

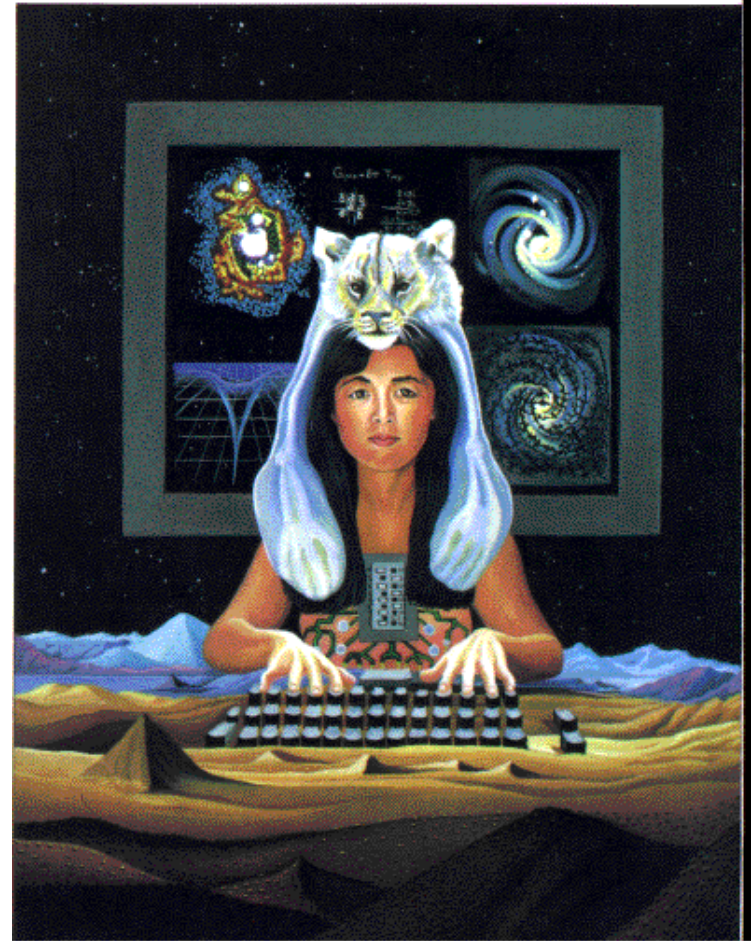
Glitches and Ghosts: Queer Memory and/as Artificial Intelligence

Sean Jarvis

2/27/14

What's queer about robots?

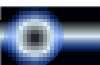
- Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1991)
- Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987)



Via <http://www.feministezine.com>

Why does queer studies care about robots?

- Queers use technologies in queer ways
 - Sexual apparatuses
 - Assisted reproductive technologies
 - Technologies designed to facilitate gender transition/confirmation

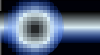


Why does queer studies care about artificial intelligence?

- Protocols are about normativity, legibility, and capability
 - Intersection with disability studies

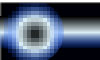
The question of historical memory

- Cvetkovich's (2003) and Gould's (2009) work on queer archives
- How can we extend their analyses to databases?



Archives and databases

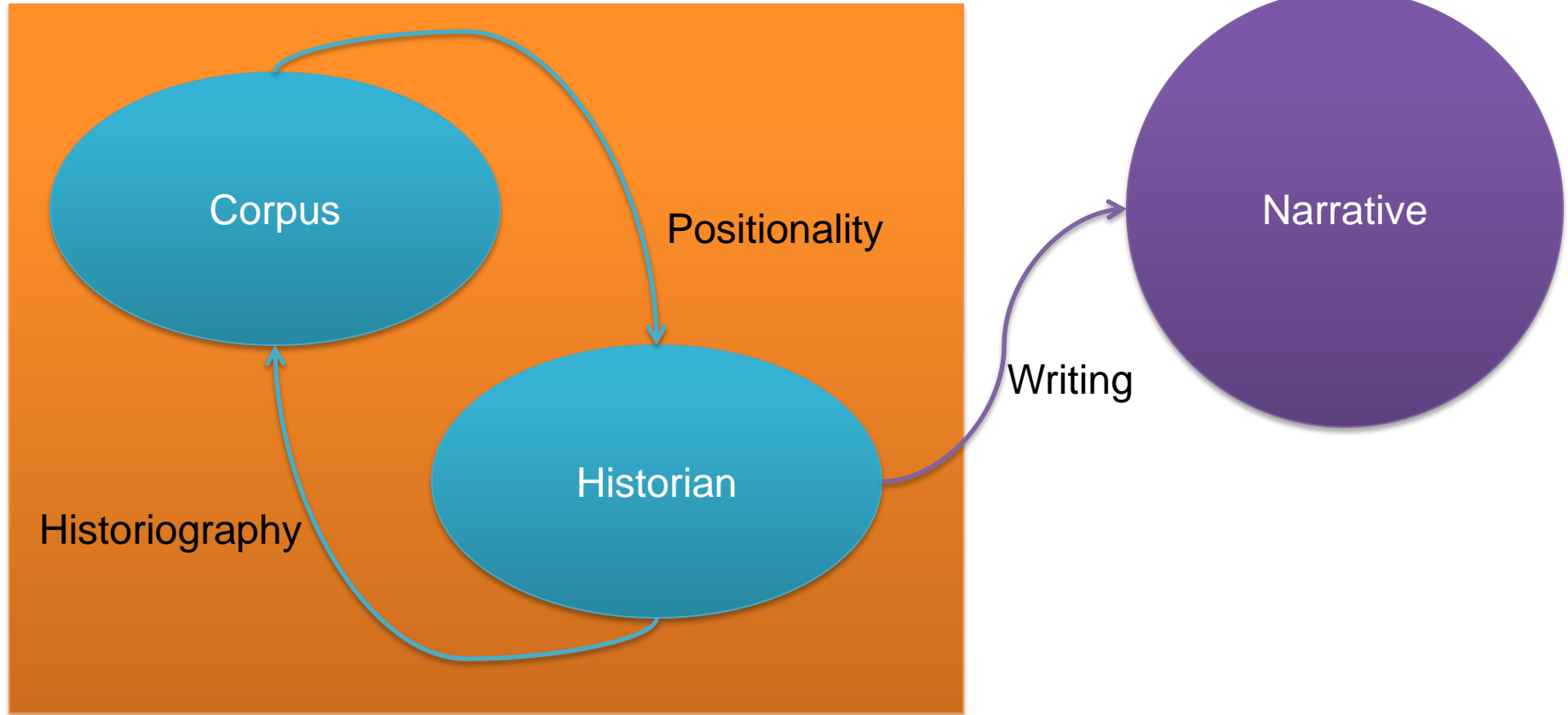
- The archive as the origin of historical narrative
- Databases: more than just a technologized archive
 - A radical break



Anatomy of an archive

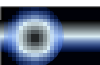
- The externality of historical narrative
 - Stories that we *draw out of* the archive
 - Their circulation is external

Anatomy of an archive (cont'd.)

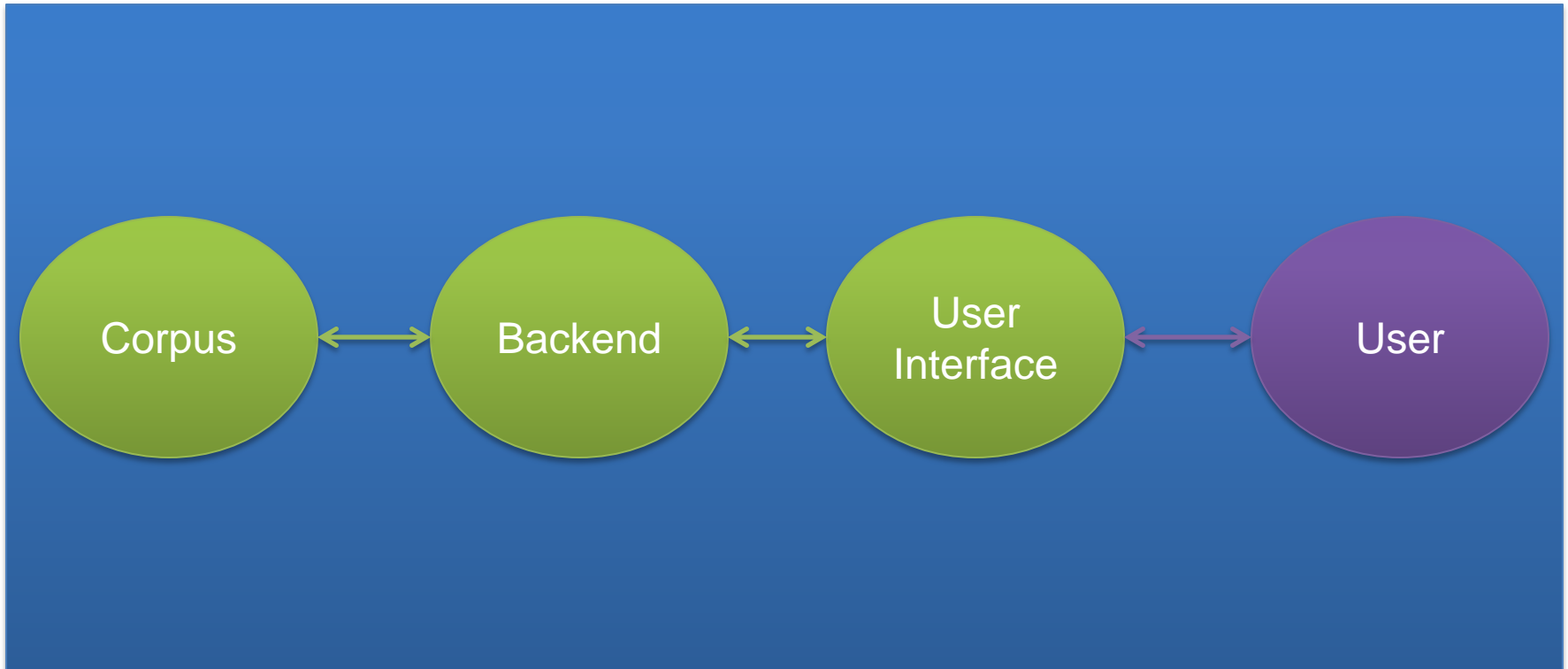


Anatomy of a database

- Database hermeneutics
 - Similar practices of “reading”
 - With one exception:
 - The reading is done by artificial intelligence

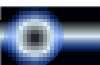


Anatomy of a database (cont'd.)



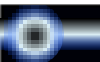
Database protocols as self-contained historiography

- Databases are *not* ahistorical or anti-historical
- However, this “reading” *does* function differently



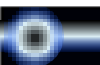
Protocols and agency

- Agency: the extent to which human action has influenced an outcome
- Database protocols are quasi-agential
 - Computer programs do not themselves have agency
 - But the humans who program them do



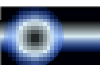
Data and representation

- Data collection as a process of making an object legible
 - Not just legibility but *representability*



The ethics of automation as a politics of representation

- Interpretation is always a political process
- Questions of automating interpretation are not just methodological, but representational

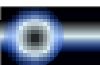


Queer oral history archives

- Negotiating the excavatory impulse
 - Excavation as a response to the “burying” of gender and sexual minorities

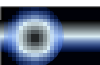
Queer oral history archives (cont'd.)

- These archives:
 - can be organized around specific organizations (e.g., the ACTUP Oral History Project)
 - can be organized around geographical regions (e.g., Project Bolo)
 - can be organized around particular identities.



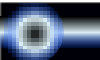
Applying an ethics of automation to queer oral history archives

- Entry retrieval relies on categorization
- This doesn't quite work for some communities:
 - Categorization is always contextually specific
 - Contexts don't always match up
 - Categorization is rigid
 - Produces friction with fluid identities



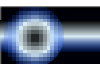
On tagging

- Tagging as a less rigid or stable starting point for categorization
- Facebook's new gender system (and its critiques): a useful summary of the limits of tagging



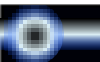
Bridging programmers, activists, and scholars

- Acknowledging that people inhabit multiple social locations at once
- Moving beyond client models of labor and toward collaborative models



Potential ways forward

- “In-house” database construction (separatist)
 - Skillsharing (borrowed from anarchist organizing)
- Bridging (integrative)
 - Rethinking the relationship between different forms of labor



Time's Up!



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 - **Quick bio: third-year doctoral student in GWSS; background in queer medical access activism; works at the intersection of queer theory, science and technology studies, and migration studies.**