts of them into question. I work from the margins as a way of evaluating many of the promises that came with the mass adoption of online technologies—that differences would be erased, tolerance would be fostered, distances of time and space would collapse, and technological innovations needed to be profitable. Drawing on extended fieldwork in three different field sites, I offer grounded, holistic accounts of how communities of outsiders have made the Internet meet their needs, developed tricks and tactics to establish and support social ties, and sometimes worked against established norms of how digital technologies should be used. On the one hand, I want to make everyday uses of the Internet appear strange and unfamiliar from the vantage point of the mainstream. At the same time, by situating these practices in the local norms and needs of countercultural users, I hope to show how the dilemmas and motivations behind these practices are nonetheless familiar.

For example, a drag queen who splits her Facebook profile into two—maintaining separate accounts for queen and boy, night and day, onstage and offstage—may produce a jarring contrast of identity. How can the same person present vastly different presentations of self, with a dramatic split of appearance, mannerisms, and language? Yet before jumping too quickly to see these practices as exceptional, the motivation is likely familiar to anyone who spends a significant amount of time online. Who hasn't experienced a moment of frustration when a distant relative comments on a Facebook update about a recent date, when a coworker sends a work-related email to a personal account, or when a new acquaintance inadvertently finds a deeply idiosyncratic Twitter feed? These mismatches of content and audience are endemic to the flattened audiences of social media. Seen in this light, when drag queens separate their Facebook accounts into two,

they are simply enacting a more dramatic version of a coping strategy that many Internet users have developed to manage the complexities of everyday online life. This movement between the unfamiliar and the familiar, from the margins to the center and back again, is how I show the diversity of online practices. Further, by looking at how online technologies play a role in the lives of outsiders, I open up an analysis of the technological distributions of power.

In science and technology studies (STS), scholars have long argued that some groups tend to benefit from or be left out of dominant narratives (and markets) of technological production. Sometimes these ideologies coalesce around privilege. Ron Eglash, Jennifer L. Croissant, Giovanna Di Chiro, and Rayvon Fouché (2004, iv) have pointed out that first-world consumers fail to recognize the extent to which technology is designed for them. At other times, the design disconnect is around gender. Judy Wacjman (2004, 27) has written on the sexism of technological production, asserting that "machinery is literally designed by men with men in mind—the masculinity of technology becomes embedded in the technology itself." Mainstream heteronormative values are baked into the design of tools and technologies, and appropriations encompass the practices and adaptations that reclaim, rework, or subvert original designs.

What has always interested me about technology and what keeps me looking at the world through a technological lens is the continual conflict between the intended versus actual uses of any given tool, device, or platform—the origin myth versus the continually revised realities. In the gaps between design and use, center and margins, it becomes possible to see ideological tensions that are otherwise largely invisible, making it easier to identify and address inequalities of access and privilege. By building conversations about online life around countercultural communities, we can learn about both alterity and technology, where distinct practices and experiences of otherness underscore the richness and complexity of the tools and platforms that we use in everyday life. Looking at countercultural appropriation provides a way of identifying (and critiquing) mainstream narratives and their underlying structures of power. As Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star (1999, 307) write in their influential book on the politics of infrastructure, acts of appropriation can be seen as "heralds of other worlds and of a wildness that can offset our naturalizations in libratory ways." I find countercultural practices and perspectives useful precisely

as heralds of other worlds that can disrupt normative technological narratives.

Part of my interest in digital technology has to do with its centrality in how we talk about postindustrial life. Work, school, religion, politics, home life: all of these domains have been reshaped by digital code (Kitchin and Dodge 2011), and part of that reshaping extends beyond the purely technical to the social, cultural, and political. Digital technologies are simultaneously burdened by and credited with generating wealth as well as income inequality, with facilitating education through online learning and distracting students from learning, and with fostering matchmaking as well as adultery. As STS scholars have noted, the dynamic of cultural anxieties that are manifesting through narratives of technology is not unique to the Internet (Malin 2014; Marvin 1988). This tendency to let technology bear the weight of larger debates makes a cultural studies analysis of digital technology a rich area of research.

I am particularly interested in relationships between digital media and community. I argue that digital technologies alternately help and hurt the work of building community. The Internet has allowed people, particularly people at the margins, to form powerful social connections in ways that would have been impossible or at least very difficult with older modes of communication. Even as communities form through sustained online communication tools, however, they also can be upended and disrupted. In the different field sites that I have investigated, people struggle to make technology meet their needs, and community trial-and-error tactics provide important insights into a broader set of users. I consider what is lost when site administrators succumb to the pressures of constantly upgrading site features. I examine the use of technology in keeping secrets, which often doubles as a means of facilitating social exclusion. And I look at the ways that being a misfit can alternately ostracize and offer a tool for political action.

The term *community* is an elusive one, in that many people have powerful associations attached to being part of a community and yet struggle to define what separates a community from a group, family, neighborhood, or place of employment. Beyond the term's fuzziness, Miranda Joseph (2002) argues that community tends to be romanticized as an unambiguously desirable social goal, with connotations of anticapitalist (or at least nonmonetary) ethics of social connection and familylike bonds that emerge

outside the home. By looking at different self-described communities (including cultural, activist, and political organizations), Joseph's work provides an important note of caution for thinking of how and when the word *community* gets deployed, arguing that the concept is sometimes used to legitimate hierarchies of gender, race, class, and sexuality.

Although I am mindful of how the word *community* can be used vaguely or irresponsibly, I still rely on the term to talk about the groups of people who are described in this book.[1] My approach has been to ask the people I interview for their preferred terms for describing the groups to which they belong and then to unpack the different meanings and values that are associated with those preferred terms. Participants in all three field studies overwhelmingly preferred the word *community*, particularly in contrast to the word *subculture*, which in common speech has negative connotations of criminality. In cultural studies, *subculture* often is used to refer to any group of people who have practices that are outside (but not necessarily in opposition to) the mainstream. In this definition, subcultures can refer to college fraternities and bowling leagues as much as fetish clubs and animal rights activists. The word *counterculture*, in contrast, has been used to refer to subcultures that intentionally oppose mainstream norms and values.[2] The groups that I study are countercultural, consciously challenging dominant paradigms of body aesthetics, economics of cultural production, and sexuality (among other things), and this sense of being in opposition to mainstream norms acts as an organizing principle for the groups that I have studied.

Another reason for working with the word *community* is to put this book into conversation with other investigations of social connection in the context of the Internet as a communication platform. All communication technologies, including the Internet, have shouldered social anxieties, and one of those anxieties has to do with the durability of community. In the 1990s, academics and industry professionals already were arguing over utopian versus dystopian visions of the Internet.[3] The optimistic view tended to see online technologies as helping people come together by rending distances and differences as almost inconsequential compared to older devices like phones. For tech utopians, the Internet promised to collapse distance and increase tolerance, which would strengthen existing communities and allow new ones to form. More pessimistic thinkers saw the Internet as a threat to existing social ties—a tool that would loosen individuals' grip on

reality by substituting a superficial, virtual world. Both views can be found in the countercultural communities that I have investigated, and although I cannot resolve the debate between tech utopians and dystopians, I can lend thick descriptions and ethnographic analysis to how digital technologies shape social ties within these communities.

One way to manage the murkiness of the word *community* is to be precise about the different ways that communities are organized. There are communities of practice (Wenger 1998), where people are bound by a shared set of knowledge about doing something, often but not always tied to a job (such as accountants, travel agents, gardeners); communities of geography, where people share a collective sense of identity that stems from shared geography (neighborhoods are probably the best example); and communities of alterity, where people are bound together by shared conditions of otherness. These shared conditions of otherness not only are descriptive (meaning that demographic factors are held in common) but also are prescriptive (meaning that these conditions shape how technologies and other things are used and talked about within a community of alterity).[4]

The boundaries between these categories of community are neither fixed nor exclusive, and throughout the analysis that follows, I sometimes pull out threads that emerge less because of alterity and more because of geography and practice. For example, geography is a vital component in understanding New Brunswick's basement scene, which is deeply tied to its spatial proximity to Philadelphia and New York. Geography is also deeply important in Brooklyn's drag community, which emerged in the midst of (and is tied to) processes of urban gentrification. Drag queens also constitute a community of practice, and many of the tactics that they have developed for managing their online lives are driven by norms of drag as a profession and as a source of stigmatized sexuality. The primary framework that I use in this book, however, is of alterity.

The word *alterity* means the state of being alien or unrecognizable to the mainstream. I turn more fully to the relationship between technology and alterity in the next chapter. For now, I want to establish how I think about alterity and otherness in this book. For anthropologist Mary Douglas (1991), constructs of contaminants and messiness do not conform to social conventions of order. Using the metaphor of dirt, Douglas (1984, 35) writes that "where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the byproduct of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves

rejecting inappropriate elements." In the context of social interactions, dirt and cleanness provide apt metaphors for understanding violations of norms and expected behavior. I find Douglas's work particularly compelling in its descriptions of the stakes for those who are conventional in stigmatizing and marginalizing those who are deeply unconventional and in its articulation of the underlying social causes for maintaining boundaries between the two.

Alterity is disruptive and can take the shape of behaving strangely or simply being a stranger. For Sara Ahmed (2000), the label of stranger is applied to any representation of otherness, where differences between strangers are often collapsed to assemble a simpler, more cohesive understanding of threat. The stranger is a relational construct that allows natives to define themselves as belonging and being at home through a process of identifying and removing those who do not belong. This conceptual process has parallels to the way that some queer theorists and activists have argued that the word *queer* is less about a discrete set of sexual desires (namely, same-sex partnerships) than about whatever practices oppose heteronormative ones (Halperin 1997).

Alterity emerges partly from what someone does (in opposition to the normal) and partly from how that behavior is read and acted on by others. A certain type of extreme body modification makes this distinction clear. I have interviewed people who have implants—silicone shapes such as stars, X's, or spheres—inserted below the skin, typically in the forearms, the back of the hands, or the forehead. These modifications are far less risky to one's health than many cosmetic surgery implants that use the same material (silicone), but they are read as marginal or even grotesque because they do not conform to standard notions of beautiful, desirable bodies. Whatever judgments are typically levied at those who opt for cosmetic surgery (such as being vain and superficial), they rarely include ostracizing, discrimination, and fear, all of which were frequently reported in my interviews with people who have obtained extreme forms of body modification. Alterity here is partly about doing something unusual to one's body and partly about interpreting what that behavior reveals and confronts about normality.

Methodological challenges come with studying alterity. In anthropology, gender studies, sociology, and human-computer interaction (HCI), there has been a tendency to fetishize otherness by celebrating outsider

status at the risk of essentializing the people being studied. In other words, by focusing from the outset on marginalized status, researchers can over-emphasize conditions of otherness and fail to recognize the many layers of alterity within a community as well as the many other communities (some of which may be mainstream) to which people belong.[5] Using body modi-fication as an example, experiences of stigma can vary wildly between someone who has tattoos that can be easily hidden (such as tattoos on the back or upper arms) and someone who has substantial facial modifications (such as a lip plate or silicone implants inserted in the forehead). The more heavily modified person may receive higher status and privilege within the body modification community but the reverse among nonmodified folks in everyday locations like the grocery store. And yet if the heavily modified person has a job where colleagues accept modifications, such as a video game developer, experiences of stigma can be far less than if a high school girl from a deeply conservative family has "only" a tongue ring. Status and stigma can fluctuate wildly and be read and assessed differently within a single community and in other social settings. I do my best to avoid essen-tializing otherness, inspired by a "life in the round" approach (Chatman 1999; Jaeger and Burnett 2010) that tries to craft a holistic and complex account of the many trajectories and narratives within each community, the ways that those trajectories change over time, and the relationships between different facets of community members' lives.

Another complication of thinking about alterity is that on one level, everyone can be seen as occupying a position of otherness. Whether through idiosyncrasies, quirks, or even allergies (Star 1990), no one is com-pletely normal all the time. A broad definition of *alterity* is useful for reflect-ing on positions of power and powerlessness in that it becomes clear that privilege and status fluctuate as people move through different communi-ties and social contexts. Yet dwelling too long on the fact that "we are all marginal in some regard" (Star 1990, 52) risks collapsing differences between positions of alterity. I use the word *alterity* to describe distinct experiences of being on the margins, where these communities differ in important ways in different experiences and relationships to otherness. Linking this definition with my earlier descriptions of counterculture and community, throughout the book, I use the term *countercultural communi-ties* to describe groups of people and practices and the word *alterity* to describe the conditions and relationships that give rise to those practices.

The word *practice* has a particular history in Internet studies, particularly with scholars like Henry Jenkins (2006) and Nick Couldry (2004). Here I talk about practices and tactics by drawing on the work of Michel de Certeau (1984). Although de Certeau is not explicitly a philosopher of technology, many cultural theorists and sociologists have drawn on his writings to analyze sociotechnical practices of cultural production, such as mashups (Jenkins 2013; for a countering perspective, see Manovich 2009), interpretive reading (Rothbauer 2005), and activist media (Barassi 2015). Of these examples, my approach most closely resembles Veronica Barassi's, who uses ethnographic methods to compare media practices among three groups of activists. I am similarly interested in de Certeau's understanding of how everyday life contains moments of improvisation, shortcuts, and hacks—divergences from the planned norms of prescribed routes and patterns.

Charged with the task of explaining countercultural ideology in France, in 1974 de Certeau gathered a group of thinkers who spent years conducting ethnographic research on the everyday lives of Parisians, which eventually was published as the two-volume *The Practice of Everyday Life*. De Certeau's core question centers on understanding how people maintain a sense of self in the midst of larger cultural institutions, which he views as forces that wear down and homogenize individuality. De Certeau refers to the ways that these large institutions operate as strategies, meaning that their actions are undertaken in cultural productions and political endeavors. Tactics, in contrast, are the individual shortcuts, improvisations, and workarounds that individuals use to make everyday life easier or more joyous.

As an example, more than once while conducting interviews in Brooklyn's drag community, I met queens who had changed the location of their Facebook pages to Indonesia, where it is common to have one name rather than first and last names. Although this meant that anytime they logged on to Facebook, they encountered an interface in a language they could not read, it was a reasonable trade-off for queens with a one-word stage name. This tactic allowed performers to circumvent Facebook's rules requiring first and last names, illustrating the way that everyday practices can reveal ideologies that are embedded into technological design—in this case, a bias toward Western naming conventions that was built into Facebook's terms of service.

As a concept, tactics do not require an overt political objective—they just need the intention to maneuver around or through institutional strategies. Looking at countercultural practices through a tactical framework, it is often more useful to concentrate on what tactics reveal about the strategies in which they operate. This approach is familiar to STS scholars who are interested in the politics of technology, as Langdon Winner (1986, 25) explains:

> It is obvious that technologies can be used in ways that enhance the power, authority, and privilege of some over others … but we usually do not stop to inquire whether a given device might have been designed and built in such a way that it produces a set of consequences logically and temporally prior to any professed uses.

In my descriptions of the sociotechnical practices of different groups of outsiders, I refer to tactics as a way of identifying how interactions with technology can reveal these embedded logics and eventual consequences. As concepts, strategies and tactics appeal to me because they account for both entrenched systems of power and operations of resistance. Yet if we want to understand the Internet in a complex and holistic way, it is too limiting to create a simple binary where the empowered are strategic and the disempowered are tactical. For example, in circumstances of socioeconomic disruption, institutions of power can adapt quickly and improvisationally in ways that at first are (or seem) tactical,[6] in that they maneuver through existing infrastructure. Although these tactics eventually tend to be enfolded into (and thus reinforce) existing structures, assuming that people in power always and only operate strategically results in a narrow and flawed understanding of privilege.

If institutions can act tactically, so too can marginalized individuals act strategically. Within the small world (Chatman 1991) of a countercultural community, people may reproduce dominant strategies within their social relationships. Much to the dismay and frustration of people who are attracted to countercultures as an alternative to the power inequalities in mainstream cultures, marginalized communities commonly replicate many of the mechanisms of prejudice. When I first encountered BME, I was excited to have found a group of people who were committed to alternative ideals of bodily aesthetics, as opposed to the cookie-cutter norms of being thin, tan, and blond—norms that dominated pop culture images of femininity in my youth. Now it strikes me as naive, but I was surprised and disappointed when, at an event early in my involvement with this

community, I heard a longtime BME member tell his loving, kind, and heavily tattooed wife that he would divorce her immediately if she gained weight. The obvious conflict here is that commitment to one kind of alterity in no way means that someone is free from other kinds of prejudice, like an intolerance of certain body types.

A third and perhaps more insidious example of the interweaving between weak and strong, tactical and strategic, occurs when institutions appropriate tactics into strategies and those at the center adopt and exploit practices from the margins. There are many examples of this kind of appropriation, from clothing and fashion (Fiske 1995) to workplace short cuts that are routinized into mandated routines (generally referred to as Taylorism). Although countercultural communities tend to be suspicious of having their practices (and identities) coopted by mainstream culture, a fuller accounting of the political efficacy of tactics requires thinking through a trajectory from the margins to the center and (perhaps) back again. One way of framing this book is to think of it as a de Certeauian investigation of the practices of everyday Internet life. Like de Certeau, I am interested in how people maintain a sense of agency and identity in the midst of powerful institutional forces that are invested in normative behavior (and consumption). My twists on de Certeau's approach are to focus on communities rather than individuals, alterity rather than the ordinary, and online rather than street-based practices.

Investigating Uncommon People: A Qualitative Approach

Up to this point, I have described what I want this book to do and why I think it matters. Now I want to explain how I have studied communities on the margins and their relationships to digital technologies. I take a constructionist view of social phenomena, meaning that I believe it is my job as a social scientist to gather and analyze the narratives that make up everyday life and to help us to make sense of ourselves, each other, our surroundings, and our societies (Talja, Tuominen, and Savolainen 2005). I see qualitative interviews as a way of accessing these narratives, especially when they are organized around a particular phenomenon—in this case, the roles played by online technologies in building and maintaining community. This relationship of interviewer and interviewed is neither a one-sided process (a neutral interviewer who pulls out pure strands of truth

from participants) nor an even exchange of information (a tit-for-tat conversation between people with identical objectives) but rather a dynamic, co-constructed dialogue that is shaped by my interests as a researcher, participants' experiences with what I am studying, and their expectations of what an interview should be.

Interviews form the bulk of evidence in this book. I conducted interviews with members of the online body modification community in summer 2011, with a number of follow-up interviews in 2014 and 2015. Between fall 2009 and spring 2011, I was part of a research team that conducted interviews and led a focus group with members of the underground music scene in New Brunswick. Interviewees' experiences with the scene ranged from the 1990s to the present. In fall 2015, my collaborator, Adam Golub, and I conducted a series of focus groups with performers in Brooklyn's drag community and held a workshop with both performers and nightlife goers about the role played by social media in drag culture, and we held a small number of follow-up interviews in fall 2015.

I call my approach *networked field studies*, meaning that several studies are linked by a shared interest in addressing a particular set of questions. The term *networked field studies* has resonances with *case studies* (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Travers 2001) and *multisite ethnography* (Marcus 1995), where inquiry into a given phenomenon requires moving across multiple field sites. My research requires similar mobility in terms of investigating separate communities and technologies and also in accounting for both online and offline practices. The field studies that comprise this book differ in that some used individual interviews while others used focus groups, but they are linked by an overarching thread of understanding what happens to alterity when it moves online.

A networked field studies approach combines the ethnographic connotations of fieldwork with Internet studies literature on networks (Papacharissi 2011). Partly I want to lay claim to qualitative methods that provide rich, interpretive understandings of everyday life but are not ethnography, and partly I want a term that accounts for researching across online communities and analytically drawing out shared practices and tactics. Although there have been qualitative analyses of online alterity (e.g., Hamer 2003; Hodkinson 2002; Loutzenheiser 2007; Moore 2005), these projects tend to concentrate on a single community rather than work across multiple communities or platforms. Looking at multiple countercultural communities is

useful for understanding the complexities of both online technologies and marginality. Put another way, a networked field study approach accounts for multiple communities as well as multiple tools of technological connection.

Any research project with more than one field study is in some way networked because analysis works across multiple cases to develop claims and build links between data points. I use the term *networked* partly because I draw on multiple cases and partly because I want to underscore the role played by online technologies in my analysis. Regarding the latter, my approach here echoes Beth Coleman's (2011, 12) description of networked media:

I use the term *networked media* to describe technologies that are connected to a distributed transmission network such as the Internet or cell towers. In such a case, *networked* speaks to a technical affordance. However, I also use the term to invoke a cultural sense of connectivity with one another.

Like Coleman, I use the word *networked* to refer to technological affordances and practices and also to highlight my approach to looking at these practices within the context of larger networks of people and technologies. *Networked*, then, refers both to the topic (technology) and the theoretical approach (viewing people and technologies as assemblages that bear analytical unpacking).

My use of the term *field studies* is fairly straightforward, although the term has been contested in social science research. As Christine Hine (2015, 58–59) argues, "although we routinely speak of 'the field site' in the singular, the object of study in ethnographic tradition has, in practice, rarely been a tightly bound geographic space or cultural unit." Instead, field sites tend to expand and contract over the course of a project and are always connected to other sites, institutions, and communities. Moreover, my understanding of the field has been shaped by ethnographers who seek to be similarly expansive in their concept of the field—from George Marcus's (1995) multisite ethnography to Jenna Burrell's (2012) work on thinking of field sites as nodes in a larger social technical network.

A final characteristic of the word *field* as I treat it in this work is an emphasis on the everyday. Largely this is due to influences of de Certeau, whose research concentrates on the everyday and the ordinary. And like others who study digital culture and production, I agree that "it is the quotidian experience of media, not the avant garde or exceptionally expensive,

that speaks to what we actually do with media and best forecast the future of mediated worlds" (Coleman 2011, 71). Although the communities that I have studied are in many ways exceptional and avant-garde, the platforms and technologies that they use are mundane. My understanding of the field comprises both online and offline contexts, with a concentration on the everyday rather than the extraordinary.

I see two key advantages in using networked field studies as a method. First, by taking a broad view of technology and investigating sociotechnical practices as embedded in everyday life, network field studies moves us beyond a simple online or offline binary. As more and more people access the Internet via mobile phones rather than desktop computers, the division between online and offline as a meaningful way of categorizing online activity becomes increasingly tenuous (Baym 2015). Using networked field studies involves working across multiple sociotechnical assemblages within a particular community and also looking across these communities to see shared practices. As a method, the use of networked field studies lends itself to multiplicity, both in terms of multiple communities and the many different technologies and platforms that matter in the everyday lives of users and communities. Looking at digital technologies in this way gets past the reductive online or offline binary so that we can instead think about entwined fabrics of technologies and people.

Second, using networked field studies allows for analysis that works across multiple case studies. Within the context of countercultural groups, researchers have tended to look within rather than between communities (e.g., Hodkinson 2002; Nardi 2010). Using networked field studies provides a framework for thinking about conceptual links that emerge across distinct field sites. This comparative work is key for building analytical claims that extend beyond a single field site. Note that I am not making an argument about network field studies as yielding more generalizable knowledge, largely because I view generalizability as an inappropriate aim of interpretive work. Instead, I see transferability as being better suited to interpretive work. Where generalizability is about scaling up, transferability is about moving between—tracing connections between field sites rather than generalizing or making universal claims. Transferability is baked into networked field studies as a method because the comparative analysis seeks to identify practices and characteristics that emerge across distinct communities and sites.

Although my work is qualitative, I would not call it ethnography. I did not spend sustained periods of time living with these communities as part of my research process. I use the word *ethnographic* throughout as a nod to the participant observation that was conducted at each field site. During fieldwork, I attended basement shows in New Brunswick and drag shows in Brooklyn. I have been a member of BME for over a decade, and while conducting interviews for the research in this book, I hung out in tattoo and piercing shops and attended community events like barbecues and campouts. Meeting people, attending events, and taking copious notes helped me to situate material from interviews in a wider context of community norms and values. In this sense, I am inspired by and rely on tools of ethnography without necessarily meeting the standards for traditional definitions of this method, online or off.[7]

Another methodological note before moving on: it always is important for researchers to minimize any negative consequences that could result for participants who are involved in a research project, but this obligation is even more vital when studying groups that are in some way marginalized or disenfranchised. The arguments and analysis that are at the core of this book come from a willingness on behalf of countercultural community members to share narratives of their lives and technological practices, which risks exposing their community to increased scrutiny, whether from authorities or from curious but potentially problematic onlookers. In addition to using pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of participants, I have sought feedback from different stakeholders at each site about how much information to disclose about the sites (both physical and digital) and practices described in this book. I expand at length on my methodological process in the appendix, including a detailed discussion of my approach to ensuring ethical engagement with these communities.

Chapter Outline

Following this introductory chapter, I discuss in chapter 2 the dominant narratives that surround online technologies and outline the various problems and inequalities that the Internet allegedly is poised to solve. As is mentioned above, these promises emerged from designers of technology, from users, and from the academics and journalists who are charged with mediating between those two groups. By laying out these issues, I set up

popular framings of online technologies and contrast them with the experiences of the countercultural communities that I investigate. Put another way, to identify sociocultural tactics, it is first necessary to understand the strategies in which they operate. I see this chapter as addressing technologies as they are designed and described strategically so that I can then turn to an analysis of countercultural tactics that emerge within and between. A second focus of chapter 2 is to give an account of technology and alterity. Reviewing research from STS, media archeology, and Internet studies, I build a list of key themes that emerge from technologies that come from and are built for the margins, including legibility (technologies that are created in ways that allow community members to track and adjudicate changes over time), flexibility (technologies that lend themselves to tactical practices of improvisation and change), and authenticity (technologies that reflect countercultural ideologies). Identifying these qualities helps improve consistency in my analysis of the sociotechnical practices that emerged from the networked field studies that comprise the following chapters.

In chapter 3, I introduce *Body Modification Ezine* (BME), focusing on how members of this group of body modification enthusiasts have dealt with maintaining community boundaries and a sense of alterity over the course of BME's twenty-year history online. For many members of this community, the Internet at first offered a powerful means of connecting with others with shared interests, sharing information, and building a sense of community. As more and more people went online and social media became increasingly popular, however, information that had long been hidden became easier and easier to find, threatening BME's exclusivity through increased attention to and commodification of body modification. Chapter 3 focuses on the politics of insiders and outsiders by looking at tensions that emerge when both the technological and cultural practices of a countercultural community become popularized. How did BME as a community make decisions about inclusivity and exclusivity? When mainstream social network sites emerged and became increasingly popular in the early 2000s, how did BME members respond? Legibility emerged as an important ethic of initially setting up policies and rules, but new challenges surfaced as both social media and body modification increased in popularity. BME's history of providing online social connectivity and information provides a trajectory for the complexities that emerge when a community struggles to include those with similar interests, exclude those with suspect

motives, and maintain a sense of otherness in the face of increasing online access.

Many of these same themes of insiders and outsiders surface in chapter 4, which looks at the underground punk music community in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Punk politics and a do-it-yourself (DIY) ethic have long characterized the music scene in New Brunswick, which has launched successful bands such as the Bouncing Souls, Gaslight Anthem, and the Screaming Females. I look at information practices of secrecy as they emerge for members of this community, who strive to keep their activities off the radar, both figuratively and literally. The paradox here is to put information online in a way that gives other community members enough information to participate in upcoming events without revealing details of these activities to the authorities.[8] Looking at the tactics that have been developed by this this community exposes the limits of social media platforms for keeping community secrets. I use the lens of flexibility to describe the multiple tactics that have been developed to maintain the integrity of the basement community. Looking at norms of secrecy and shifting from the individual notion of privacy to the collective practices of secrecy can provide a new perspective on collective tactics for controlling information in the context of surveillance and monitoring.

In chapter 5, my final field study focuses on Brooklyn's drag community, which has blossomed into a vibrant nightlife scene. Drag queens described Facebook as vital to their work as performers, to a highly local sense of community, and to a broader sense of queer culture and identity. At the same time, participants were deeply critical of Facebook as a platform that failed to accommodate the fluidity and complexity of their countercultural identities. In particular, Facebook's authentic-name policy (formerly called its real-name policy) allows me to develop a critique of authenticity as a sociotechnical characteristic that allows communities of alterity to see themselves, their norms, and their values in the technologies that they use every day. In considering how drag queens across the United States were able to develop a coalition that succeeded in forcing Facebook to apologize for and eventually rework its policies, I argue that countercultural politics alone cannot provoke a change in policy, especially when the platforms are illegible and inflexible in their policies. Working as a community of misfits, drag queens mobilized through a combination of being willing to be visible and making visible their alterity.

The themes that are drawn out from and across these field studies include membership boundaries, collective rulemaking, secrecy and privacy, alterity, and performativity. In the final chapter of this book, chapter 6, I synthesize these findings into a set of claims about how online technologies matter, both in terms of alterity and community. Returning to the dominant Internet narratives that are described in chapter 2, I argue that the contemporary push for mobility and cross-platform interoperability can work to the detriment of communities that are looking to develop a sense of place online. I also look at how countercultural relationships to digital technologies speak to battles over online anonymity and work through the advantages and disadvantages of building one's own online platforms (as body modification folks did with BME) versus making mainstream platforms work for countercultural needs (more in line with how Brooklyn drag queens use digital technologies). Working with the three-part framework of flexibility, legibility, and authenticity, I offer a guideline for design ethics or countercultural values in design, looking to shape how technologies approach building tools to support different kinds of communities.

I see my project as one that constructs a kaleidoscope of different communities and technologies, twisting and refocusing on different fragments of sociotechnical practices used in the communities that I examine as they come together and (sometimes) fall apart. The combined effect of these twists and shifts is more of a collaged assemblage than a well-defined, clearcut image of the Internet as an object of study. Within the many practices, experiences, and struggles discussed in this text, the richness of online practices becomes glaringly, excitingly apparent. From this rich set of tactics at the margins, we gain tools for a clearer analysis of how technological artifacts embed ideologies, making it possible rethink practices and uses that have been established as normative. Ultimately, what is at stake in this book is the radical potential for addressing gaps of power and privilege through the (re)discovery of the Internet's depth, breadth, and strangeness—the ways that it enables exploration, secrecy, connection, and community.

Notes

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Choosing a term to use for talking about groups of people is a problem that is familiar to many social theorists. For example, Ryan Moore (2005, 201) rejects the word *subculture* as being inadequate for describing the fluidity of the groups that he studied and uses the word *scene*, which he defines as "cultural, social, temporal and spatial zones in which diverse people interact and contest the meanings of their actions" (see also Pfadenhauer 2005). Similarly, Andy Bennett (1999) argues that the word *subculture* lacks flexibility and suggests thinking in terms of sociality and tribe relations. Lisa W. Loutzenheiser (2007, 121) argues that the lack of flexibility in the word *community* has to do primarily with the inability to reflect changing group ideology and instead suggests a cohesion that is in fact imaginary. See also Laura Portwood-Stacer (2013, 7) on the decision to shift between the words *subculture*, *movement*, *scene*, *milieu*, and *community* in her discussion of anarchist lifestyle politics.

2. I am essentially mapping these terms onto Raymond Williams's (1991) division of politics of difference.

3. For a helpful review of these debates in the 1990s, see Barry Wellman (1997). For other important critiques of community in anthropology and information science, see Vered Amit and Nigel Rapport (2002) and Tiffany C. Veinot and Kate Williams (2012), respectively.

4. I use the word *shape* here to point to social shaping theory of the relationships between technology and people. For a helpful review of social shaping theory (particularly in contrast to more determinist arguments), see Nancy Baym (2015).

5. There are real differences in people's relationships to outsider status. For some people, that status comes primarily from belonging to countercultural communities, and for other people (such as people of color, the very poor, and people who are differently abled), that status comes from participating in structural conditions of exclusion. Although the kinds of alterity that I study are often considered to be

choices, I am wary of assigning that label because many people in countercultural communities do not experience their participation as a choice. For example, consider the response of a drag performer to a question about when she first started doing drag: "I started doing drag in 1989 when I was born. … I *am* my drag persona, I guess." Similarly, many members of the body modification community see their physical alterations as part of a journey of self-expression that feels less like choice and more like a fulfillment of the person that they are meant to be, and they see their communities of alterity as vital resources for supporting that identity. Nevertheless, I recognize that a legitimate criticism of this book is the decision to use theories of alterity as applied to a narrow set of marginalized identities, leaving out structural and categorical experiences of marginalization.

6. I am grateful to Megan Finn for first pointing this out to me.

7. For a thorough treatment of what constitutes online ethnography, see Tom Boellstorff, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pierce and T. L. Taylor (2012) and Christine Hine (2015).

8. These issues also emerge in the more extreme forms of body modification (Lingel and boyd, 2013) and are relevant to many other communities of alterity, such as sex workers (Grant 2014) and radical activists (Bratich 2011).

Chapter 2: Frameworks for Technology and Communities of Alterity

1. From this viewpoint, we might look at the punitive practice of doxing (from the abbreviation *docs* for *documents*), which is revealing identifying information about an anonymous or pseudonymous user as a form of forced authenticity or punishment.

2. For expanded reviews of these debates, see Baym 2015 and Hine 2015.

3. My favorite examples of technologies that were developed while people were seeking something else are tofu and gunpowder—both the result of the efforts of ancient Chinese alchemists who were seeking immortality (Jack 2015; Rupp 2014).

4. For useful edited collections on media activism, see Bart Cammaerts, Alice Mattoni, and Patrick McCurdy (2013) and Lina Dencik and Peter Wilkin (2015).

Chapter 3: The Death and Life of Great Online Subcultures

1. It is outside the scope of my analysis to compare the forms of body modification discussed in this chapter with cosmetic surgery like breast implants or liposuction. At first glance, the two sets of practices might seem opposite in terms of rejection of versus adherence to mainstream norms of beauty. Yet a reductive binary collapses with the increasing popularity of modifications like piercings and tattoos, and because extreme cases of cosmetic surgery can ultimately revolt rather than attract (Taussig 2012). As part of this investigation of alterity, I concentrate on body