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### Digital Spaces, Material Traces : Investigating the Performance of Gender, Sexuality, and Embodiment on Internet Platforms that feature User-Generated Content

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**Publication date**  
2010

[Link to publication](#)

#### **Citation for published version (APA):**

van Doorn, N. A. J. M. (2010). *Digital Spaces, Material Traces : Investigating the Performance of Gender, Sexuality, and Embodiment on Internet Platforms that feature User-Generated Content*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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## Afterword

As discussed in chapter one of this dissertation, I have adopted a social constructionist research approach that takes into account the material dimensions of social construction, in addition to its symbolic and discursive aspects. Yet, as the reader may have gathered from the previous chapters (and my reflections in the postscripts), this ‘material awareness’ only gradually became part of my research perspective. In this sense, the ‘representational model’, which initially framed my thinking about gendered, sexualized and embodied performances in digital spaces, was slowly but surely augmented by something that could be called a ‘material-performative’ model. This entailed a reconfiguration of my understanding of what exactly was taking place in these spaces and what it was that made these performances so interesting and worthwhile to investigate. Instead of only focusing on practices of signification and symbolic interaction, I started thinking about how these practices and processes related to the spatial conditions of digital environments. This, in turn, necessitated a more pronounced acknowledgement of the sociotechnical and affective dimensions of online gender performances, which is what I have tried to achieve in the postscripts and the concluding chapter.

I sincerely hope that this ‘epistemological transition’ will not be perceived as somehow contrived or otherwise ill-conceived. Rather than retrospectively attaching a new theoretical framework to the finished studies, I consider these studies to still be very much alive and vibrant with possibilities for revision and renewal<sup>1</sup>. As I revisited the studies and went through my notes and annotations in an attempt to start writing the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I became increasingly aware of their ‘untapped’ potential. This potential was, by definition, virtually present but had yet to be actualized. As such, the addition of the postscripts and the theoretical inferences postulated in the concluding chapter should be understood in the context of my aspiration to actualize these studies’ virtual potential, by making certain matters more ‘concrete’ in retrospect. As stated above, this has been accomplished by supplementing the existing

research with a perspective that is more sensitive to the ways in which gendered, sexualized and embodied “matter comes to matter” in digital spaces (Barad, 2003).

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>I therefore consider the published versions, which appear in this dissertation, to be just one incarnation in these studies’ ongoing lives in which they negate any attempt at foreclosure.