

SQS 1–2/2020: Sisälllys / Innehåll / Contents

SQS
1–2/2020

Sisälllys
Innehåll
Contents

Tuula Juvonen and Therese Quinn
Looking Back, Looking Forward:
Queer History Month, Museums,
and Activism for Justice and Freedom 1–IV

1] Pervoskooppi: artikkelit / Queer Scope: Articles

Tuula Juvonen
Queer as a Queer Guided Tour 1–21

Clinton Glenn
Cultural Production and the Canonisation of
LGBT Histories in the Baltic States 22–44

2] Pervoperuutuspeili: puheenvuorot / Queer View Mirror: Opinion Pieces

Sue Sanders
Growing up Needing the Past:
An Activist's Reflection on the History of LGBT+
History Month in the UK 45–55

Tom Furber
Straight from the Archives:
Reflections about Professional Engagement
with LGBTQ+ Lives 56–61

3] Pervopeili: keskustelut / Queer Mirror: Discussions

Rita Paqvalén
Beyond Tom and Tove:
Queering Finnish Museums from an Intersectional
Perspective 62–77

Jaimi Parker and Morgan Gieringer
Exhibiting Regional LGBTQ History in Dallas,
Texas 78–94

Dan Vo
The Compassionate Way:
Towards Trans and Non-Binary Inclusive
Narratives in Museums 95–101

Leslie Wooden
Alvin Baltrop:
Queer Photography as a 'Counter Practice'
in the Archive 102–109

Jemina Lindholm and Kaura Raudaskoski
The Space Between The Lines Is Not Neutral:
Pedagogical Labour in Failing Institutions 110–120



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SQS 1–2/2020: Sisälllys / Innehåll / Contents

SQS
1–2/2020

Sisälllys
Innehåll
Contents

4] Lectio praecursoria

Varpu Alasuutari
On Death and Loss in Queer and Trans lives 121–126

5] Pervosilmäys: arvostelut / Queer Eye: Reviews

Rita Paqvalén
Making Museums Relevant in a World of
Diversity 127–129

Nina Nyman
How Activism on Gender and Sexuality is
Changing Museums 130–133

Sarita Hernández
Iridescent Futures:
Imagining Alternatives with Queering
the Museum 134–138

Rita Paqvalén
Om museernas historiebruk och
förändringsarbetets utmaningar 139–142

Asta Kihlman
Kuvakorttien queer-fantasiaa 143–145

Riikka Taavetti
Järkevin jalkinein henkilökohtaiseen ja
yhteisölliseen queer-historiaan 146–148

Alexandra Novitskaya
Failing Together in Solidarity 149–151

6] Kirjoittajat / Contributors 152–155



ISSN
1796-5551

Rita

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

Queer History Month, Museums, and Activism for Justice and Freedom

Tuula Juvonen and Therese Quinn¹

Getting the Ball Rolling

LGBT History Month was initiated in the United States by an out schoolteacher named Rodney Wilson in 1994. Raised in a fundamentalist Christian family in the conservative midwestern state, Missouri, Wilson began to study history as he “outgrew” his childhood religion (Wilson, 2015). His investigations took a personal turn as he started a coming out process in his mid-twenties; Wilson explored LGBT history for “meaning, purpose and support” and found that what he learned gave him a “sense of place and potential” (Wilson, 2015). Wilson came out as gay to his high school students after they viewed a film about the Holocaust. This earned him a reprimand from the school’s administration, telling him he could only discuss “homosexuality in class if it was part of the existing history curriculum” (Farrow, 1995). This became an opening for Wilson. He was inspired by the successes of previous activists, who fought to see Black, women’s, Latinx, Indigenous and other cultural histories acknowledged, to create LGBT History Month (Wilson, 2015; Farrow, 1995). He and a friend began writing a proposal, and with the support of many others,

LGBT History Month was inaugurated that October (Farrow, 1995; Hemphill, 2015).

The wheel was invented again in 2004 in the United Kingdom by activist and teacher Sue Sanders and other members of Schools Out, a group working to challenge the oppression of LGBT people in the education system, which Sanders co-founded in 1984 (Watters, 2012). Since then the idea has travelled further, and now LHBT history is celebrated as Queer History Month in Berlin, Germany, and as Rainbow History Month in Finland, as just two examples.

This special issue takes these annual celebrations as a starting point to interrogate LGBTQI+ issues around museums and activism, a topic that has during the past year experienced quite a boost. This is evidenced by the vibrant and well-attended Archives, Libraries, Museums and Special Collections (ALMS) conferences, most recently held in Berlin in 2019 on the theme *Queering Memory*²— and some of the papers included here are the direct outcomes of connections forged at ALMS. Also, several

¹ This is a co-written paper with no first author.

² Please note that many of the presentations are available at the *Queering Memory* conference website <https://queeralmsberlin2019.de/interactive-program/>.

recent interesting publications, included in this journal as reviews, attest to a resurgent interest in linking culture and heritage sites to movements for justice and social change, as of course does on-the-ground organizing and actions by museum workers.

A persistent need for our queer past, and a need to reflect upon the ways it has been provided to us, is evidenced in this special issue. We have included an essay by Sue Sanders, where she recollects not only on her personal path to cocreating LGBTQ+ History Month in the United Kingdom, but also the inventive strategies the group of activists has successfully used to push their agenda and to shift the attitudinal landscape in that country, and beyond. She also describes the struggles forged by UK activists in the Thatcher era, with its repressive take on anything but heteronormativity. This vividly reminds us that the victories won are hard fought, and never come with a guarantee. However, pushing through that difficult time has also taught the activists valuable lessons in organizing that allowed them to use LGBTQ+ History Month as a launchpad for related initiatives in schools, libraries, museums and other sites in the UK, from organizing lectures and programs, and developing a resource-rich website, to using social media to publicize events across the country.

It will likely surprise no one that how well LGBTQI+ history is presented and received is highly dependent on context and location – and the context also plays a role in how different initiatives had gotten off the ground. Unlike in the U.S., where LGBT History Month was introduced in the schools, in the UK and in Finland the activism has expanded in particular in collaboration with museums and archives. Many times, social and institutional norms have compromised queer content in those venues. Rita Paqvalén relates a history of efforts to queer museums in Finland, with three exhibition projects in which she participated with other researchers, artists and museum workers as focal points. These efforts have since led to

establishing Rainbow History Month in 2018 and founding an association Friends of Queer History in 2020. This association now carries on and expands the activities initiated by the History Month on their newly launched website.³

Clinton Glenn, for his part, follows the “Firsts” in the Baltic region, namely the first queer art and history exhibitions that have taken place there during the mid-2000s. He points out how these have taken up queer politics and themes, and are shaped by resistance to the silencing effects of communism, and both anti-LGBTQ conservatism and a rejection of “western” values. Moreover, the review written by Alexandra Novitskaya about *Queer-Feminist Solidarity and the East-West Divide*, and edited by Katharina Wiedlack, Saltanat Shoshanova and Masha Godovannaya, provides additional background to the social and political situation that affects queers in the Post-Soviet regions. The anthology, this review notes, offers a rich sampling of perspectives on solidarity efforts between queer and feminist communities in postsocialist Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia, and in the West.

Doing the Walk

Activists and cultural workers who aim at a more just society are increasingly successful in pushing memory institutions to do their part of the work, too. Hence this volume includes texts written by practitioners in different memory institutions, who explicate their learning curve in their professional capacity when confronted with issues of queer pasts. Morgan Gieringer and Jaimi Parker, who work at the University of North Texas Special Collections in Dallas, ended up creating several archival exhibitions highlighting queer lives and cultures in a city thus far known

³ <https://sateenkaarihistoria.fi/>

more for its homophobia than being a supportive environment for queer cultural production. The context was rather different for Tom Furber, who works as an Engagement and Learning Officer in London Metropolitan Archives, which has collections dating to 1067, and queer records from as early as 1395. Furber has well-established queer support groups that serve as “critical friends” – guiding and holding him accountable – as he interprets artifacts related to LGBTQ+ history. These authors also discuss the situation where they themselves are not members of the queer community they serve and reflect interestingly upon that experience and how they have mastered its challenges.

It is vital that practitioners are keeping an eye on the changes that take place in the lives of LGBTQI+, and in the discussions about social justice that are forged in their diverse communities. The recent collection *Museums, Sexuality, and Gender Activism* edited by Joshua G. Adair and Amy K. Levin, here reviewed by Nina Nyman, provides a plethora of inspiring examples of the activism that has been going on in the museums over the recent years. In this special issue we have included a piece by acclaimed freelancer museum consultant Dan Vo, who adds nuances to that discussion by showing how trans and non-western experiences that already reside in the museum exhibitions can be brought to bear in museums’ exhibitions and guided tours.

Who and How Will We Remember?

When we are talking about history, we are most likely talking about people who are no longer with us. In her dissertation, Varpu Alasuutari introduces readers to her ideas about queer death and the (im)possibilities queers have to remember their loved ones. Especially interesting for this special issue could be her theorizations about the rituals of remembrance as examples of melancholic attachments, or continuing bonds, which can be beneficial

in the midst of grief – but also create possibilities for adding to history.

It is also interesting to think who are the people who will be hailed when they are gone. Sometimes they are the very people who have been overlooked during their lifetime, as Leslie Wooden notes. In her essay she introduces us to the archive of a Black photographer from the United States, Alvin Baltrop, who was dedicated to documenting his fellow queers, for example, in the piers of New York – much to dismay of his contemporaries. Yet, since his death in 2004, he has been rediscovered and now enjoys a fame unknown to him during his lifetime.

The best way to ensure posthumous recognition is of course to take the matters in one’s own hands. This was done by Kate Charlesworth in her *Sensible Footwear: A Girls Guide*. Charlesworth drew a comic book about her life – and the lives of her fellow lesbians and gay men in the UK, who belonged to the generation that saw the attitudes change to an unforeseen extent. Her comic autobiography is presented to us in a review by Riikka Taavetti.

Queer Perspectives

Representation is always a salient topic for cultural sites, but there is also a vibrant strand of discussion taking place about the ways queer approaches can inform professional practices in memory institutions. Interestingly enough, queer feminist approaches feature here in abundance: Pia Laskar in Sweden and Nikki Sullivan in Australia are both queer and gender studies scholars who have moved from the academia to work in the museum field instead – and now challenge their new professional environments with queer interventions. Rita Paqvalén reviews for us the handbook *Den outställda sexualiteten (The Unexhibited Sexuality)* Laskar has written for museum professionals, and Sarita Hernández reviews the book *Queering*

SQS
1–2/2020

III

Introduction

Tuula
Juvonen
and
Therese
Quinn

the Museum, which Sullivan co-authored with Craig Middleton. Both books reflect and support the flourishing of queered cultural practices and spaces in museums.

Tuula Juvonen's contribution follows a similar line of thought, as she interrogates the application of queer theory in different LGBTQ+ guided tours provided by art museums belonging to the Finnish National Gallery. She asks how queer theories travel from academia to the museum praxis, and how are they interpreted in that context?

Interpretation is also the key issue in *Sukupuolen sotkijat (Gender Confusers)*, the book written and compiled by the art historian Harri Kalha, reviewed here by Asta Kihlman. Kalha presents in that photo book a collection of anonymous images in postcards and photos he has collected over the years from flea markets. With his queer interpretations of historical material from the beginning of the 20th century he urges us to reconsider the assumed universality and immutability of binary gender conventions.

Are we there yet?

As many of the entries in this volume attest, the labor in memory institutions is conducted under very different working conditions. Some of the authors have permanent positions in memory institutions, but many of the queer cultural workers have more precarious positions, out of which they try to make a difference. Many of the museum professionals are also in debt to the persistent and innovative work of unpaid activists, who have against all odds pushed through their vision, and thus assisted in queering the museums and the past they present to their visitors. Jemina Lindholm and Kaura Raudaskoski, a collaborative pair of freelance museum workers, pose a critical analysis of memory institutions' treatment of social movements. In their essay they call for institutional accountability, noting that institutions

seem more interested in hosting special events and celebrations than in making structural changes essential to supporting queer and crip lives. Where are the ramps and all-gender bathrooms? Inclusion can begin when exclusion is recognized and countered.

LGBT History Month started initially in the schools in the United States, and that is also the location from which many of the examples are drawn in Therese Quinn's book *Questions about Museums, Culture and Justice to Explore in Your Classroom*, reviewed for us by Rita Paqvalén. In that book Quinn suggests ways teachers can use museums not only to queer their classrooms, but also to bring forward in their teaching an intersectional understanding of social justice.

Museums and schools are powerful sites of learning and engagement. As they increasingly and creatively celebrate queer histories, they also help to set a foundation for more just futures.

We hope you find this special issue inspiring for future research, teaching, and queer history activism, possibly in germinal collaborations with respective communities and memory institutions.

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QUEER AS A QUEER GUIDED TOUR

Tuula Juvonen

SQS
1–2/2020

1

QueerScope
Articles

ABSTRACT

In this article I focus on the queer guided tours held in three publicly funded museums which form the Finnish National Gallery. In my analysis I alternate between my reconstructions of the tour guide's narration during each respective tour, and my interpretative reading of it. I am interested in seeing how *queer* was defined and put into practice by each of the different tour guides. On the one hand, I pay attention to the queer-informed content of the tour; while on the other, I am also curious to see whether and how *queer* was translated into the pedagogies of the guiding practices themselves. By doing so, I hope to illuminate the different ways in which *queer*, both as a theoretical and political concept, may be put into practice in mainstream museums, and the possible ramifications of this for both the guiding practices and the positioning of the visitors.

ABSTRAKTI

Artikkeli käsittelee kolmessa Suomen Kansalliskalleriaan kuuluvassa taidemuseossa toteutettuja queer-opastuksia. Analyysissäni siirryn kunkin oppaan kerronnan rekonstruktioista omaan tulkitsevaan luentaani ja jälleen takaisin. Kiinnostuksen kohteena on se, kuinka oppaat määrittävät *queeriä* ja käyttivät sitä opastuksessaan. Yhtäältä kiinnitän huomiota opaskierroksen queer-näkökulmaiseen sisältöön, toisaalta siihen, näkykö *queer* ote myös opastuksen pedagogisessa toteutuksessa. Artikkelissäni teen näkyväksi niitä erilaisia tapoja, joilla *queer*, niin teoreettisena kuin poliittisenakin käsitteenäkin, voidaan ottaa käyttöön valtavirtamuseoissa. Samalla nostan esiin tehtyjen valintojen seurauksia sekä opaskierrosten toteuttamiselle että vierailijoiden asemoinnille.

“What do queer guided tours accomplish?” was a question I stumbled across in October 2019, when a one-day seminar *Toisin katsottu museo [Reconceiving the Museum]* took place at the Finnish National Gallery's Ateneum Art Museum in Helsinki, Finland.¹ The event raised the notion of how supporting democratic practices in the context of art and art education may result in furthering equality regarding sexual and gender diversity. Seminar participants were offered lectures, case studies, panel discussions, workshops, and a film screening. As a pre-seminar offering on the day prior to the event, participants were welcomed to attend queer guided tours at four different Helsinki art museums.

I was able to attend three of the queer guided tours held in the publicly funded museums which form the Finnish National Gallery: the Ateneum Art Museum, the Sinebrychoff Art Museum, and the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art.² Although these museums are part of the same Finnish National Gallery, the ways in which each tour guide approached

- 1 The seminar was organized by the Finnish National Gallery and the Aalto University Department of Art, in collaboration with Culture for All Services and the Finnish Museums Association. The program is available at: <https://ateneum.fi/tapahtumat/toisin-katsottu-museo-seminaari/>.
- 2 I was unable to be present at the fourth queer guided tour offered simultaneously at the Finnish Museum of Photography by Jemina Lindholm and Kaura Raudaskoski. See, however, Lindholm and Raudaskoski 2018.

Tuula
Juvonen

queer guiding during their respective one-hour tours differed considerably (similarly Turino 2015). In this article, I seek to analyse the ways in which queerness was evoked during the different guided tours, and how it affected both the guiding practices and the positioning of the visitors.

In recent years there has been increasing discussion about queering museums and interpreting lesbian, gay, bi, and trans histories (Levin 2010; Adair & Levin 2020). Whereas Susan Ferentinos downplays the necessity of queer theory for interpretations in public history contexts (Ferentinos 2015, 7), I rather align myself with Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton, who argue that radical change in museum practices requires critical self-reflection based on theoretical analysis (Sullivan & Middleton 2020, 6). In this article I take Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's discussions about queer reading styles as the starting point for my analysis of the queer guided tours I partook in.

Instead of measuring the queer guided tours I visited against any pre-given definition of *queer*, in this article I make their queerness the object of my analysis. Before going into detail regarding the ways in which *queer* was interpreted in the queer guided tours, I will lay out the impetus to organize queer guided tours in Finnish art museums. Subsequently I will describe the methods concerning both the gathering of data and analysis, followed by a closer examination of the queerness in the three tours I attended. I will close the article by discussing the queerness of queer guided tours and presenting my conclusions.

Normative Museums Queered

It is common to see museums as sites of establishing and maintaining normative power structures, art museums being no exception to the rule here. From this perspective it is tempting, as well as easy, to do a *paranoid*

reading (Sedgwick 2003b) of museums. According to Sedgwick, those leaning towards paranoid readings already know there is something wrong with the world. In this case, they lay bare the myriad ways in which museums, through their practices and collections, create normative hierarchies by excluding and othering that which is labelled *queer*.

Unequal and exclusionary power dynamics have also been the driving force in creating specifically queer museums, in which queerness may be put on the centre stage. Hence, we have museums that have been created by activists of the gay community, such as the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art in New York, in which the focus is to “inspire, explore, and foster understanding of the rich diversity of LGBTQI+ experiences”.³ Similarly the Schwules Museum in Berlin, a permanent “Eldorado for the history, everyday life and culture of homosexual women and men”, organizes not only social history exhibitions, currently including trans topics, but also frequently displays gay art.⁴ Increasingly often many historic house museums are also acknowledging their queer legacies; for example, the Kirpilä Art Collection, located at the late Juhani Kirpilä's home in central Helsinki (Sorainen 2020).⁵ While such places provide an oasis for visitors who wish to dwell in a queer world, the efforts of such dedicated museums may also easily be overlooked and rendered insignificant by the general public. It may also be difficult for queer art to break into the consciousness of the mainstream from those self-induced margins, regardless of its quality and opportunity to provide a catalyst for different discourses.

A *reparative reading* offers a different take on the question of the normative power of mainstream museums. It proposes that *queer* is something that is already always present (Sedgwick 2003b, 149–151), even in those museums

3 Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art: <https://www.leslielohman.org/about>.

4 Schwules Museum: <https://www.schwulesmuseum.de/ueber-uns/?lang=en>.

5 Kirpilä Art Collection: <https://taidekotikirpila.fi/visiting-the-collection/>.

that seek to exclude it. All that is required is taking a different perspective when examining museums and their collections. Then we begin to see both the Sisyphean task in maintaining the norms through reiteration, and the inevitable cracks that appear in the process. Becoming aware of that normalizing process begins to uncover of all kinds of queerness that normalizing seeks to hide. Hence, applying a queer gaze to museums will challenge the assumed normativities and offer differing narratives.

Since institutions such as national museums and galleries have historically been the sites of nation building, and as such, sites of exclusion for various “undesired” others (Bennett 2014, 71–73), it will be a lengthy process to undo their permanent collections and exhibitions. There is currently a lot of activism taking place in and around museums, as formerly excluded groups are fighting for their presence in museums (Sandell 2017). This has resulted in increased inclusivity through organizing special exhibitions. Furthermore, the biased results of past collection and exhibition processes can be challenged, and their hidden queerness may be made visible by creating queer paths⁶ throughout exhibitions, as well as providing queer guided tours. During queer guided tours, guides may use differing approaches to the collections in question. They may, for example, alternate between paranoid and reparative readings, and consequently encourage their audiences to see through the normative constraints of museum collections, and perhaps even recognize unexpected queer histories within the exhibitions. But could they achieve even more?

Answering that question is difficult, due to the challenge posed by data collection when studying any form of guided tours. The ephemeral

6 E.g. the British Museum’s theme: Desire, love and identity <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/desire-love-and-identity> or A Rainbow Thread at the National Museum of Iceland <https://www.thjodminjasafn.is/english/for-visitors/the-national-museum/visitor-informations/events-exhibitions/temporary-exhibitions/a-rainbow-thread-1>.

performances of tour guides are notoriously difficult to capture for analysis (Potter 2106, 255). Those scholars that have taken up the challenge have used various methods of data collection; interviewing the guides (Shep, Boxtel, and Noordegraaf 2018; Potter 2016), attending the tours as a participant observer and conducting practice-as-research (Smith 2013), or videotaping the guided tours (Burdelski 2016; Best 2012, 36–37; De Stefani and Mondada 2017). In those cases, the scholars have been interested in issues such as the power politics imbedded in the guiding profession, the various linguistic, affective, or bodily means by which a guide captures the attention of the visitors, as well as how a guide creates the flow of verbal and nonverbal interaction between the visitors. In order to understand how a guide creates a smooth museum experience, or struggles to gain authority, thematic analysis of transcriptions and recordings, along with conversation and interaction analyses, have proven very useful.

I, for my part, stumbled into this field of study quite by accident, as I became both struck and fascinated by the differences between the three queer guided tours I experienced. All three were held during the course of one day, each with some 20 participants, some of whom also attended all three. While attending the respective queer guided tours, I did what I so often do when I focus on any lecture: I took hand-written minutes while listening to the tour guides. Thus, I had at least one page of meticulous mind maps of each of the tours.⁷ In my notes, I had captured verbatim the guides’ definition of *queer*, the plotline of the tour they presented, and the reasons given as to why or how certain items were chosen for a closer look. However, my notes did not include any information about the interaction during the tour, also because my focus was more on noting down the narrated content rather than making any other observations, as a trained

7 My take on mind maps roughly follows the guidance offered by Buzan and Buzan 1999.

ethnographer with a planned participant observation would have done (Spradley 1980, 52–62). Yet I decided to see how far my notes would allow me to go in understanding the differences between the tours, and decided to use them as the source of my conceptual analysis that seeks to clarify what kind of positions the use of queer indicates, and how that understanding informs the guided tours (c.f. Perko 2008, 69, 73–75; Alm & Laskar 2017, 138).

In this article I determine the means by which each tour guide in each of the three museums I visited tackled the challenge of offering a queer guided tour. The text alternates between my reconstructions of the tour guide's narration during each respective tour, and my interpretative analysis of it – whilst I am fully aware that my reconstructions of the narrations remain a questionable twice-told story (Howard 2001, 5). In my analysis, I, as a queer feminist gender studies scholar with an interest in lesbian and queer history, am interested in seeing how *queer* was defined and put into practice by each of the different tour guides. On the one hand, I pay attention to the queer-informed content of the tour; while on the other, I am also curious to see whether and how *queer* was translated into the pedagogies of the guiding practices themselves. By doing so, I hope to illuminate the different ways in which *queer*, both as a theoretical and political concept, may be put into practice in mainstream museums, and what the possible ramifications of this may be.

When presenting the data, I chose not to make assumptions about the gender of each guide. Even though each guide introduced themselves to the tour guests with their first name, given names do not necessarily equip us to draw conclusions on a person's gender. Moreover, as the Finnish language does not make gender distinctions with third-person singular pronouns, there was no need for the guides to raise the issue of gendered pronouns during their Finnish-spoken tours. Consequently, for such reasons, when

referring to the guides in this article, I use 'they' as a third-person singular pronoun, similarly as I would use 'hän' in Finnish.

Some of us also routinely make assessments about the sexual orientation of the people we meet, with our judgements often colouring our responses to them. The tour guides we encounter in museums are not exempt from becoming objects of such a scrutinizing gaze, and even less so, if they offer queer guided tours which specifically foreground issues of gender and sexuality. However, I resist the urge to let my own assumptions about the sexual orientation of the guides become part of my study of the tours, and seek to limit my analysis only to their addressing of the audience's sexual preferences that the tour narration seemed to evoke.

The Ateneum Art Museum

*A norm-critical, rainbow-coloured, and multi-voiced guided tour of the collections exhibition Stories of Finnish Art. During the guided tour, we explore the diversity of identities, genders, sexualities, and the means of their representation; as well as gaze, power, and desire through using examples from the works in the exhibition.*⁸

The Ateneum Art Museum is founded on the collection work initiated by the Finnish Art Society in the 1840s. Since 1888, the collection has been housed in a purpose-built museum in central Helsinki. The Ateneum's

⁸ The insert given in italics is from the announcement provided by the organizers about the respective queer tours: *Normikriittinen, sateenkaareva ja moniääninen opastus Suomen taiteen tarina -kokoelmanäyttelyyn. Opastetulla kierroksella tutkimme identiteetin, sukupuolten ja seksuaalisuukien moninaisuutta ja esitystapoja sekä katsetta, valtaa ja halua kokoelmanäyttelyn esimerkkiteosten kautta.*

standard exhibition displays Finnish art from the mid-18th century through to the modernist movements of the 1950s. Furthermore, the museum shows temporary exhibitions of renowned domestic and international artists.⁹ During the queer tour, we visited the current permanent exhibition *Stories of Finnish Art*.

A student volunteering as a tour guide leads the group up the colossal staircase to the second floor. While we gather around them in the hallway, they briefly tell us about the history of queer guided tours the museum has offered since 2012, initially in collaboration with Helsinki Pride (Lahtinen & Paqvalén 2014, 46). The guide then explains their take on *queer*, which is influenced by their education in both visual arts and gender studies. They define *queer* as a critique of normativities, not just of heteronormativity, but a critique that also takes into account intersectional differences such as class, race, and ability. Additionally, they promised to offer us readings of the artworks that both gave attention to, as well as challenged, issues such as the gender binary and eurocentrism. The idea of *queer*, they emphasize, is however not to settle for a given meaning, but to keep it open for new interpretations. They furthermore encourage the audience not to necessarily view the tour guide as an expert, but as a fellow gazer.

The tour guide's interpretation of *queer* was sensitive to the intersectional take on queer theory that has been present within Finnish academic discussions since the 2010s (Rossi 2015). They drew our attention to certain issues, and set up certain expectations, which helped to prepare the audience for the upcoming tour. Moreover, the guide was establishing themselves as an educated expert, while at the same time decentring their own position of power with an invitation to be regarded as one of the gazers.

Before escorting us in to the exhibition hall, the guide situates the historical role of the National Art Museum in the process of nation building (Berger 2014, 18). The Ateneum was founded in 1888, during the golden age of museums, with the intention to collect and display artwork that later on would be received as the most iconic visual images of Finnishness. They point out that when looking at the collections we should not only look at what is there, and by whom, but also ask ourselves what is missing – considering that the acquisitions were most likely made by white, heterosexual men whose choices decided what was and wasn't suitable to be displayed in such a prestigious setting (Pettersson 2010, 168–174, 178–181).

Hence, by highlighting the limitations of the collections, the guide was pointing out the often overlooked nationalist and gendered power structures that lurk behind any collection and exhibition process, even in present day. True to a paranoid reading practice, they also asked us to pay attention to the omissions driven by inequality, which are often harder to notice than the things that are visually present. Such guidance geared the attention of the visitors in a particular way, giving them an idea of the critical framing that the chosen queer perspective would offer for the tour.

After the introduction, the guide leads us to the first exhibition hall, which houses paintings from the late 19th century. We learn how at the time Finnish painters used to frequent Paris, which was an important European art centre. But not only that, as the city also offered many pleasant opportunities for queer encounters – unlike Finland at the time, where homosexual acts for both men and women were criminalized since 1894.

The first work of art at which we halt is *Luxembourgian puisto* [*The Luxembourg Gardens*] (1887), painted by Albert Edelfelt (1854–1906). [Fig. 1] The guide informs us that Edelfelt was a privileged noble man that easily fitted into the Parisian circles of both artist and their patrons. The

9 Ateneum Art Museum <https://ateneum.fi/museum/?lang=en>.



Fig 1. Albert Edelfelt: *The Luxembourg Gardens*, 1887. 141,5 × 186,5 cm, oil, oil on canvas. Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Aaltonen.

large conventional painting shows wet nurses, nannies, and a mother taking care of small children in a sunny Parisian park. The topic of the painting gives the guide the possibility to discuss upper- and middle-class women's predetermined role as *mother*, and the ways in which women that fell out of the given norm were labelled as hysterical or sexually questionable at the time. Among the sexually questionable women were also wet nurses, and artists' models in general. We learn how the models, frequently selected by eroticizing and exoticizing criteria, had precarious work contracts which often led them to servicing the artist sexually as well.

The guide contrasts the working conditions and oeuvre of Edelfelt to that of Elin Danielson-Gambogi (1861–1919) by pausing at her self-portrait (1900) [Fig. 2.] Unlike men, women painters had a difficult time receiving

any professional art education at all. During their studies women were, for example, not allowed to draw naked male bodies. Encountering such difficulties may have made them more determined, but also rebellious. For example, Danielson-Gambogi challenged through her work the ways in which women were commonly portrayed. She painted, among other things, breastfeeding mothers and cigarette-smoking women.

In that same hall, the guide points out how the misery of peasants and poor workers was portrayed in a romanticized and even sexualized manner by the upper-class painters that went 'slumming' in their dwellings. Yet the debilitation of an upper-class lady caused by a stroke remained a feature that would be delicately caged by the very same painter – exemplified here by Edelfelt's portrait of Anna Sinebrychoff. [Fig. 3.] In a similar manner to able-bodiedness and class distinction, whiteness was also privileged both in the artists' choice of topics, and consequently in the museum's collections. The guide informs us that there are only two images showing a black person in the Ateneum's collections, which is comprised of some 80 000 paintings. The one painting on display, painted by the Swedish Nils Jakob Olsson Blommér (1816–1853), is titled "Portrait of a Black Man" (undated), thus reducing Pierre Louis Alexandre Pettersson (Werner n.d.) from a person to just a type of people. [Fig. 4.]

In their talk, the guide dismantled naturalized distinctions as an effect of structural inequality. By naming privileges and disadvantages based on gender, sexualization, ability, class, and race, and connecting them to particular artists and artworks, they became undeniably vivid for the visitors. By doing so, the guide also challenged the apparently self-evident and innocent portrayals and descriptions present in the museum as being imbued with othering.

Next we move to Kalevala hall, where the most iconic images by Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1865–1931), based on the Finnish national epos Kalevala,



Fig. 2. Elin Danielson-Gambogi: *Self-Portrait*, 1900. 96 × 65,5 cm, oil, oil on canvas. Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Pakarinen.



Fig. 3. Albert Edelfelt: *Portrait of Mrs. Anna Sinebryhoff*, 1884. 129 × 104,5 cm, oil, oil on canvas. Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Janne Mäkinen.



Fig. 4. Nils Jakob Olsson Blommér: *Bust portrait of a black man*, 1835–1853. 55,9 × 46,8 cm, oil. Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Aaltonen.

are on display. [Fig. 5.] We gather around the *Aino* triptych (1891), which illustrates the story of a young woman named Aino who refused an arranged marriage with old Väinämöinen, and chose rather to drown herself instead. In the images, we see firstly the fatal meeting of Aino and Väinämöinen, in the centrepiece, a naked Aino in a lake avoiding his grasp, and finally a contemplative Aino sitting at the lakeshore, again naked, gazing at the mermaids. These images allow the guide to discuss the selection – given the ample choice – of Kalevala stories to be painted in the first place. They also point out the ways in which naked women

were portrayed in the paintings by contrasting Aino with the heroic and active image of Kullervo in another of Gallen-Kallela's Kalevala paintings. [Fig. 6.] The guide also raises a more recent queer feminist interpretation of the Aino myth, namely the one that suggests that instead of getting married to a man, Aino chose to spend her eternity in the company of mermaids, depicted in the third segment.

Thus the guide once more made visible the active decisions involved that led to what the final work on display will be. Although the male gaze



Fig. 5. Akseli Gallen-Kallela: *Aino Myth*, Triptych, 1891. 200 × 413 cm, oil, oil on canvas. Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Aaltonen.

dominated the artistic depiction of the Aino myth, one that every visitor was already well familiar with, the guide challenged its unavoidability by highlighting the possibility of its queer feminist interpretation. It added queer agency to Aino's choice and removed the necessity to view her as a victim of sexual harassment and compulsory heterosexuality.

The final hall we move to is dedicated to turn of the 20th century symbolism. Here we learn that symbolism was not only characterized by inner visions, but also by the exploration and portrayal of androgynous bodies. Here the guide chooses first to discuss Ellen Thesleff's (1869–1954) questioning take

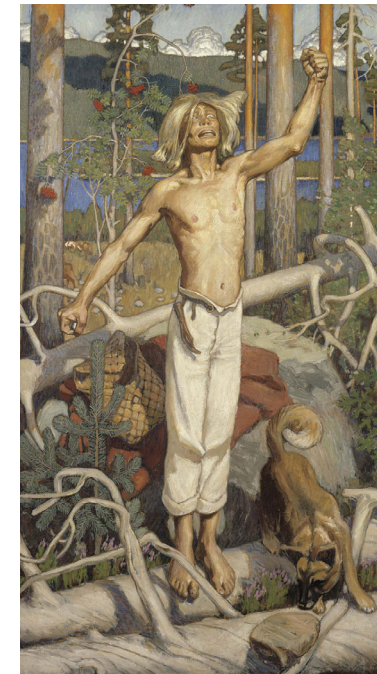


Fig. 6. Akseli Gallen-Kallela: *Kullervo Cursing*, 1899. 184 × 102,5 cm, oil. Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Pirje Mykkänen.

on embodiment, and her subtle and inward gazing portraits of women, in particular her sister Thyra Elisabeth (1892). They also circulate a photographic image taken of Thesleff in Paris during the 1890s. It shows a young, androgynous female artist with very short hair. The second painter the guide draws our attention to is Magnus Enckell (1870–1925), whose male nudes *Herääminen* [*Awakening*] (1894) and especially *Heräävä fauni* [*Awakening Faun*] (1914) display an unforeseen sensuous and eroticized take on male bodies. [Fig. 7.] [Fig. 8.] As a circulated photographic image of Vaslav Nijinsky attests, the latter painting was inspired by the dancer's performance in the Ballets Russes' *Afternoon of a Faun*, which Enckell saw



Fig. 7 (left). Magnus Enckell:
The Awakening, 1894. 113 × 85,5 cm,
oil, oil on canvas. Finnish National
Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum. Photo:
Finnish National Gallery / Yehia Eweis.



Fig. 8 (right). Magnus Enckell:
Awakening Faun, 1914. 65,5 × 81 cm,
oil, oil on canvas. Finnish National
Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum.
Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Jenni
Nurminen.

while in Paris. Yet Enckell's Finnish contemporaries were less taken by his enthusiasm for male nudes, and also labelled his ample use of colour as too effeminate, flamboyant, and grotesque for a male painter.

Quite as the tour started, it also ended in Paris. Now the city's capacity to offer transnational queer inspiration to Finnish artists is made tangible to the visitors with the help of photographic images. The guide made the tour guests aware of how the artists in question refused the conventionally gendered painting styles, and the deliberate ways in which they both went against the grain. Moreover, they explicitly addressed and brought to view the non-binary gender performance and homosexuality of the artists. That the guide was able to offer visitors such details and interpretations was also due to the delightful fact that there are queer scholarly works available in

the publications of art historians Harri Kalha (2005), Juha-Heikki Tihinen (2008), and Asta Kihlman (2018).

The queer guided tour at the Ateneum delivered what it promised; namely a well-rounded norm-critical and multi-voiced tour that explored the diversity of identities, genders, and sexualities, as well as the art historical means of their representation, while embedding all of this in a cultural historical context. Hereby it quite adheres to the understanding of queer guided tours put forward by Emmi Lahtinen and Rita Paqvalén in their report on queer visitor expectations regarding services in the art and culture sector (Lahtinen and Paqvalén 2014, 45). The engaged and educated tour guide captured the attention of the visitors, who kept wanting to hear more, and thus rarely interrupted them even to ask further questions.

However, it is by no means atypical for Finns to remain shy and silent in such situations. Yet the end effect, even when the tour's content could be called *queer*, mostly in the sense of a paranoid reading, was that the rather traditional format of conducting the tour did not support the explicit offer from the guide to be viewed as a fellow gazer and interpreter.

The Sinebrychoff Art Museum

*How does European art from the 14th century through to the beginning of the 19th century open up to the queer gaze? How do gender and sexuality appear in classical artworks? During the tour, we familiarize ourselves with the Sinebrychoff house museum and the collection exhibition.*¹⁰

The Sinebrychoff Art Museum is a historic house museum located in the former home of the entrepreneur Paul Sinebrychoff and his wife Fanny, which was bequeathed to the Finnish state in 1921. The couple had used a portion of their fortune to create an art collection, notably comprised of portrait paintings by old European masters. The collection is currently exhibited on the second floor of the building, the interior of which is maintained to preserve its original 1910s appearance.¹¹

Our tour guide greets us in the museum shop on the entrance floor, possibly in a similar manner to how they have been greeting tour guests over the past eight years that they have offered the tours as a volunteering docent. They start by engaging us in a discussion on what *queer* is, and quote its

definitions from a guide published by the Kunsthalle Helsinki art museum. The cited definitions include “odd; an umbrella term for identities; a term that escapes definitions; challenging norms; providing alternatives” (Kunsthalle Helsinki n.d.). Moreover, they point out that often when we try to create an overall picture of a matter, it is the peculiarities that get overlooked.

Based on the tour guide's introduction, it was rather difficult for the visitors to attune themselves to the upcoming tour. Its all-encompassing take on *queer* seemed to offer something for everyone, yet did not really define its own stance. During the course of the tour, it became evident that *queer* would mostly be present in the tour guide's keen attention to historical detail, particularly the peculiar and the odd.

After the introduction, we move on to the second floor, where we enter the opulent Empire hall. While standing there, the guide offers us a historical overview, punctuated with catchy anecdotes about the historically changing attitudes towards homosexuality. The narration starts with the Greek antiquity, moves through to the Roman Republic and Empire, on to the advent of Christianity, past the era of *Völkerwanderung*, to the attitudes harboured by the Catholic Church, over to the Renaissance, and all the way through to the 19th century. It becomes evident that the attitudes towards (male) homosexuality shifted radically over the different periods, as it resurfaced again and again in different forms and in various places. After the lecture, the guide points out some of the furniture in the hall that borrows images from Greek culture, especially the Greek vases – even if they are nowhere near as racy as the explicitly homoerotic images on the Pompeian vases which the guide previously referred to.

It was striking that the guide did not explicitly address or problematize the (presumed) heterosexual family home context where the queer guided tour took place. Yet the visitors were made to feel most certainly rather

10 *Miten eurooppalainen taide 1300-luvulta 1800-luvun alkuun avautuu queer-katseelle? Miten seksuaalisuutta ja sukupuolta tuotetaan taiteen klassikoissa? Opastuksessa tutustutaan Sinebrychoffin kotimuseoon ja kokoelmanäyttelyyn.*

11 Sinebrychoff Art Museum. <https://sinebrychoffintaidemuseo.fi/en/>.

queer by the temporal inconsistencies of the situation: modern people, today here more equal in the face of law, were standing in the opulently furnished Empire hall, attuning to the guide's queer stories about the often vicious means by which homosexuality had been addressed and controlled over the past centuries.

Without further ado, the guide takes us to the next rococo-themed room, where we find a rich portrait gallery of Swedish royals.¹² In this room, we focus on a portrait of Gustav III (1746–1792), the first of the three Swedish royals we were to concentrate on. [Fig. 9.]

The guide offers us a lively piece of gossip about Gustav's married life. It started with Gustav III marrying the Danish Princess Sofia Magdalena, with whom he had been engaged since the age of five. The 18-year-old king was, however, not present at his own wedding, but sent his brother to stand in for him instead. Gustav's interest in marital life remained vague, and thus, after seven childless years, his Finnish equerry Adolf Fredrik Munck had to be invited to the marital bed as an instructor, in order to secure "an heir and a spare" for the royal house. We also learn how the contemporaries of Gustav III were puzzled by his behaviour, and wondered whether he had possibly acquired "Italian habits" from his journeys. All in all, the king was considered to be odd and effeminate. No watertight evidence of his homosexuality has survived, but his close relationship to his political adviser, the Finnish Gustaf Mauritz Armfelt, raised eyebrows and caused rumours.

Through the guide's narration it soon became evident that during this queer guided tour the artworks were not going to be approached from

12 The Swedish royals were also the rulers of Finns, with Finland forming the eastern frontier of the Swedish Kingdom until 1809. Thereafter Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy of Imperial Russia, and remained so until its full autonomy as a nation in 1917.

an art history perspective, as often not even the name of the painter was mentioned. The guide's focus was rather on cultural history and on queering the perceived truth of its narration. The queer tidbits offered by the guide made it evident how the writing of mainstream history holds firmly to a heteronormative narrative, and continues to reduce queer history writing to anecdotes and gossip only. The guide's talk also showed how our current language fails us when we try to interpret past intimacies: how are we to name and understand "Italian habits" without falling into anachronisms? (c.f. Lahtinen and Paqvalén 2014, 46). Even though it is impossible to know for sure what was going on in the king's life, the guide's narration provided visitors points of departure for second-guessing the more commonly served straight story. Listening to the tour guide while examining a portrait of the long-gone king, the visitors could vividly imagine that his life might have been different and queerer than is usually volunteered.

The theme of the following hall is baroque, and the paintings on its walls are mostly portraits of rich Dutch merchant families, as the guide tells us. Amidst all of them is also a portrait of the Swedish Queen Christina (1626–1689), on which we focus next. [Fig. 10.] The person in the image is rather unassuming, but the cape with ermine lining gives her away as a royal, our guide informs us. Queen Christina was one of the remarkable, unmarried female rulers, along with Queen Elizabeth I and Empress Catherine the Great. Unlike them however, she was trained to become a king. Already at her birth she was assumed to be a boy, and consequently, throughout her life, she distained the role reserved for women and rather preferred hobbies 'not suitable' for a lady, such as studying. Moreover, the guide adds, her contemporaries were puzzled over her intimate friendship with her maid of honour Ebba Sparre – a relationship that is difficult to interpret even today, as the classification of friendship would likely have been different at the time. The interpretation is further complicated in



Fig. 9. Alexander Roslin: *Gustav III, King of Sweden*, 1775. 75 × 59 cm, oil, oil on canvas. Finnish National Gallery / Sinebrychoff Art Museum. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Aaltonen.

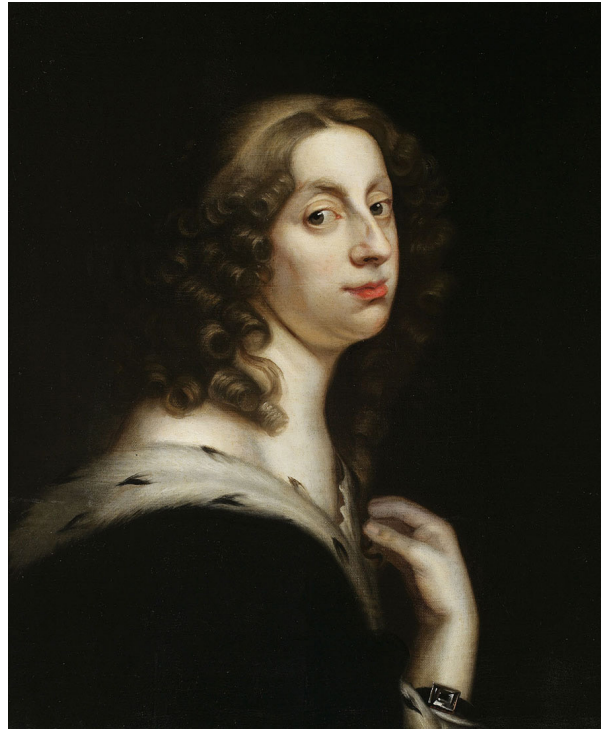


Fig. 10. David Beck: *Christina, Queen of Sweden*. 68 × 56 cm, oil, oil on canvas. Finnish National Gallery / Sinebrychoff Art Museum. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Kirsi Halkola.



Fig. 11. David Klöcker: *Charles XII, King of Sweden*. 140,5 × 108,5 cm, oil, oil on canvas. Finnish National Gallery / Sinebrychoff Art Museum. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Petri Virtanen.

light of the fact that the former queen is said to have fallen for a cardinal after rejecting the crown and moving to Rome.

Again here, rather than offering us a window to art history or the life of the painter, the guide chose to use the painting in question as a steppingstone in addressing the queer history of the person it portrayed. Quite like with Gustav III, but even more so in the case of Queen Christina, the trope of gender inversion was implied in the context of alleged same-sex relations. On the one hand, our guide faced an epistemic dead end due to the normativities and omissions characteristic in conventional

history writing: it has persistently shown difficulties with capturing and understanding relationships that do not follow a heterosexual trajectory (Sullivan & Middleton 2020, 27–28). Yet on the other hand, the guide's narration revealed a likewise problematic reliance on the idea, present also in some approaches to lesbian and gay history, that a person's sexual orientation must be understood as both a binary and permanent feature throughout time. However, Christina's presumed love affairs both with her maid of honour Sparre and the (unnamed) cardinal trouble such a view, quite as queer theory suggests.

In the final hall, we see more baroque portraits. Among them is the image of Charles XII (1682–1718), Sweden’s warrior king. [Fig. 11.] The guide points out how the portrait depicts a king that refuses to wear the obligatory white wig of a noble man of his time – quite in contrast, for example, to the gay brother of Louis XIV, who completely camped up his wig in the French royal court. Charles XII, for his part, preferred the life of a soldier to life in a royal court. Since the age of 18 he favoured the company of his fellow soldiers, with whom he lived and slept. “The Army is my wife”, he announced, and fought wars in Central Europe for years, before he had to flee to Turkey. “Nowhere have I seen such beautiful men”, he is told to have said after his arrival. And when he eventually was killed by a bullet, it is maintained that it was fired by his abandoned male lover. The guide also points out the paradoxical co-optation of queer history today: whereas queer people choose to see Charles XII as a predecessor of the modern manly gay man, the nationalist right-wing Swedes devotedly hail him as their war hero.

Once more the visitors were offered glimpses of potential queer history. Based on the figure of Charles XII, the guide was able to contrast the campy royal courts with the lives of manly men among soldiers, opening up yet a new facet of queer history writing. Interestingly, they also managed to build a bridge from past historical uses to present ones by addressing the contested interpretations of the king’s relevance both to queer and nationalist history writing. In doing so, they also revealed the political importance of offering queer readings at memory institutions.

Before leaving, we get to see a glimpse of the master bedroom of the former owners, the Sinebrychoff spouses. In that spacious room the tour guide points out the large painting of a nude Bacchus on the wall. This is of course a rather aptly chosen image, considering that Paul Sinebrychoff made his fortune in the brewery industry. Before we leave the second floor,

the guide leads us through a small corridor which they have nicknamed the “Tinder corridor”. There we see on display palm-sized portraits, which people used to send to their family, friends, and (potential) partners as gifts before the era of photography. Among these pictures there is also a ring with a miniature portrait of a man. Interestingly enough, the ring is constructed in a manner that allows one to flip that image around. On the other side there is a portrait of yet another man. What was the purpose of this ring? What was the relationship of these two men in the images, and theirs to the owner of the ring? These are the questions the guide urges us to ask ourselves as we leave the museum.

One could argue that the queer guided tour at the Sinebrychoff Art Museum did not quite hit the mark in what it was aiming for, as described in its advertisement. Although we were in a house museum, we learned only very little about the place itself, or about the ways in which sexuality and gender were presented in the classical artworks of its permanent collections. We were, however, given novel information about the queerness of the historical figures portrayed in three of the artworks on display. In their narration, the tour guide managed to raise many implicit questions about queer history writing and telling. Consequently, the queer tour was able to offer “more [...] to think about and more to *envisage*” (Lahtinen and Paqvalén 2014, 47; author’s emphasis), quite in the spirit of reparative reading, which urges us to focus on the queer affordances provided by the material at hand. Envisioning the past from this more optimistic perspective is immensely valuable, as it may open up queer horizons that also propel us to think differently about our present and future.

However, the tour also drew its own limits as to what could be thought of differently. For example, as the tour guide’s focus was clearly on homosexuality, the heterosexual context of the museum was left

unaddressed and thus the heterosexuality of former house owners normalized, as if it would have been immutably the same as in our times. The chances to explicitly problematize anachronistic and normalizing assumptions, such as the choice to have a male nude prominently displayed in the couple's master bedroom, were left unattended. Similarly, the concept of a queer guided tour, as it was put into practice here, did not challenge the traditional hierarchical structure of a guided tour, where the only fully informed party is always the guide. Although visitor's questions were accepted and answered, the tour guide's scripted stories did not leave the audience much of an opening for interaction. Hence, even during a queer tour, the visitors were reduced to a passive audience.

The Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma

*The word 'queer' translates into Finnish as 'odd' or 'weird'. Modern art is often just like that: deviating from the expected and posing a challenge to the rules. During an active guided tour, modern art offers a point of entry for discussions regarding sexuality, gender, power, norms, and identities.*¹³

The Museum of Contemporary Art was parted from the collections of the Ateneum Art Museum in 1990, and moved to the new purpose-built museum Kiasma, designed by architect Steven Holl in 1998. The Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art displays varying modern art exhibitions based on its own collections, as well as invites domestic and international artists to present their work.¹⁴ During the queer tour, an exhibition titled

13 *Queer-sanan suora käänös tarkoittaa suomeksi outoa tai kummallista. Nykytaide on usein juuri sellaista: totutusta poikkeavaa ja sääntöjä kyseenalaistavaa. Toiminnallisella opastuksella nykytaide toimii keskustelunavauksena seksuaalisuuden, sukupuolten, vallan, normien ja identiteettien tematiikkaan.*

14 Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art. <https://kiasma.fi/en/about-kiasma/>.

Coexistence. Human, Animal and Nature in Kiasma's Collections was on display.

Our tour guide – who, as we later learn, is a trained museum pedagogue – greets us in the spacious entrance hall of the Kiasma. There they offer us cushions to take along, as “we will be sitting on the floor”. The guide does not introduce us to the building, but instead explains how the queer tour we are about to embark on came into being: some teachers approached the museum with a request for a guided tour that would allow their pupils to examine identity-related themes via art in a neutral setting. Consequently, the queer guided tour was designed to initiate art-based discussions among school-aged children by adding different activities to narrated guidance.

From the entrance hall, we move to the second floor, to the artwork *Kesäyö* [*Summer Night*] by Outi Heiskanen (b. 1937). [Fig. 12.] We quietly enter a large hanging tent made from white, sheer fabrics. In the middle of this cathedral-like tent rests a masked, human-shaped and sized, mummy-like figure laid on massive dark logs.

We place ourselves around the silent figure, and our guide wishes us welcome once more. They then initiate an introductory round, during which we walk around the tent introducing ourselves to each other with a first name and a handshake, or some other form of greeting to our fellow visitors. As we continue to introduce ourselves, we must then use the name we heard from our previous encounter and apply the gesture we saw the previous person use to greet us. When the delightfully confusing exercise was over and the laughter stilled, the guide reveals to us the aim: to literally move us, and shake off our accustomed ways of thinking and being.

We then sit down on our cushions to form a circle and our guide demonstrates how they commonly create an atmosphere of trust with visiting pupils: they ask what kind of rules would allow us to feel safe



Fig. 12. Outi Heiskanen: *Summer Night*, tent, 1986. 4,1 × 8,2 × 4 m, gauze, fabric, wood, wool. Finnish National Gallery / Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / kuvaaja Antti Kuivalainen.

during the tour. We answer by bringing up things such as speaking up voluntarily, and from one's own perspective, listening to others, giving space, not making assumptions, and being able to voice one's discomfort if needed. Our guide accepts each of the suggestions with a simple "thank you", and closes the exercise by asking whether we feel we could commit ourselves to the rules we just created.

Many of the pedagogical tools the tour guide used at the beginning of the tour are similar to the ones Jemina Lindholm and Kaura Raudaskoski have developed and used in their queer/crip guided tours (Lindholm & Raudaskoski 2018). The guide also spent a lot of time and attention here in creating an atmosphere where visitors could feel at ease with each other. The inherent power hierarchies among the visitors were mitigated by treating everybody's input with the same unconditional and non-judgemental acceptance. The first exercise with rotating identities and assumed bodily gestures was also indicative of the unsettling ways in which the queer guided tour was to evolve, while the shared laughter and respectful tone of the guide helped in reducing the vulnerability of the visitors.

After the introduction and engagement exercises, we cast our attention on the artwork in a form of free watching. The guide asks us to move around the artwork silently for a while, to let it affect us, and then sit back in our place. The exercise, they tell us, aims at raising questions such as who am I? How do I look, not only at art, but also at other people? While we are seated again, they ask us to capture our feelings in one word, and to share that with the group. After the initial round, people may volunteer to further explain their interpretations, which may be respectfully reflected on by others. During the discussion, the guide responds to one participant's concerns about the artist's current ill health, and the ways in which that knowledge had coloured their viewing experience. The guide confirms that

the aged artist Heiskanen was aware that her time was limited when she produced the artwork depicting imaginings of her own death. They also raise a question in return: should our knowledge of the artist's approaching death limit our playfulness in interpreting her work?

The approach chosen here by the tour guide seem to align with Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, who has pointed out how “[q]uestions about educational purpose, pedagogy and performance come together in post-modern times, placing the museum in a swirling vortex of ambiguity, confusion and potential opportunity (Hooper-Greenhill 2007, 201)”. Whereas the guides in the museums that were filled with old art had chosen to give us informative lectures on the artists, their works, and the histories behind the people portrayed, in this museum of modern art we had none of that. The guide only briefly mentioned that such information is partly available through the museum's apps and on-line guides. Here the only lecturing they gave concerned the pedagogical choices they had made while planning the tour, and the rest was about demonstrating the effectiveness of these tools on us. Although we all probably already knew that viewers can perceive art in very different ways, hearing the multitude of interpretations was still a revelation. That the guide greeted each interpretation with a simple “thank you”, further fostered the atmosphere of acceptance and empathy. The end effect was that we ourselves, our preconceived notions and interpretations, became the focus of questioning, challenging, and queering, rather than the artworks we encountered.

We continue our queer tour and move to the third floor, where we stop to look at the four-piece conceptual work *One of Them Is a Human* (2017) by Maija Tammi (b. 1985). It presents four close-up photographic portraits: three picturing androids and one, maybe, an actual human – yet without informing the viewer which one is which. The tour guide asks us to first have a good look at the images by ourselves, and then to line ourselves up in front of the one we assume to be human.

Again we share with the group our differing interpretations and arguments, while the guide engages us in a discussion regarding additional questions; what does it do to us if we cannot tell the difference between a human being and a human-like robot? Why does a robot need to be gendered? What can we know of someone just by looking at them? What are the many minute codes we follow and base our assumptions and interpretations on? Which ones are necessary, which ones could be let go?

Even though the museum space limited the types of engagement the participants could be involved in, the activities reminded one of those put forth by Phil Smith. He had created walking tours on heritage sites and then evaluated their effects, in particular participants' sensitization to the multiplicity of meanings, as well as reflection of those meanings and their production (Smith 2013, 106). It seems that here the guided tour aimed at creating similar effects.

During the exercise, the visitors put into practice some very basic museum visitor activities: pausing, looking closer, moving, and asking (Kallio 2004, 128–129). Yet here the guide had chosen for the exercise to examine a piece of art that forcefully made the visitors aware of their pre-conditioned ways of watching images – or even other people. Rather than allowing the participants to settle for just one right and final interpretation, the guide demonstrated how viewing can be, and *remain*, an open-ended process, without resting on any given certainty. Since all the viewers could participate in the process and contribute to the experience, either by placing their bodies silently in front of the chosen work, or by sharing their interpretations with others, the epistemic authority of the tour guide was reduced and that of the visitors was foregrounded. Instead of providing answers, the guide rather kept pushing the visitors further with their questions.

At the end of the tour we group together in a quiet side room on the uppermost floor of the Kiasma. There we may together reflect on the pedagogies through which the tour was conceived. Discussion, and especially the non-judgemental listening, is raised as a key component of the tour's pedagogy. Since people are often afraid and ashamed to be found adhering improperly to the given norms, the non-judgemental and generous listening practiced during the tour is highlighted as a means to subtly challenge the authority of prevailing norms. Careful listening, as well as taking responsibility for shared discussions, allows participants an immersion in the matter at hand, and gives them further tools to achieve a pluralistic understanding of it. Here the role of the guide is far from lecturing, as they rather concentrate on breaking the given structures and supporting the group in its explorative and participatory processes.

After a wrap-up, the visitors that still had the time and stamina move on to the next room to view the video *The Visitors* (2012) by Ragnar Kjartansson (b. 1976). Others leave the museum, in order to prepare for the following day's seminar.

As the advertisement of the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art's queer guided tour promised, it was an active guided tour that used modern art as a point of entry for shared discussions. The discussions that took place during the queer tour did not particularly centre around the artist or even the details of the artist's work in itself, but rather focused on the multiple readings and interpretations of the visitors that challenged the idea of only one given truth, making use of a queer theoretical stand that Gudrun Perko calls plural-queer (Perko 2008, 76–84). The role of the tour guide was not limited to the selection of such works that allowed the visitors to engage in discussions about sexuality, gender, power, norms, and identities, but also included the respectful facilitation of those discussions. The chosen method also profoundly queered the concept of a traditional guide-centred tour. Although the allotted time only allowed the visitors

to see two of the dozens of artworks on display, they were offered several interpretations of each.

What Gets Queered in Queer Guided Tours?

One guided tour of a museum will never be exactly the same as another, even with the same tour guide, due to the social, interactive, and thus unpredictable nature of the event (Potter 2016, 255). Even less similar are tours taking place in different museums and being led by different people with varying pedagogical backgrounds – even if all are called queer guided tours. The diversity of these three queer guided tours presented and analysed here propel us to think of art museums not merely as memory institutions that are content to manage their own collections, but also suggest that museums can and should be approached as sites of queer pedagogy and learning.

When the three tours are contrasted, we see how the Ateneum Art Museum offered a well-substantiated academic tour. It was one that remained always polite and was able to offer something new for everybody, regardless of their sexual orientation. The queerness of the tour was clearly based, true to its foregrounding of a paranoid reading practice, on the critique of the production of various privileges. It sought to address and challenge the ways in which privileges have been maintained structurally, discursively, and socially, both in society and in museums (Laskar 2019, 42–43). Will the visitors now have a keener eye for the various ways in which inequalities are reproduced in society, or will the museum visit rather remain a stint in a liminal space, from where one returns back to everyday life scot-free (Nelson 2019)?

There is certainly a risk of that. When focusing on the pedagogy of the Ateneum's tour with its cultured lectures, one may notice how the tour

turned the visitors foremost into learners. The well-known and practiced framework for learning, where one person lectures while others listen, is effective for spreading new information, but also fosters the passivity of learners. If learning is a risky event, in which the learner is being moved or even displaced (Sedgwick 2003a, 8), one can ask in what ways were the visitors moved by this tour? What has possibly changed, and how will that change be put into action after the visitors/learners leave the museum? There is, of course, the hope that in the future the newly informed visitors may object and challenge the overdue and non-reflected on museum practices, and demand changes, for example, in the traditional titles or interpretations offered by the museum (Laskar 2019, 49–52; Clayton & Hoskin 2020, 67).

The guided tour at the Sinebrychoff Art Museum, in contrast, is an example of a tour that seems to be designed with the gay visitor in mind – noting also that gay is not a gender-neutral term. Since it is delivered as “from us to us”, it seeks to give gays and lesbians back the histories that were previously stolen and hidden from them, and so to sustain and nourish their already assumed, yet fragile gay identities. Such an approach clearly has its own empowering value in its use of reparative reading practices, but it is queer primarily for those visitors whose heteronormative world view has not previously been challenged. One can also ask whether such an approach that assumes particular oppositional identities may result only in fostering the pre-existing stereotypes attached to them. If so, how and in what ways would that move the visitors?

It may also be argued that the chosen pedagogical approach for this guided tour turned a group of individual visitors into one homogenous entity; the (gay) audience (Best 2012, 44). Here the role of the audience was also reduced to listening to the guide’s narration, which may or may not have resulted in some changes of mind. But even if the tour’s queer narration created a wishful continuum from past to present queer identities, it most

likely also left the visitors with a politically productive and activating question: what *else* has the heteronormative historical narration denied us?

The Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art is by definition exempt from having foremost to establish a position on the questions of (art) history writing. Here the queer guided tour used the museums’ collections not to address art history, but instead to challenge its visitors’ preconceived certainty that there is only one pre-given and normative way to see, not only things, but also each other – or oneself. It also chose to take a radically queer approach to the pedagogy of its guided tour by rejecting the traditional setup between the lecturing tour guide and their listening tour guests. The way the Kiasma’s tour was designed, it made it difficult for the visitors to become simply one passive audience, as the exercises required them to become active participants. Despite the collaborative nature of the tour, the learning experience nevertheless became very individual for each of the participants.

This tour took to the extreme the trend of moving away from an object-focused approach towards an audience centred one (Sullivan and Middleton 2020, 64). For this tour the object of queering was neither the artist, their artworks, the models they depicted, the related cultural histories, nor even the various interpretations made of the artworks, but quite profoundly the visitors self-understanding of themselves and the ways in which they relate to others. The queering was even more powerful when combined with the bodily exercises that moved bodies more than just from one hall to another. Yet precisely this could also become a challenge to those visitors with varied abilities, for whom, for example, the simple sitting on the floor might be excluding, and who would thus find more traditional approaches more accessible.

Even if all the queer guided tours analysed here offer in their own ways access to difficult knowledge, and thus create a risk of crisis that inevitably

occurs when previously held wisdoms are challenged (Laskar 2019, 53), the Kiasma tour took the risk a step further. It was moving the participant beyond known or even knowable identities towards a fluid subjectivity. Hence I suggest that the guide was moving the participants towards a *tentative reading* of themselves and their potentialities. Adding a tentative reading to the toolkit of queer tour guides would mean that tours are not limited only to a paranoid reading and its critique of past or present normativities, or to a reparative reading, by which the items presented in the museum are seen and interpreted differently and thus *queered*. A tentative reading allows one to look beyond the items on display, into oneself, and to recognize the unforeseen possibilities, either in relation to gender and sexuality, but also beyond them, and especially to their capacities to connect with others. Such an ability may help one to re-orientate with less resistance and a more open mind towards unpredictable futures yet to come.

The seminar *Toisin katsottu museo* could not have had a better start than offering thought-provoking pre-seminar queer guided tours to its participants. One is, however, left wondering, what about wider audiences? When and how often do they have a chance to join queer guided tours and progress in various ways from them? Or even further: how come such elements that could make the museum visit not only “a more socially and historically just experience for all” (Potter 2016, 259), but also a transformative one, must be isolated from other guided tours and marked specifically as *queer* tours? Why cannot *queer*, as they interpret it, be part and parcel of any tour that routinely takes place in a museum?

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21

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Cultural Production and the Canonisation of LGBT Histories in the Baltic States

Clinton Glenn

ABSTRACT

This article examines three exhibitions held in the Baltic States that laid claim to being the first LGBT exhibitions that engaged with national history and identity in their respective contexts. These exhibitions include: *From Dusk to Dawn: 20 Years of LGBT Freedom in Lithuania* (Vilnius, Lithuania, 2013); *Untold Stories* (Tallinn, Estonia, 2011); and *Slash: Between the Normative and the Fantasy* (Rīga, Latvia, 2015). In my analysis I interrogate how these exhibitions critically engaged with transnational debates in LGBT and queer politics, while reflecting local understandings of national and sexual identity – as evidenced in the exhibitions’ curatorial strategies, catalogues and curatorial statements, and in the artists and artworks presented.

ABSTRAKTI

Artikkelissa tarkastellaan kolmea Baltian maissa järjestettyä näyttelyä, joita pidetään ensimmäisinä kansallista historiaa omissa konteksteissaan käsittelevinä lhbt-taidenäyttelyinä. Ne ovat *From Dusk to Dawn: 20 Years of LGBT Freedom in Lithuania* (Vilna, Liettua, 2013), *Untold Stories* (Tallinna, Viro, 2011) ja *Slash: Between the Normative and the Fantasy* (Riika, Latvia, 2015). Analysoiden näyttelyiden kuratoinnin strategioita, näyttelykatalogeja, kuratointijulistuksia, esillä olleita taiteilijoita ja heidän teoksiaan tarkastelen sitä, kuinka nämä näyttelyt osallistuivat kriittisesti transnationaaleihin keskusteluihin lhbtq-politiikasta, samalla kun ne heijastavat paikallisia käsityksiä kansallisesta ja seksuaalisesta identiteetistä.

Introduction

In his 2018 article “Contemporary Art and Alternative Queer Archival Strategies in Central and Eastern Europe,” Polish art historian and curator Paweł Leszkowicz describes how in the post-communist region of Europe, the state has the dominant role in “shaping and ideologically controlling historical commemoration,” which with the rise of conservative nationalism it has been accompanied by a “fixation on a heroic or traumatic national past” (2018, 74). In the three Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – this can be exemplified in the promotion of national culture and language in the frame of 100 years of independence, celebrated in 2018.¹ This form of nationalist celebration leaves little room for voices silenced from official rhetoric, such as local LGBT communities. However, counter-archival strategies employed through queer curatorial methods have, as Leszkowicz notes, the power to challenge official narratives through affective modes of knowledge production, “imbuing historical data with active intimacy and activist fervour of transformation” (2018, 90).

¹ The Baltic States celebrate two separate independence days – one celebrating the initial independence from the Russian Empire in 1918 and a second celebrating the restoration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1990/1991.

An example of one such strategy comes in the form of 100 Days of Pride, organised by the Rīga, Latvia based LGBT-rights non-governmental organization (NGO) *Mōzaika* as a part of Baltic Pride 2018. Coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the first declaration of Latvian independence in 1918, 100 Days of Pride directly linked national memory of independence and freedom to that of individuality and celebration: “we celebrate independence and freedom of each individual with 100 events over 100 days of the 10th Baltic Pride” (Mozaika 2018, 6). Events held during these one-hundred days included workshops, talks, speed dating, film screenings, and a photo exhibition. These events can be understood as a community-building strategy – through engaging young activists and community workers, allies, and older LGBT Latvians that lived through the final years of the Soviet Union. However, as the organisers note, Latvia remains in last place in the European Union (as of 2018) in terms of LGBT rights and “[t]he majority of Latvian politicians choose to ignore every attempt to create positive change for the LGBTI+ community in Latvia” (Mozaika 2018, 6).

To date, there has been no comprehensive study of LGBT art and historical exhibitions held in the Baltic States. This gap in scholarship is not due to a lack of subject matter: since 2000, there have been more than twenty exhibitions, running the gamut from solo shows to group exhibitions held in a variety of venues including small private galleries, museums, cafes, restaurants, and cultural centres across the three countries [for a fuller picture of the exhibitions that have taken place, see Appendix 1]. In this article, I focus on three specific exhibitions labelled as “firsts” – as the first LGBT or queer group exhibition – in their respective countries: *From Dusk till Dawn: 20 Years of LGBT Freedom in Lithuania* (*Nuo sutemų iki aušros: 20 LGBT laisvės metų Lietuvoje*, curator Laima Kreivytė), held at the Contemporary Art Center in Vilnius, Lithuania in 2013; *Untold Stories* (*Sōnastamata Lood*, curators Anders Hārm, Rebeka Pōldsam, and

Airi Triisberg) held at the Tallinn Art Hall in Tallinn, Estonia 2011; and *Slash: Between the Normative and the Fantasy* (*Šķērsvītra: starp normatīvo un fantāziju*, curators Kaspars Vanags and Gary Everett), held at Kim? Contemporary Art Center in Rīga, Latvia in 2015.

These exhibitions have several characteristics in common: they featured a variety of artistic media and styles; they were framed in dialogue with larger discourses of gender and sexuality, both in their home countries and transnationally; and, they were described under the signifier of “first.” Aside from being labelled as the first LGBT or queer group exhibition in their countries, they were also firsts in terms of their locations in cultural institutions and galleries; the sponsorship they received from local political and cultural organisations as well as support from foreign embassies and cultural institutes; and how they framed their narratives within local history.

The research questions that inform my analysis are: how did these exhibitions attempt to link LGBT identity to national history and belonging; and, how did they engage with larger theoretical debates in curatorial, feminist, and queer studies in Central and Eastern Europe at the times they were held? To give context to this analysis, I first sketch the theoretical background to queer curatorial practices, including the influence of feminist curating that first arose in the Baltics in the 1990s, and the theoretical propositions that carried over to LGBT exhibitions beginning in the late 2000s. The exhibitions I examine herein stand in for and represent LGBT history, which is frequently, though not always,

absent in the public spheres of Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia.² Here I also query how the three exhibitions interact with and reflect understandings of national and sexual identity – both through curatorial strategies and artworks, and the theoretical framing of each exhibition. In particular, *From Dusk till Dawn* positions itself as a point in a historical trajectory in Lithuanian (LGBT) history, beginning with the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993, tentatively passing through Baltic Pride 2013, and onward to a presumptive brighter future.

In contrast, both *Untold Stories* and *Slash* straddle the line between curating LGBT history and reflecting queer critiques of identity, community, and (hetero)normativity. *Untold Stories* was framed around the “intensive public debates” on “the same sex partnership law, adoption rights and the legal situation of lesbians and gays” (Härm et al 2011, 2) in Estonia, while exhibiting works that reflect conversations around sexual minorities already present in the local arts scene. In comparison, *Slash*’s inclusion of artists from Western Europe and North America alongside Latvian artists can be seen as an attempt at building queer community transnationally, positioning LGBT Latvians as part of a larger whole surpassing national borders. Finally, as this article is one part of a larger research project, I conclude with methodological questions for the future as well as a few observations based on my research thus far.

2 There have been a number of more recent projects recordings the oral histories of LGBT individuals across the three countries, including the work of artist Jaanus Samma, referenced herein. See: Rita Ruduša, *Pagrīdes citādība. Homoseksuāļi Padomju Latvijā (Forced Underground: Homosexuals in Soviet Latvia)* (Riga: Apgāds Mansards, 2012); Kārlis Vērdiņš and Jānis Ozoliņš, eds., *Queer Stories of Europe* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2016); Riika Taavetti, ‘Discovered Queer Desires: Rereading Same-Sex Sexuality from Finnish and Estonian Life Stories of the 1990s,’ *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 28, no. 2 (May 2019): 205–234.

Notes on Terminology: Baltic, LGBT, Queer

In contemporary terminology, “Baltic States” refers to the three countries that lie on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania [see Fig. 1]. Over the centuries the region has been subjected to numerous feuds and battles between great empires, from Germany to Denmark, Sweden, Poland, and Russia. Three periods inherently define Contemporary Baltic identity. One, the National Awakenings of the late 18th and early 19th centuries during which Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians began to produce literature and songs in their native languages

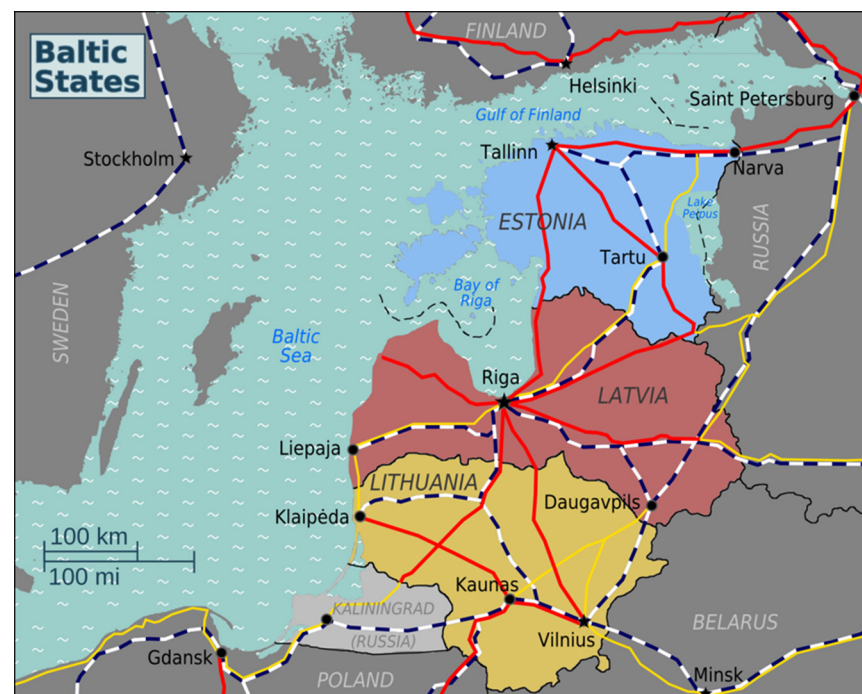


Fig. 1. Map of the Baltic States. Creator: Peter Fitzgerald, with alterations by Travelpleb, 13 March 2009. Original URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baltic_states_regions_map.png. Used under Creative Commons Licence CC BY-SA 4.0.

and understand their identities in national terms.³ Two, the first periods of independence for the three nations that began at the end of the First World War and ended with German and Soviet occupations during the Second World War, though it must be noted that the three countries were distinct in their development as independent countries. Three, their shared histories of Soviet occupation, which initially included armed resistance and mass deportations to Siberia. Armed resistance was followed by mass migrations of people from elsewhere in the Soviet Union, resulting in significant shifts in the demographic make-ups of Latvia and Estonia, where the populations of the capitals became heavily Russified, a feature that still exists today (Mole 2012, 50–80).

Furthermore, the silence that surrounded homosexuality in the Soviet Union can tentatively be linked to current perceptions in local populations that homosexuality is foreign. While homosexuality was de-criminalized in independent Estonia at some point between 1929 and 1935 (Kalkun 2018), after the annexation and occupation of the three Baltic States beginning in 1940, punishments for homosexuality included hard labour in the GULAGs of Siberia (Healey 2001).

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the three countries joined the United Nations (1991), the European Union (2004), the Eurozone (Estonia in 2011; Latvia in 2014; Lithuania in 2015), the Council of Europe (Estonia and Lithuania in 1993, Latvia in 1995), and NATO (2004). As a part of their entry into the Council of Europe, Latvia and Estonia decriminalised homosexuality in 1992 and Lithuania in 1993 (Szulc 2017, 211).

³ For a more comprehensive history of the three nations, see: Michael North, *The Baltic: A History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Andres Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States* (London: Red Globe Press, 2017).

As a part of the accession treaties each country signed in order to join the European Union, they were required to implement specific non-discrimination policies in employment and protections for minorities based on the EU's Copenhagen Criteria (Petz 2016). In comparison to other European Union states, Latvia and Lithuania remain among the most hostile to LGBT rights on the continent. In the 2020 Rainbow Map by the pan-European LGBT NGO *ILGA-Europe* ranked Lithuania as 33rd and Latvia as 41st out of 49 European countries based on legislation and legal protections for LGBT individuals (ILGA-Europe, n.d.). Estonia ranks higher at 21st place and has a form of partnership legislation in place, though the enabling acts have yet to be passed.

Furthermore, there has been considerable backlash over the past two decades in relation to public expressions of LGBT identity and the organisation of Pride marches. In particular, the early marches held in Tallinn, Estonia and Rīga, Latvia in the early 2000s were subject to campaigns of violence and attempts by local authorities to ban marches, in spite of the nations' commitments to the Right to Freedom of Assembly and Freedom of Expression as a part of the Council of Europe and European Union. In Lithuania, legislation was passed in 2010 that forbids the public dissemination of information counter to that of the traditional nuclear family and the family as enshrined in the Lithuanian constitution – in effect, banning the positive promotion of LGBT rights and families in the public sphere. While the bill was ostensibly aimed at “protecting” minors, it has had the effect of stifling public discussion of non-heteronormative sexuality and has been used to threaten those who speak openly about LGBT rights.⁴ It is in this hostile atmosphere that Baltic Pride first formed.

⁴ The leading LGBT NGO in Lithuania, *LGL*, makes mention of three such cases, mainly focused on the broadcasting of commercials for Baltic Pride 2013. See: LGL, “LGBT* Rights in Lithuania,” https://www.lgl.lt/en/?page_id=199.

After the violence that Prides in Estonia and Latvia faced, organisers from both countries as well as representatives from Lithuania met in Sigulda, Latvia in 2008 to collaborate and pool their resources. The first Baltic Pride was held in Rīga in 2009 with hosting duties rotating among Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania each year (LGL 2016, 9).

In regard to the general public, the abbreviation LGBT is widely understood in the Baltic States, particularly in the context of partnership rights and same-sex marriage and frequently appears in local media. LGBT is also included in the names of Estonian and Latvian NGOs: for example, in the names *Eesti LGBT Ühing* and *Association of LGBT and their Friends Mozaika* both feature “LGBT” in their local languages and English translations. Books written by and for the LGBT community frequently include glossaries that define LGBT through translation, along with other terms including asexual, polyamory, intersex, and pansexual (Davidjants 2010; Zabarauskas and Femina 2016, 244–245). Identity categories that exist in Western Europe and North America are understood and used by locals in a variety of ways, though research on the diffusion and circulation of these identities in a Baltic context is currently lacking.

Queer, on the other hand, is mainly used within the academic and cultural spheres and is not understood by the general public. In the curatorial statement for *Untold Stories*, the curators acknowledge the limited reach of queer, noting that “the concept of queer has had little impact, and has predominantly been employed within the framework of academic studies” (Härm, Põldsam, and Triisberg 2011, 2). Furthermore, there is the question of whether queer or queer theory is appropriate to a given context. As Polish sociologist Joanna Mizielińska notes in her analysis of queer theory’s impact in Finland, local scholars have suggested that queer theory as a field has been predominantly focused on American-centric conceptions of race, gender, and sexuality and do not always map neatly onto other

geographical contexts (Mizielińska 2006, 95). Furthermore, there is an academic bias towards citational practices that skew heavily towards the Anglo-American world – in other words, for local scholars to be taken seriously, they must be able to reference critical strains of thought in queer theory rather than producing their own forms of knowledge. Mizielińska notes that “Queer does not mean the same things in other languages as it does in English. Retaining an English term can be questioned as being a very sophisticated but empty gesture” (Mizielińska 2006, 88–89). In the context of this article, I use the terms as used within the exhibitions themselves – for example, *From Dusk till Dawn* uses LGBT while *Untold Stories* uses LGBTQI. However, I do acknowledge the potential pitfalls of bringing “queer” into a Baltic context and only engage with the term when used by local scholars.

Theoretical and Methodological Propositions

From Feminist to Queer Curating

In order to address the history of LGBT and Queer exhibitions in the Baltics, it is essential to acknowledge the debt that is owed to feminist curatorial practices that both influenced and have worked in dialogue with queer curation. Only one significant academic collection addresses feminist curation in Central and Eastern Europe, *Working with Feminism: Curating and Exhibitions in Eastern Europe* (Kivimaa 2012c). This anthology features articles that examine feminism in the context of Central and Eastern Europe as a region, the Balkans (with a focus on the countries of former Yugoslavia), Latvia, and Poland. Most notably, Estonian curator and academic Katrin Kivimaa presents the first pan-Baltic examination of feminist curatorial and artistic practices in her article “Rethinking

our im/possibilities: Or do the Baltic states need feminist curating.”⁵ In the article, she notes the pressure that contemporary art institutions in the Baltics faced when attempting to integrate into a larger international contemporary art scene:

The tropes of Westernisation and internationalisation functioned as primary determinants in the process of creating and developing a new field of multidisciplinary, topical, and theoretically advanced contemporary art. The fact that the modelling of this new field depended on the pre-existing structures and trends of Western (global) art aided those desiring to make feminist exhibitions with certain legitimacy. (Kivimaa 2012a, 77.)

However, as Kivimaa notes, the absence of political feminism or activist movements in the Baltics were used in “anti-feminist counter-arguments” which claimed that such discourses were impositions from outside the region (Kivimaa 2012a, 77). She goes on to discuss a number of feminist art exhibitions that were held in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania that tapped into international discourses on feminist art and curation but were “paradoxically framed by disavowals of feminism which, as it was argued, had no relevance in local culture” (Kivimaa 2012a, 70–71). In effect, they were configured within an international contemporary art context – where feminism was an overriding concern for a number of cultural workers – while attempting to remain legible within their own national contexts.

5 Kivimaa has also been involved in transnational conversations on feminism and gender in contemporary art, having taken part in the symposium portion of the major feminist art exhibition *Gender Check* in Warsaw in 2010. Kivimaa spoke alongside other major feminist art historians including Serbian curator (and curator of *Gender Check*) Bojana Pejić, American academic Amelia Jones, and Lithuanian curator Laima Kreivytė.

She further notes that there has not been a wholesale change in institutions in the region since the 1990s – instead, there are only a handful of academics and curators who continue to work with feminist critiques, and there are even less who do it as a sustained practice (Kivimaa 2012a, 70). Most notably, the perception of the proper function of art, as an example of aesthetic quality, continues to inflect contemporary debates. She gives an example of how

the questions of inclusion, exclusion and power relations as fundamental factors in social practices of making exhibitions or writing art histories, continue to be sidelined or regarded as ‘externally’ imposed demands of political correctness by many representatives of both older and younger generations of art historians and curators. (Kivimaa 2012a, 71–72.)

This perpetuates the view of what the value of the cultural object is its form and aesthetics rather than the way art is representative of social or political concerns of a given theoretical discourse – be it feminist or queer.

Finally, Kivimaa notes how the emergence of gay/lesbian activism in the Baltics has had an impact on “on some art projects responsible for re-politicising the practices of making and curating art” (2012a, 92). In making this claim she specifically references *Untold Stories*, stating that its curatorial agenda was paradoxically two-fold: one, to include “positive representations of the emergent LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, intersex) community” in the region while highlighting practical concerns of the local community such as partnership legislation, whereas the curatorial theme of the exhibition “relied predominantly on an anti-identitarian agenda of queer theory and took a critical stance against the discourses of normalisation and assimilation” (Kivimaa 2012a, 92). While this may seem contradictory, I argue later in this article that this is characteristic of a number of exhibitions of the time – they sought to reflect local social

and political concerns while tapping into the critical power of queer theory to denaturalise essentialist understandings of gender and sexuality. This, as I propose, is due to the ambitions of these exhibitions: they were labelled as the first of their kind and had the responsibility to speak both to a broader audience – in particular, the local LGBT community – and to speak critically in contemporary art and academic discourses present internationally, including queer theory and queer curatorial practices.

This begs the question: what exactly is queer curating? One way of approaching this question is through the re-reading of archives and the historical record. A 2010 special issue of the Scandinavian LGBTQ studies journal *Lambda Nordica* entitled “Queer Methodologies,” takes up this approach, examining how queer theory can be used as a tool for doing ethnographic fieldwork, the impact of affect theory on queer scholarship, and doing queer in activist archives and museum spaces. One particular strategy used by curators is approaching the collections of major institutions in order to read for “queerness” where it has otherwise gone unacknowledged. In his article “Queer in the museum: Methodological reflections on doing queer in museum collections,” Swedish curator Patrik Steorn addresses the question of knowing what to look for and “looking queerly” in institutions that are formed on the basis of national heritage and culture. Steorn points to two methodological issues when doing queerness in collections: one, looking “for objects that might reveal queer presences” in order to address how museums produce normative categorisations such as style, period, and locality; and two, reconfiguring institutions in order to “elaborate the productive role of non-normative desire and affective attachment in the practice of queer interpretation” (Steorn 2010, 121).

Steorn cites the work of art historian James Sanders who notes how traditional museums have the inability (or perhaps, lack of political will) to incorporate discussions of the political and social context of artworks and

artists into exhibitions alongside aesthetic representation as categories of critical analysis (Steorn 2010, 124). This is reflected not just in curatorial and display practices, but also in the way that artistic works are organised within museum collections. For example, when Steorn asked the National Museum in Stockholm for images that could be considered gay/lesbian or had queer figures as subject matter, the museum responded that they collected based “on grounds of artistic quality” – in effect, the institution was characterised by an inability to break out of traditionalist modes of collection and presentation. As he notes, this is not a new critique of institutions – feminist art historians were asking similar questions in the 1970s, particularly in relation to “how the term ‘quality’ was used to exclude certain artworks from the art historical canon” (Steorn 2010, 125). What a queer approach to museums brings is the ability to understand artworks and other cultural objects from a different point of view – one tied to “different emotional and political attachments to objects” (Steorn 2010, 131).

Here Steorn proposes constructing an alternative archive, rather than reconfiguring the normative structures of the museum or gallery; this archive would “consist of interpretations of artworks or other objects that have been queered and appropriated by an LGBT audience, and which holds narratives about affective knowledge and queer desires” (2010, 130). However, I contend that before such an archive of queerness can be constructed, a few specific requirements must be met: one, the capability to compile a set of works that can be understood by both audiences and academics as “queer”; two, framing an exhibition within geographical boundaries in order to make “queer” local; and three, the choice of an institution that will allow such critiques to carry cultural and political capital. The first requirement, the capability to compile a set of works, has a much to do with the methodological approach one takes to collecting and curating as it does to gaining access to museum archives – which requires

navigating bureaucracy and potentially hostile administrators and staff with their own political agendas. The act of compiling these works can thus be understood as an act of canon-building, where the canon exists outside and in juxtaposition to official narratives of cultural and historical value.

The Canon and the Nation

Polish sociologist Robert Kulpa references the idea of building queer canons within his text “Nationals and Sexualities – ‘West’ and ‘East.’” Here he cites Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s argument from *The Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) where she discusses the difficulty of relating gay and lesbian studies to the English literary canon (Kulpa 2011). Kulpa takes this further, noting that the incorporation of gay and lesbian subjects into “state-controlled institutions (as, for example, in the case of ‘sexual citizenship’), albeit at the expense of radicalisation and Islamophobia, could be read as the reshaping of the social canon” (2011, 48). This “reshaping of the social canon” has the effect of shifting the boundaries between who is and is not included in official narratives of national identity, be they cultural, political, or literary. He proposes two different ways of looking at this move. One exists as more of a top-down normalisation described as “writing homosexuality into an existing master narrative by dominant nation-state discourse” or *canonising homosexuality*. This can be juxtaposed with a grassroots/activist approach he refers to as *homosexualising the canon* or “writing homosexuality into the existing national master canon of history by sexual dissidents – lesbian and gay subjects themselves” (Kulpa 2011, 48). This allows the objects of discourse, in this case, LGBT individuals, to become the subjects of discourse: the active producers of knowledge rather than the products of it. This recuperative move, as Pawel Leszkowicz notes, can also be understood from the perspective of democratic participation: “From this point of view, the queer visual critical interventions into the communist archives conducted by artists might be read as a representative

of recent acts of empowerment and democratisation, regaining or reparation of memory” (Leszkowicz 2018, 89–90).

Furthermore, Kulpa acknowledges the difficulty that queer theory has with the idea of nation and national identity. In contemporary scholarship, there is an overriding tendency to view nationalism as a normativising force, either through Lisa Duggan’s (2003) concept of homonormativity – the neoliberal incorporation and subsequent depoliticization of white, affluent gay men into consumptive culture – or through Jasbir Puar’s (2007) conceptualisation of homonationalism – the bringing into nationalism of gay/lesbian proper subjects and the “othering” of queer people of colour, particularly those who are from the Middle East and Muslim. However, such critiques are inherently biased in their locations within a North American and Western European context and do not take into account small nations in Central and Eastern Europe that are not imperial powers and have been the object of neoliberal policies, rather than the producers of such dynamics. In this context, Kulpa presents a negative perspective of how nationalism is understood in queer theory, stating:

What is so necessarily wrong with the willingness to be recognised as a part of a national community, to build one’s own identification in relation to other nationals and to not be left aside as encapsulated and self-contained, ab/sub/ob/ject (2011, 56)?

He further describes how claims to nationalism by gays and lesbians can be understood as both a recuperative move and one that challenges the monolithic perception that nationalism belongs to right-wing political actors. Rather than ceding national identity to those who seek to erase lesbian and gay subjects from national belonging, “lesbian and gay communities in [Central and Eastern Europe] and elsewhere may well embrace national ideas as one of the methods of their struggle” (Kulpa 2011, 56).

However, I wish to caution that this does not necessarily mean that an expansive form of nationalism, one that Kulpa gestures towards, will automatically open the boundaries of who belongs within the idea of the nation. As I discuss later in this article, the curators of *Untold Stories* have been particularly critical of the ways that nationalism has been taken up by gays and lesbians in Estonia, and how such discourses are often inflected with xenophobia and racism.

Furthermore, this continual emphasis on the nation and national identity as the frame through which gender and sexuality can be understood is particularly characteristic of the exhibitions I discuss herein. Much of this has to do with the role that the state has in promoting cultural institutions. Paweł Leszkowicz notes that across Central and Eastern Europe, “cultural and historical organisations rely almost exclusively on the state’s financial support” (2018, 71). In effect, the capital available to explore cultural heritage resides almost exclusively within the bureaucratic structures of states that are characterised by “increased conservatism and nationalism, which is typically homophobic” (Leszkowicz 2018, 71). Leszkowicz proposes queer archives and queer memory as counter-institutions and alternatives to these forms of exclusion; however, they are also predicated on sustained and sustainable funding sources. In this context, the question of whether LGBT or queer exhibitions can escape the frame of the nation becomes almost impossible to imagine – particularly given the continued marginalisation that these communities face across Central and Eastern Europe.

Methodology and Context

My main methodological approach to studying these exhibitions has been through visual and critical discourse analysis, looking to the exhibition catalogues, websites (including those archived via the Internet Archive’s

Wayback Machine), critical reviews, news articles, and photo galleries. My research in the Baltic States began only in 2016, so I have only had “access” to these exhibitions through their material traces left in documents and in photographs, rather than through my own experiences visiting the spaces. However, I am very familiar with the three institutions discussed herein and have visited their galleries on a number of occasions. I also wish to note that there is an imbalance in the material available for the three exhibitions: while *From Dusk till Dawn* and *Untold Stories* released publications containing the names of the artists and artworks involved, *Slash* was not accompanied by a catalogue. My analysis of the works included has come from examining a series of photos taken for the exhibition as well as references on artists’ websites. As such, my discussion of *Slash* herein is as much about critiquing its theoretical foundations as it is an attempt to fill in the gaps in terms of the staging of the exhibition itself.

In turning to my analysis of the three exhibitions, what becomes most prominent is how they reflect the social and political contexts of their time. In particular, *From Dusk till Dawn* was very much marked by the experiences of the local community during the first Baltic Pride march in Vilnius in 2010. The theoretical background of *Untold Stories* was inflected by questions around the idea of family, community, and nation. In contrast, *Slash* was very much connected to the internationalisation of gender and sexuality – both through its role in EuroPride/Baltic Pride 2015 and in the inclusion of artists and works from across Europe and North America.

***From Dusk till Dawn*: sexuality and gender in/through the state**

From Dusk till Dawn: 20 Years of LGBT Freedom in Lithuania opened on the 23rd of July 2013 at the Contemporary Art Center (CAC) in the Old Town district of Vilnius and ran until the 6th of August. A part of the cultural programming of Baltic Pride 2013, the exhibition was labelled as the “first

exhibition of queer history and culture in Lithuania” (Kreivytė 2013a, 5) and featured artworks in a variety of media including photography, performance art, video, print, and textiles. The exhibition was organised by Lithuanian academic and curator Laima Kreivytė, who is well known in the cultural sector in the country and incorporates feminist and queer methods into her curatorial practice and writing. Notably, all thirteen artists included in the exhibition were Lithuanian. *From Dusk till Dawn* also featured two parallel exhibitions – a solo exhibition of Aušra Volungė’s photographs at the Marija and Jurgis Šlapeliai House-Museum, and Virgilijus Šontas’s photographs at the Modern Art Centre, which ended a week after *From Dusk till Dawn* closed. *From Dusk till Dawn* also included several events such as a poetry reading by the American poet Eileen Myles as well as a queer poetry night and the exhibition opening, which included a performance of Eglė Ganda Bogdaniene’s “Trans-parade: gender (changing) fashion,” a collaboration with the students of the Vilnius Art Academy.

The exhibition was divided into two separate sections – the CAC’s reading room was used as a space for historical and archival documentation of the local LGBT community, while the works of art were displayed in the basement gallery of the Center. While the use of the basement space was initially due to the rest of the building being previously promised to the 15th Vilnius Painting Triennale (Griniūtė 2015), the curatorial strategy made use of the underground nature of the space as representative of the Lithuanian LGBT community’s social position. In discussing the choice to juxtapose the two spaces – history on the ground floor and cultural production in the basement – curator Laima Kreivytė described the decision as follows:

That is why the exhibition sites – the reading room and ground floor hall of the Contemporary Art Centre – are symbolic in their own way. One of them is (a)light, the other is associated with vaults, the

underground, and the first gay bars. The reading room hosts the documentary part and artworks related to conceptual contemplation on the history of LGBT [...] The basement is hiding and at the same time, revealing the images of non-normative sexuality in Lithuania’s contemporary art and artistic strategies of queering – questioning of the norms. the major topics are gender performativity, homoerotic beauty of the body, being together, and the critics of patriarchal institutions. (Kreivytė 2013b, 45.)

Here the choice was to bring history out into the open for both the LGBT community and other visitors to see. Included in the exhibition was a timeline of events printed on translucent vinyl and adhered to the windows of the CAC’s reading room. The timeline, just like the exhibition, was predicated on an origin point being the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Lithuania in 1993.⁶ Here the ability for the community exist in the public sphere is directly linked to the legal mechanisms of the state – in effect, the state having the power to deem a group of citizens as no longer criminal and perhaps worthy of basic rights.

The timeline also included documentation of prominent historical events for the local community, including the publication of the first LGBT magazines in the country, theatre performances, TV interviews, and important events in the fight for equal rights. Most notably, the timeline refers to two events of censorship that preceded the exhibition, one in 2006 and the other in 2009. The first involved a photograph of a gay couple by Ugnius Gelguda that was excluded from an exhibition by students of

⁶ Homosexuality had been criminalised in Lithuania since the Tsarist period of the Russian Empire and subsequently carried over into the first period of independence from 1918–1940 and the Soviet occupation until 1991. 2013 was also the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Lithuanian Gay League, the largest LGBT-rights NGO in Lithuania.

the Vilnius Art Academy that was held in the small western Lithuanian town of Juodkrantė. The second incident occurred as part of the “Artists for Human Rights” exhibition held by the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2009 when photographer Akvilė Anglickaitė’s photo series on transsexuality was excluded.⁷ As Kreivytė notes, these two incidents “sparked off the most considerable debate on censorship in Lithuania at the end of 20th century” (2013b, 47). In direct response to the censorship, Kreivytė included Anglickaitė’s work in an exhibition at Gallery Kairė-Dešinė called “For Human Rights with No Censorship” (Kreivytė 2013c, 41). Both of the censored works were included in *From Dusk till Dawn*.

Furthermore, the exhibition acted in a “conceptual dialogue” with *Ars Homo Erotica*, a major exhibition curated by Paweł Leszkowicz and held at the National Museum in Warsaw, Poland in 2010.⁸ Unlike *From Dusk till Dawn*, *Ars Homo Erotica* was characterised by the recuperative move it attempted to make in terms of re-contextualising the museum’s collection through a “homeroerotic perspective” (Leszkowicz 2012, 141) – and through the inclusion of art from across Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, Hungary, and Russia. *Ars Homo Erotica* also featured four Lithuanian contemporary artists in the programme including Remigijus

Venckus, who would be featured three years later in Vilnius. The exhibition’s goals, as the curator described, were

to represent the volatile nature of queer politics in Eastern European countries through artistic expression. Queer activism and art that developed in the region, functions at the very centre of the social and political struggle for LGBTQ rights, freedom of expression, and democracy. (Leszkowicz 2012, 142.)

Notably, the exhibition was held alongside Warsaw Pride and EuroPride, an annual pan-European Pride celebration that rotates among host cities across Europe. 2010 represented the first time that EuroPride had been held in a location in Central and Eastern Europe.

Drawing a link between *Ars Homo Erotica* and *From Dusk till Dawn*, there were a handful of shared artists across both exhibitions, including the aforementioned Remigijus Venckus as well as a work by Adomas Danusevičius entitled *Somewhere in the Bush*, a direct nod to a photograph by the Russian group Blue Noses that had appeared in the Warsaw exhibition (Kreivytė 2013b, 49). Similarly, Paweł Leszkowicz in a brief discussion of *From Dusk till Dawn* notes the role that photography played in activating archives of memory. Referring to the inclusion of photographs of nude men by artist Virgilijus Šonta, Leszkowicz states:

They document the transitory freedom and eroticism of gay/ nudist beaches at the time when male homosexuality was still illicit. Thus archival traces are hidden in many genres of art, especially in portraits and nudes which need to be rediscovered and reinterpreted in a queer way by artists and curators. (Leszkowicz 2018, 85.)

Here the conceptual dialogue between exhibitions is reciprocal, predicated on the understanding of the power of the image as a form of memory-making rather than simply memory activating.

7 The term “transsexuality” appears in the English translation of the catalogue and appears to be a direct translation of the Lithuanian “transseksualumas.” It should be noted that this term has fallen out of favour and has been replaced by “transgender” in most English contexts over the past two decades. See: Laima Kreivytė, *From Dusk till Dawn: 20 Years of LGBT Freedom in Lithuania* (Vilnius: 2013), 38; 41.

8 The exhibition was also notable for the support of Polish academic Piotr Piotrowski, who was head of the Museum at the time. He would later resign after the Board of Trustees refused to accept his plans to reconfigure the museum in line with his strategy of developing the institution as a “critical museum,” or one aligned with critiquing the museological construction of national identity. It is also speculated that the impetus behind the plan’s rejection was his support for *Ars Homo Erotica* (‘Piotr Piotrowski About His Resignation from the Polish National Museum’ 2010).

The social context of exploring the previously “underground” or illicit extends to many of the essays within the exhibition catalogue. The essays also reflect both an anxiety and optimism for the exhibition and Baltic Pride 2013. This anxiety reflects the traumatic experiences that many in the community faced during the first March for Equality of Baltic Pride 2010, where marchers were considerably outnumbered by counter-protesters while the march was forced to be held on a small, desolate street across the river from the older part of Vilnius.⁹ In the lead up to Baltic Pride 2013, local organisers fought the city to hold the March for Equality in the centre of the Old Town on Gedimino Prospektas, the main street linking the *Seimas* and the symbolic Cathedral Square. In her essay in the exhibition catalogue for *From Dusk till Dawn*, gender studies scholar Margarita Jankauskaitė reflects on this shift, noting how “the dusk that enwrapped the community” previously, particularly in the threat of exposure, had now receded and was accompanied by “the community [making] demands for public, symbolically significant spaces,” thus “[reflecting] a complex transformation of values” (2013, 9). While this demand for visibility acts as the *raison d’être* of the exhibition, the tension of the past remained an indelible part of its presentation.

The inclusion of photographer Vsevolod Kovalevskij’s *InVisible* reflects the difficulty of presenting the past within the frame of the present. The work consists of black and white photographs and audio documentation of the March for Equality route from 2010, acting as a form of “spectre” or haunting of that event. In her curatorial statement, Laima Kreivytė links Kovalevskij’s work to the exhibition’s title, describing how the “work displays a junction of history and its artistic reflection.” She then connects

9 This experience is well documented in Darja Davydova’s essay “Fragmented Subjects: The Changing Face of the Lithuanian LGBT Community in Public Discourse,” included in the publication *Changing Faces: First March for LGBT Equality in Lithuania* (Vilnius: LGL, 2012).

this to the physical act of moving through the exhibition, noting that “[b]y climbing the stairs from the basement to the reading room, the viewer will not just symbolically come out, but will steer the wheel of LGBT history – from dusk till dawn” (Kreivytė 2013b, 51).

Other essays in the exhibition catalogue reinforce this movement from the dark to the light. In Nida Vasiliauskaitė’s essay “Why it is Necessary to ‘Demonstrate’ Homosexuality,” she makes direct reference to the controversies over Baltic Pride 2010 and the perception in the general public that being open about one’s non-normative sexuality is a provocation. She outlines the major changes in Lithuania since the first coming out stories appeared in local media in 1995 through the 2007 controversy over a truck paid for by the EU and emblazoned with the slogan “For diversity. Against discrimination” as well as the notorious 2009 Law on the Protection of Minors Against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information. The law, as Vasiliauskaitė notes, was “aimed at “cleaning” public space from anything that is not heteronormative” (2013, 23) and forbids the dissemination of representations of “non-traditional” family configurations in media. Notably, it remains in the Lithuanian legal code today.

Vasiliauskaitė also points to the power, and danger, of visibility, noting how to be open about one’s sexuality in Lithuania is seen as an attack or “an aggressive infringement upon the ‘nature’ of the heteronormative mainstream” (2013, 25). In contrast, Dalia Mikonytė describes the dynamics of LGBT visibility in Lithuania through a series of “misunderstandings,” beginning the first attempts to register the Lithuanian Gay League – where the Lithuanian form of the term “gay,” or *gėjus*, was similar to the name of a lake and resulted in official confusion as to what the organisation was representing (2013, 27). These misunderstandings, as she describes, encompass the sometimes-successful attempts at beginning a dialogue in the country, as well as the acts of censorship in the local arts scene.

Finally, the exhibition catalogue actively engaged with queer theory. In his essay “Queer Discomfort,” sociologist Artūras Tereškinas cites Sara Ahmed’s notion of discomfort in his desire to be seen and to live “otherwise” to the heteronormative majority. He explicitly links this to the inability or rather lack of desire to conform to societal expectations as well as the discomfort of living in a country where one cannot remake themselves based on their self-perception of identity. Referencing Ahmed, Tereškinas states:

[T]hose who live such lives do not seek comfort; on the opposite, they uphold discomfort regarding all aspects of normative culture by the way they live. Ideally, they have no families, don’t marry, don’t mate, don’t give birth to and don’t raise children, don’t join neighbourhood watch groups, don’t pray for the nation during war. Because otherwise they would be supporting the exact ideals that make queer lives failed and intolerable. (2013, 13–15.)

This stands in opposition to much of the exhibition, which is firmly embedded within the framework of progressive politics and human rights. Rather than fighting for visibility and acceptance, Tereškinas argues for a form of counter-politics that is based on discomfort – both discomfort of the self and discomfort of the “normative” majority.

Laima Kreivytė also proffers queer understandings of the works in her curatorial statement. In particular, she describes the origins of the exhibition’s title, *From Dusk till Dawn*, as inspired by the 1996 American vampire film of the same name directed by Robert Rodriguez. Picking up on the figure of the vampire, she points out how it represents “an allegory of transformation, of a shifting non-normative identity” that has the potential to transform others: “Isn’t it what society is afraid of? That everyone who sees gays and lesbians, and communicates with them, will become the same as them?” (Kreivytė 2013b, 43). In her text, Kreivytė

also makes the theoretical move to bring “queer” into Lithuanian through the use of the Lithuanian word “kreivas” meaning wry or curve.¹⁰ She goes on to describe queer as

not defining, but criticising identity, its stiff essentialistic construction. Moreover, queer may function not only as a noun (referring to a person of non-traditional sexual orientation), but also as an adjective (referring to weirdness, circumflection, deviation from the norm) and a verb, referring to a subversion of the dominating (hetero)norm, “defamiliarization” of standard images, rejection of gender stereotypes and critique of the patriarchal system. (Kreivytė 2013b, 43.)

While it is important to understand this anti-essentialist position in regard to the exhibition – particularly given Kreivytė’s clarification later in her essay that not all artists included in *From Dusk till Dawn* identified as LGBT – this stands in contrast to the exhibition’s slogan that reinforces a normative perception of time and progress as linear. Included in both the physical representation of the chronology placed on the windows of the CAC reading room and at the end of the timeline presented in the exhibition catalogue, the slogan reads: “The (hi)story has not yet ended – you are invited to fill it!” (Kreivytė 2013c, 41). While I understand this optimism as an attempt to portray the future – from the vantage point of 2013 – as being more open, progressive, and free, as of the writing of this article the challenge has yet to be taken up by other exhibitions or cultural projects in Lithuania.

¹⁰ While “kreivas” has not been taken up as an alternative to LGBT in Lithuania, the term is also found in the name of the Vilnius Queer Festival “Kreivės,” a film festival founded in 2014. At this juncture, I am uncertain if there is a direct connection to Kreivytė’s essay.

Untold Stories: From LGBT to Queer Politics in Estonia

The oldest of the three exhibitions was *Untold Stories* (curators Anders Härm, Rebeka Põldsam, and Airi Triisberg), held at the Tallinn Art Hall in Tallinn, Estonia from 8 May to 26 June 2011. It featured twenty-eight artists from Estonia, Finland, Germany, the United States and Denmark. The exhibition was conceived of as a part of Tallinn's designation as a European Capital of Culture for 2011 and received support in the form of funding from the EU, and the "Diversity Enriches" programme of the City of Tallinn. Unlike *From Dusk till Dawn* and *Slash*, *Untold Stories* was not directly connected to Baltic Pride, though the exhibition's run did overlap with Baltic Pride 2011 in Tallinn. The exhibition catalogue makes a note of this, providing a short description of Baltic Pride and the local OMA Festival,¹¹ as well as links to the festival programming. The exhibition was international in scope, including artists from the United States, Finland, and Germany, alongside Estonian artists. The exhibition also featured a speakers' series including artist talks, a lecture by academic Robert Kulpa, and a screening of the Latvian documentary *Homo@LV* (dir. Kaspars Goba, 2011), which depicted the aftermath of the first pride march in Rīga in 2005.

The stated aim of the exhibition was two-fold: one, to "provide a fragmented insight into the social, cultural and political life of LGBTQI people"; and two, "to take a critical stance toward the discourses of normalisation and assimilation that frequently accompany attempts to win recognition by the majority of society, thus referring to the points of dispute within the LGBTQI movement itself" (Härm, Põldsam, and Triisberg 2011, 2). In

11 The OMA Festival was an arts festival that was held concurrently with Baltic Pride in Estonia in 2011 and 2014. It included an open-air concert and was the replacement for the Baltic Pride marches that did not take place when Baltic Pride was first hosted in Tallinn.

an interview with Katrin Kivimaa, co-curators Rebeka Põldsam and Airi Triisberg acknowledge the seemingly contradictory nature of attempting to represent both a normative/assimilationist viewpoint as well as a critical/anti-identitarian perspective. Triisberg notes that there was a concerted effort to present "positive representations of LGBTQI subjectivities" in the exhibition, connected to discussions with local activists and "something quite typical for queer/feminist cultural and political projects happening in the region of Eastern Europe – with the agenda of mainstreaming gender and sexual difference" (Kivimaa 2012b, 204). In contrast, the curators were also interested in interrogating more theoretical issues, including how to incorporate queer and feminist theory into an exhibition when these discourses are primarily relegated to academia. They also sought to address some of the larger problems with mainstream LGBT politics in Estonia including "nationalist and racist, but also anti-feminist and trans-phobic attitudes" held by gays and lesbians in the country (Kivimaa 2012b, 204).

Untitled Stories can also be understood as a reflection of the social and political situation in Estonia at the time: proposals for partnership legislation were being debated in the political and media spheres of the country while local activists were engaged in their own debates over the merits and detriments of holding a pride march.¹² The curators acknowledged the complicated nature of these debates in their curatorial statement, articulating the critical position that the "exhibition aims to direct attention at the processes of multiple marginalisations that occur within minority groups, posing questions about possible alliances between queer struggle and other social movements" (Härm, Põldsam, and Triisberg 2011, 2).

12 Further background on the partnership legislation debates can be found in sociology Kadri Aavik's article "Negotiating Uncertainty: Sexual Citizenship and State Recognition of Same-Sex Partnerships in Estonia" in the book *LGBTQ+ Activism in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

Two pieces in the exhibition help to illustrate some of these larger theoretical and practical concerns. The first is Jaanus Samma's *Stories (Lood)*, a series of audio interviews with older gay men that lived through the Soviet period. These interviews have a dual purpose – one, recording the lived experiences the older generation who lived and loved through the occupation; and two, as documentation of the spaces of desire they inhabited, including parks, bars, cafes, and beaches in and around Tallinn. This form of memory-making and archiving stands in contrast to the performative nature of the public reading of American artist Zoe Leonard's 1992 spoken-word piece *I Want a President...*, organised by Berlin-based artists Malin Arnell and Kajsa Dahlberg in collaboration with Stockholm-based Johanna Gustavsson and Fia-Stina Sandlund and Leonard herself. The performance was held at the base of the nationalist Independence War Victory Column on 10 June, and the text was adapted for the local context. Co-curator Airi Triisberg notes that the purpose of the performance was as a response to some of the debates being held by local LGBT activists in terms of holding a pride march. In particular, they were responding to the problematic arguments being made including a rejection “demonstration culture” and protest as antithetical to “Estonian traditions” to the much more problematic “[fears] transsexuals defining the public image of ‘completely normal’ people, such as the majority of gays and lesbians” (Kivimaa 2012b, 216). The performative nature of this protest is characterised by both an occupation of public space in the city as well as a clear rebuke to the normalising aspects of assimilationist lesbian and gay politics.

The curators were also intent on interrogating the extent to which feminist and queer curatorial practices could intersect within an institutional setting. For example, Triisberg describes how some of the overriding concerns behind the exhibition include questions of how these forms of curating could be expressed as “a very specific kind of method, a strategy of doing

exhibitions differently,” particularly in the practical aspects of staging an exhibition (Kivimaa 2012b, 220). Rebeka Põldsam reflects some of these critical anxieties, pointing to the small number of cultural workers who engage in these types of curatorial practices “despite the prominence of some of these exhibitions” as well as the insular nature of those workers and academics who are engaged in the field (Kivimaa 2012b, 221). Furthermore, the question of continued institutional support continues to be a central issue for the long-term prospects of LGBTQ (and feminist) art exhibitions within state institutions in the Baltic States. In the wake of *Untold Stories*, the new head of the Tallinn Art Hall referred to the exhibition as an example of “niche” exhibitions that should be pushed to the margins of the institution's programming (Kivimaa 2012b, 207). If such exhibitions are contingent on support from within art galleries and museums, a change in mandate, staff, or direction of the institution has the potential to end overt support for such work.

I also want to point to a larger academic debate that exists in terms of the impact of the designation of EU Capital of Culture. Ostensibly the hosting duties are meant to introduce cities to an EU-wide audience, and in particular, to showcase local cultural production and heritage. Along with this is a strong pressure to conform to the bureaucratic requirements that accompany EU funding and the hosting duties. Finnish art historian and cultural researcher Tuuli Lähdesmäki critiques this dynamic, observing that the designation: “narrows the cultural richness in Europe by ignoring the already existing local and grass-root level cultural phenomena, and by demanding development that follows current regeneration and development trends.” She further comments on the goals of the programme, stating that “it simultaneously homogenises the cultural offerings due to the structure which forces the cities to follow certain criteria, obey certain cultural values and trends, and compete against other cities for the designation” (Lähdesmäki 2014, 493–494). Tentatively

extending this critique further to *Untold Stories*, one could question whether EU support, as well as funding from the city of Tallinn, represented a concerted effort to recognise and encourage the cultural production of LGBT artists in Estonia, or whether it was more a performative act presenting a “progressive” face to the rest of Europe.

Slash: Between the Normative and the Fantasy – transnational and local queerness

Held as a part of the cultural programming of Baltic Pride/EuroPride 2015, *Slash: Between the Normative and the Fantasy* (*Šķērssvītva: starp normatīvo un fantāziju*, curator Kaspars Vanags) opened at the Kim? Contemporary Art Center in Rīga on 18 June 2015 and closed on the 2nd of August. The venue takes its name from the Latvian phrase “kas ir māksla?” or, “what is art?” Kim? is a contemporary art space with a mandate to engage in a critical discussion of “what it means to be a cultural agent today” while exploring “how to show and talk about art, thinking about how art functions in differing contexts of local and global economies, traditions, cultures and subcultures, between the disappearance and reappearance of identities” (Groševs, n.d.). Here I want to highlight the international focus of the mandate, particular the mandate’s conception of “differing contexts of local and global economies.” In bringing together Latvian and international artists, the centre’s mandate serves to link the local artistic community, which receives little to no press or visibility in the west, to larger artistic networks and contemporary cultural production. *Slash* mirrored such ambitions – to bring together local and international artists in a dialogue about gender, sexuality, and queerness.

The exhibition featured thirteen artists from Latvia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Finland, Poland, and Germany. Similar to *From Dusk till Dawn*, *Slash* also included two parallel exhibitions, one a solo

show of Latvian artist Inga Melgere at the Janis Rozentāls and Rūdolfs Blaumanis Museum and the other featuring the work of American artist Matthew Lutz-Kinoy’s mixed-media piece *Princess PomPom in the Villa of Falling Flowers* at 427 Gallery. Notably, the exhibition was intended to run until 2 August; according to the gallery’s website, it closed abruptly on 1 July when the building owners evicted the gallery from the space (427 Gallery, n.d.). It is unclear whether the eviction was related to the content of the show or to its ties to the larger exhibition.

Slash was curated by Latvian curator Kaspars Vanags, best known as a co-founder of the Open Creative Collective in Rīga, as well as the curator of the Latvian pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015. A small portion of the exhibition was curated by Gary Everett the founder and artistic director of the Liverpool-based queer arts festival *Homotopia*. Everett, in collaboration with the Tom of Finland Foundation, selected a number of Tom of Finland’s works to be exhibited. The press release for *Slash* described its theoretical premise as “the first time a public art institution in Latvia is turning towards ‘slashes’ among contemporary art expression” (Vanags 2015). This reference to the term “slashes” is tied to a theoretical proposition made by Vanags in his curatorial statement. In a similar manner to Kreivytė’s use of the Lithuanian term *kreivas* as an analogue to queer, Vanags looked to the Latvian word *šķērss*. For Vanags, it represents “something that is opposite to straight, holds considerable potential as an equivalent to *queer*, which in the English-speaking world was introduced in the 1980s, when describing one’s own personal take on the peculiarities of one’s sexuality” (Vanags 2015). Furthermore, the word’s literal translation into English is diagonal or cross – something that cuts across at an angle different from “straight.” The link to queerness is evident throughout the exhibition, pointing to the struggles of the past, to queer possibilities in the present, and the unknown destinations in the future.

The exhibition also makes a similar move to *From Dusk till Dawn* in its reference to the decriminalisation of homosexuality. It states:

More than 20 years had to pass since the decriminalisation of homosexuality for such an exhibition, influenced by the digitalisation of personal life, to be possible – borrowing from the *open-source* mentality. The other, here, isn't juxtaposed to the norm as something locked in the solitude of an individual strangeness or an impossible taboo, but as an awareness of an essentially recognisable, reachable, and modifiable aspect of personal identity. (Vanags 2015.)

The text gestures toward the current technological environment where personal details can easily be shared and engaged with via social media, allowing for the diffusion of identities that were not possible previously. Similarly, the title of the exhibition, *Slash: In Between the Normative and the Fantasy*, is characterised as a space between, rather than hard binary oppositions:

Stuck between the norm and fantasy, the slash questions the self-explanatory about sexual orientation. It questions the difference between identity and belonging, between belonging and decency. It does not concern only homosexuality, but a whole range of issues, which sometimes dart and zigzag through our minds. (Vanags 2015.)

Its argument is one steeped in questions of community and belonging, particularly when social and political space is not always given to those on the margins. Furthermore, “slash” represents not a division between the local and the global, but a liminal space in which the local is disseminated in the global, and where the global is made local through language, culture, and everyday experience. However, the exhibition, much like *From Dusk till Dawn*, relies on a stable origin point – the decriminalisation of homosexuality – to frame its theoretical exploration of art and representation.

In the broader context of the exhibition, I want to make a note of a few things that should be considered when attempting to understand its rhetorical function in the programming of EuroPride. Due to the explicit nature of some of the works included in the exhibition, admission was limited to those 18 years and older, unless accompanied by a guardian. While this could be seen as potentially problematic, in particular by relegating queerness to the realm of banal pornography and provocation – the question of what compromises would have been required to remove this prohibition remains up for debate. As well, the international aspect of the exhibition deserves further exploration – here, the question of how international collaboration and cultural exchange translates into a sense of solidarity and the building of artistic networks is ripe for future study.

Included in the exhibition were works by Latvian artists, including Atis Jākobsons' large-scale figurative illustrations and explicit drawings from the archives of illustrator Edgars Ozoliņš. Berlin-based Canadian artist Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay contributed a performance and textual piece *Love Letters Transcribed*. The piece consisted of letters from his personal correspondence with friends and lovers that were transcribed specifically for the exhibition. They were distributed through various interactive means: letters were sent by mail to exhibition visitors who wrote their contact details in the bathroom of the gallery, while the artist passed other copies out to passers-by who met the artist in an inner-city park in Riga at midnight on the summer solstice, coinciding with the exhibition (Nemerofsky Ramsay, n.d.). *Slash* also featured Polish Karol Radziszewski's nine-channel video installation entitled *Fag Fighters*, which plays on the Polish right-wing perception of homosexuality as a national threat by depicting the escapades of a gang of gay anarchists who are signified by the pink balaclavas they wear. Radziszewski is notable for his work as the editor of *Dik Fagazine*, the only art journal to cover queer art in Central and Eastern Europe, and as the founder of the *Queer Archives*

Institute, an artistic and archival project “dedicated to research, collection, digitalisation, presentation, exhibition, analysis and artistic interpretation of queer archives, with special focus on Central and Eastern Europe” (Radziszewski, n.d.).

Baltic Pride 2015 was held alongside EuroPride, representing the first time that a post-Soviet nation had been awarded hosting duties. EuroPride’s mandate suggests that the decision of a host city is normally predicated on a strong local LGBTI community as well as an experienced organising team. However, they also emphasise the “the political significance of the event for the region and host city’s LGBTI friendliness all come into play” (EuroPride, n.d.). EuroPride is as much an initiative for social change as it is about supporting local activists. Rīga was selected as the venue for EuroPride in 2012, when organisers of Baltic Pride 2015 *Mozaika* competed against LGBT groups from Vienna, Manchester, Milan, and Barcelona, for the rights to host. Most notably, Vienna withdrew its bid and threw their support behind *Mozaika*’s bid. In speaking to the US-based LGBT news organisation *The Advocate*, the head of EuroPride, Hans de Meyer, remarked that the homophobic environment in Latvia was not a factor counted against Rīga, but rather was a motivation to award the city hosting duties. More importantly, de Meyer noted the influence of Russia on Baltic politics and local LGBT communities, stating:

We’re not allowed to go into [Russia] without getting arrested for being who we are, so of course [EuroPride is] the next best thing we can do [...] It’s not only Latvia; if you look at what happened last year in Baltic Pride and the difficulties they had organising it in Vilnius, Lithuania, the country next door, it’s the same thing. There’s still this Russian influence that plays a part in the acceptance of LGBT rights. (Godfrey 2015.)

In effect, EuroPride’s decision to go to Latvia was based as much on supporting the local LGBT community as it was in building solidarity with activists across the region, particularly those to the East.

The decision to hold EuroPride in Rīga was met with condemnation from Latvian political and religious leaders. The Vice Mayor of Rīga, Andris Ameriks, when speaking to the news service *The Baltic Times*, described EuroPride as “a pretentious demonstration of oneself, which does not promote understanding” and argued that it shouldn’t be allowed (*The Baltic Times* 2015). Protests occurred during the main pride march, with one of the major protest groups calling themselves *Antiglobalisti*, or anti-globalists. The implication in their name is that gay and lesbian rights, and by extension, gay and lesbian identities, are a result of globalisation and not native to Latvian culture.¹³ While local media focused on the negative backlash of EuroPride, less critical attention has been paid to the political and social dimensions of hosting EuroPride or the impact of exhibitions such as *Slash*. In the one academic article that explores the implications of EuroPride for the local community, British academic Jayne Caudwell examines how the language of international human rights is taken up at a local level, and in particular, through an ethnographic exploration of the Baltic Pride/EuroPride 2015 Pride House and the inclusion of foreign VIPs in the festival.

In her observations and interviews with volunteers at Pride House, Caudwell notes that while there was a lack of fluency in international discourses of human rights, “there was evidence of positive discourses of LGBT equality

13 For a more thorough analysis of the tension between local attitudes towards homosexuality and Pride Marches, and its impact on “tolerance” of sexual minorities, see: Dace Dzenovska, *School of Europeanness: Tolerance and Other Lessons in Political Liberalism in Latvia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 112–140.

and a strong shared commitment to the finale Pride parade” (2018, 57). Caudwell contrasted the volunteers with foreign VIPs, who were primarily political figures from foreign embassies located in Rīga and representatives of international human rights NGOs. Caudwell points to the human rights conference held during EuroPride, where local and international speakers discussed the state of LGBT rights in the region as well as the homophobic backlash the pride events faced. However, as she notes, there was a distinct gap between the universal language of human rights being spoken of in broad political and legal terms and the local “vernacularisation of rights [involving] small-scale social interactions and broader cultural associations attached to contemporary political and legal stories, and LGBT forums, art and film” (Caudwell 2018, 60). Extending this analysis to *Slash*, the questions of foreign support and local interpretations of the exhibition remain unanswered. In this respect, the actual use of the “slash” as a way to bring queer into local vernacular remains an unfulfilled theoretical gesture of making queer local. Furthermore, there is the possibility that the use of the term – which is inherently non-sexual – evacuates the radical potential that exists in the English context of queer. This reflects one Polish sociologist Joanna Mizielińska’s key critiques of queer’s potential in non-English contexts: perhaps “translation has the opposite effect to that intended by its users: instead of questioning normative sexuality it may strengthen it by erasing sexuality from the discourse altogether” (2006, 91).

Conclusion

To conclude, I return to the research questions undergirding my analysis: how did the three exhibitions attempt to link LGBT identity to national history and belonging, and how did they engage with larger theoretical debates in curatorial, feminist, and queer studies in Central and Eastern Europe at the times they were held? While all three engaged with national

history and identity, while reflecting larger debates in queer and feminist studies transnationally, they did so in very different ways. *From Dusk till Dawn* represented a two-fold curatorial strategy: the presentation of historical materials, including news papers clips, TV programs, and other documentation of LGBT life in Lithuania, alongside cultural production engaging in larger discourses of gender and sexuality. The theoretical basis for the exhibition is evidenced in its exhibition catalogue – where a timeline of LGBT history in Lithuania is presented alongside essays that engage in critical discussions of queerness and anti-normativity. *Untold Stories*, on the other hand, exhibited works informed by the oral histories of LGBT Estonians while providing documentary evidence of “the everyday experiences of sexual minorities in social relations” (Härm et al 2011). In contrast to *From Dusk till Dawn*, *Untold Stories* placed individual experience and memory, rather than historical events, up front and centre. While *Untold Stories* bridged both the local and the transnational with the inclusion of international artists, *Slash* took a much more theoretically based approach to questions of gender and sexuality. Through the linkage of the Latvian term *šķērsis* to the English “queer,” the exhibition’s theoretical move was to take queer theoretical propositions, including the socially constructed nature of gender and sexuality, and bring them into a local context. The inclusion of both Latvian and international artists reinforced the curator’s desire to put the local and the transnational in dialogue, rather than in a unidirectional flow of western theory to eastern praxis.

However, the theoretical propositions of all three exhibitions point to a larger problem of making the transnational local. In her discussion of feminist curation in the Baltics in the 1990s, Katrin Kivimaa points out how feminist curators often looked towards contemporary feminist art practices internationally as a way of engaging in and contributing to the internationalisation of contemporary art. As Kivimaa notes, this had an additional effect, one in which local male artists and art critics

were able to successfully counter such theoretical interventions as “political correctness,” using the lack of political feminism and feminist activist groups in the Baltic States as evidence of how these “concerns” originated outside the nation and therefore were not representative of local contemporary (national) art practices (2012a, 75–77).

However, I wish to caution against placing the location of the production of theory and praxis as solely in the west – in particular, the perception that discourse is unidirectional in flow and impact. As seen in the exhibitions discussed herein, research questions are often motivated by local concerns including historical milestones for local communities, testimonies of the generation that lived through the Soviet occupation, as well as attempts to make “queer” local. In discussing queer curatorial strategies in the Polish context, Paweł Leszkowicz notes how

[t]he escape outside this narrow national framework seems to be impossible even for queer artists, curators and historians who want to question the entire system, so pervasive is the official national discourse. On the one hand, queering the national heritage is disruptive for the nationalist ideology which remains heteronormative, on the other a more cosmopolitan approach would only enrich the queer disruption of boundaries. (2018, 84–85.)

For such work to be done there needs to be more than a “first” exhibition addressing national history and cultural identity through LGBT and queer lenses. Rather, these debates need to be actively maintained and opened to new audiences outside of activist and academic circles.

Of the exhibitions held to date in the Baltics, none have been granted access to the main institutions of cultural memory: national museums and galleries. The step of having the ability – and the institutional support – to question the very foundation of national identity is a key step of “queer

memory work.” According to Leszkowicz, exhibitions that *have* been given access to the institutions of national memory have been “very successful in their vision of alternative histories” (2018, 85). However, in my view this reinforces the need to cast a critical eye on the ways that institutions actively engage in and produce national identity and culture – rather than acting as repositories of tradition and heritage.

All three exhibitions examined herein received support from local arts groups, galleries, museums, NGOs, politicians, and international embassies and granting agencies. However, it remains unclear at this point in my research how the process of applying for and receiving grants and other material support had an impact on the final shape these exhibitions took. Similar questions could also be asked of the organisations that chose to fund these exhibitions – what were their motivations for providing funding? Furthermore, it remains unclear to me how the administration and mandates of the respective galleries influenced the critical questions each exhibition proposed. Looking at the exhibitions more specifically, they are quite different in terms of how they were framed – either through national identity or transnational conceptions of queerness. Ripe for further research are the transnational dimensions of queer theory and praxis in curation in Central and Eastern Europe. In particular, what dynamics allow curators to engage with western queer theory, both in local academic and cultural settings and through educational exchanges and conferences? And, have these exhibitions marked a concerted shift within institutional practices in their respective countries? Finally, the institutionalisation of national memory reifies the nation as one of the primary pre-occupations of any institutional critique. If one were to go beyond the frame of the nation, and in particular, tap into transnational dynamics of sexuality and gender, what would this mean for local LGBT communities who might no longer see themselves, their experiences and histories, as the material for local artists and curators? And how would this gesture towards a form

of “queerness” that becomes essentialised as a universal form of “non-normativity” rather than particularised through local interpretations, curatorial and academic writing, and activist engagements?

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Appendix 1: Other LGBT Exhibitions in the Baltic States

Note: This is not an exhaustive list and as such should be considered as in progress. For brevity, this list does not include exhibitions that are not LGBT or queer in focus, but include LGBT artists or artworks.

EXHIBITION NAME	DATES	LOCATION	NOTES
<i>Amour – Vahet Pole</i>	2008	Lounge Stereo, Tallinn, Estonia	Charity exhibition and solo exhibition of Estonian photographer Indrek Galetin, raising funds for the Estonian AIDS Prevention Centre
<i>Karminas (Carmine)</i>	2008	Tulips and Roses Gallery, Vilnius, Lithuania	Exhibition of Lithuanian painters Adomas Danusevičius and Alina Melnikova
<i>For Human Rights with No Censorship</i>	10 – 19 December 2009	Gallery Kairė-dešinė, Vilnius, Lithuania	Curated by Laima Kreivytė
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	6 – 9 May 2010	Hotel Conti, Vilnius, Lithuania	Organized by Swedish MEP Christofer Fjellner; part of the cultural programming of Baltic Pride 2010
<i>Perekond (Family)</i>	6 – 12 June 2011	März Projektiruum, Tallinn, Estonia	Curated by artists Anna-Stina Treumund and Jaanus Samma; part of the cultural programming of OMA Festival/Baltic Pride 2011
<i>Orlando. A Biography</i>	2012	Gallery Kairė-dešinė, Vilnius, Lithuania	Solo exhibition of Lithuanian artist Laisvydė Šalčiūtė
<i>By the Way</i>	21 – 31 August 2014	Skalvijos kino teatras, Vilnius, Lithuania	Solo exhibition of Lithuanian photographer Arcana Femina; part of the programming for Kreivės Vilnius Queer Festival
<i>Kõhe tunne?! (Feeling Queezy?!)</i>	2 August – 7 September 2014	EKKM, Tallinn, Estonia	Curated by Rebeka Põldsam
<i>LGBTI Latvijā no 20. Gadsima sākuma (LGBTI in Latvia Since the Beginning of the 20th Century)</i>	15 – 21 June 2015	Kaņepes Kultūras Centrs, Rīga, Latvia	Historical exhibition, curated by historians Ineta Lipša ¹ and Inese Runce
<i>Vision of Kaos</i>	20 – 30 August 2015	Skalvijos kino teatras, Vilnius, Lithuania	Solo exhibition of Lithuanian photographer Arcana Femina; part of the programming for Kreivės Vilnius Queer Festival

<i>Not Suitable For Work: A Chairman's Tale²</i>	9 May – 22 November 2015 15 April – 9 October 2016	Estonian Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy; Museum of Occupations, Tallinn, Estonia	Solo exhibition of Estonian artist Jaanus Samma
<i>5 Years of Struggle</i>	13 – 23 June 2016	Paviljonas, Vilnius, Lithuania	Solo exhibition of Russian photographer Romas Melnik; part of the cultural programming of Baltic Pride 2016
<i>M-i märg unenägu (M's Wet Dream)</i>	9 December 2016 – 26 February 2017	Tartu kunstimuuseum, Tartu, Estonia	Solo exhibition of Estonian photographer Anna-Stina Treumund
<i>Lietuva atskleidžia (Lithuania reveals)</i>	9 – 26 May 2017	Seimas (Parliament), Vilnius, Lithuania	Solo exhibition of Lithuanian photographer Arcana Femina; held in conjunction with the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia
<i>Who is this Wo/Man</i>	6 – 9 July 2017	Kino Artis, Tallinn, Estonia	Solo exhibition of Belgian photographer Danny Eeraerts; part of the cultural programming of Baltic Pride 2017
<i>Humans of Rainbow</i>	4 – 10 June 2018	Kultūras Centrs Sudrabs, Riga, Latvia	Part of the cultural programming of Baltic Pride 2018
<i>Piiritlemata Perfektsus (Undefined Perfection)</i>	8 February – 31 March 2019	Fotomuuseum, Tallinn, Estonia	Solo exhibition of Estonian photographer Indrek Galetin
<i>Lilli, Reed, Frieda, Sabine, Eha, Malle, Alfred, Rein and Mari</i>	20 June – 15 September 2019	Fotografiska, Tallinn, Estonia	Solo exhibition of Estonian photographer Anna-Stina Treumund
<i>The Darkroom: Tom of Finland</i>	21 February – 19 July 2020	Fotografiska, Tallinn, Estonia	First exhibition of the photographic works of illustrator Touko Laaksonen (Tom of Finland)

¹ Lipša's larger research has included an analysis of family formations, women's rights, and abortion during the initial period of independence of Latvia from 1918–1940. See: Ineta Lipša, *Seksualitāte Un Sociālā Kontrole Latvijā 1914–1939* (Riga: Zinātne Apgads, 2014).

² Finnish academic Riikka Taavetti discusses Samma's work at length, in particular the controversial nature of its presentation at the Museum of Occupations in Tallinn. See: Riikka Taavetti, "Queer Politics of Memory: Undisciplined Sexualities as Glimpses and Fragments in Finnish and Estonian Pasts," PhD diss. (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2018).

GROWING UP NEEDING THE PAST

An Activist's Reflection on the History of LGBT+ History Month in the UK

Sue Sanders

ABSTRACT

In her essay lesbian activist Sue Sanders from the United Kingdom recalls her personal journey from the 1950s to the present. The essay covers her times as a curious but clueless child, a budding lesbian activist longing to learn more about lesbian past, and becoming one of the founders of LGBT+ History Month in 2005. She pays attention to the political and societal changes that preceded its initiation, and gives a vivid description of the diverse activities celebrating the Month. Moreover, she draws our attention to its many outgrowths that benefit schools, memory and cultural institutions, and inspire new scholarship.

ABSTRAKTI

Esseessään brittiläinen lesboaktivisti Sue Sanders kertoo kasvutarinansa 1950-luvulta tähän päivään. Se kattaa hänen elämänsä uteliaasta mutta tietämättömästä lapsesta aloittelevaan lesboaktivistiin, joka haluaa oppia enemmän lesbohistoriasta, ja edelleen hänen päätyemisestään yhdeksi sateenkaarihistoriakuukauden perustajista vuonna 2005. Sanders kuvaa sekä kuukauden perustamista edeltänyttä poliittista ja yhteiskunnallista tilannetta että niitä monia tapoja, joilla kuukautta on sittemmin vietetty. Lisäksi hän esittelee sen monia liitännäisaktiviteetteja, jotka hyödyttävät kouluja, muisti- ja kulttuuri-instituutioita ja inspiroivat tutkimusta.

Thinking back, when growing up in London in the 1950s, I knew nothing about gay and lesbian people, and even less about LGBT history. When I was a kid, there were two gay men who lived next door; one worked at Decca, the then record company. I would sing in the garden in the hope of being discovered; needless to say, it did not happen. My parents were tolerant of them, nothing else. My mother had some close female friends who I learnt later were probably lesbians in a threesome, but it was never discussed.

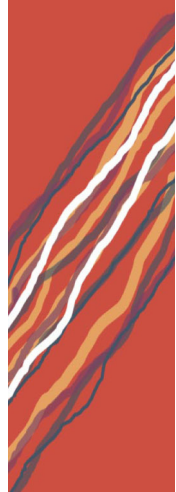
There was a very sweet gentle local gay man I met when I was a teenager. He was very brave walking around in pink trousers in the early Sixties. We chatted a bit, but I don't think I ever came out to him as I was not out to myself then, just knew I was different. I was having quite a few relations with boys, much more so than my best friend who was secure in her heterosexuality.

Although our Sunday ritual included a roast dinner and listening to the radio programme Round the Horne (www.bbc.co.uk) which had two very camp gays, Julian and Sandy doing a sketch every week. My parents loved it, yet whether they were aware they were laughing at gay humour I don't know. It was very risqué, full of double entendre, and used Polari, the gay

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45

Queer
ViewMirror
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Sue
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language. So, the irony was that gay life was there, but hidden in plain sight and certainly out of mine.

I do remember – and I would have been 10 at this time – being very excited about the Wolfenden Report, buying a paper, one of the tabloids, to find out about it. So clearly some part of me knew it was important to me. The report was looking into whether prostitutes and homosexuals should be decriminalised, and the report recommended that homosexuality should be. Yet that was enacted only partially ten years later in 1967.

Unfortunately, I stumbled upon and read Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness* quite early, maybe in my late teens. I found it very unsettling to say the least. In an attempt to meet lesbians, I rang the Gateways, a lesbian club, now closed, featured in the film *The Killing of Sister George*. I stammered "I think I might be a lesbian", and a very butch voice came down the phone: "Do come down, I will look after you!". I did not go near the place for years. I did, though, direct *No Exit* by Jean Paul Sartre in my third year at drama college. It was, I guess, my final fling at the heterosexism of the college. I cast the lesbian against type, which intrigued all, and it worked. I was the only out 'gay' in a drama college in London in the so-called swinging sixties!

It was in the seventies and eighties that I began to look for lesbian historical material. It was a time of much activity. I ran the Oval House, a well-known fringe theatre in London, for a year. It supported women's and left-wing theatre and attempted to get theatre that was exploring all the pertinent and current issues.

I was directing in the theatre and working with a lesbian company, Siren, and living with Caeia March, who was working on her first Lesbian novel. I was at the same time working with Nancy Diuguid. She had been an instrumental force with the Gay Sweatshop company, ([www.](http://www.unfinishedhistories.com)

[unfinishedhistories.com](http://www.unfinishedhistories.com)) a ground-breaking theatre company that toured plays exploring and celebrating what we would call now LGBT+ issues. Julia Parker and Mavis Seaman were running the Drill Hall, a theatre on the fringe, off Tottenham Court Road, London, that supported feminist and gay theatre. It was a heady time of experimental theatre exploring the issues of the day known as agit prop – witty, powerful, sometimes surreal drama and very much exploring themes and people hitherto unknown. Nancy, together with a group of women – predominantly lesbian – directed a play written by Barbara Burford (www.theguardian.com), *Patterns*, which attempted to illustrate the sisterhood down the ages. While many books and art pieces were reclaiming women's history, the lesbians were often left out. Whereas Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (www.brooklynmuseum.org) is one prominent example of art work which included lesbians, Dale Spender's *Women of Ideas: And what men have done to them* (1982) was a detailed exploration of women that history had forgotten, but did not explicitly identify lesbians. In response, I wrote an essay for a women's studies conference titled "*Where are the Lesbians in Women's Studies?*" which was well received by the lesbians and frostily by the heterosexual women. In 1984 they were keen to hide us, as they were afraid lesbians would put off heterosexual women exploring and embracing feminism.

Homophobia continued to be a prominent feature of life into the 1980s. For example, Greenham common, the American nuclear base in Berkshire, was being campaigned against by a group of women activists. The publicity surrounding the campaign was predominantly very lesbophobic. Most papers vilified us as man hating, hairy, ugly lesbians, and presented us as aggressive – an irony given we were peacefully challenging the most vicious aggressor threatening annihilation on a mass scale. Also, the reaction to AIDS was appalling. The press and the government were vile; AIDS was known as the gay plague and the stigma of it was horrific.

In an attempt to find my history, I took myself off to the British Library armed with a list of possible lesbians I had gleaned from the works of Chicago and Dale. By then I had discovered that the writer, who had so inspired me while studying her work at A level –Virginia Woolf – was bisexual. She had used the British Library extensively, so I might be sitting at a desk she had used! Had anyone told me about her bisexuality when I was studying at school, my life would have been completely different. I would have been confident in my choices knowing that I was not alone in them and that someone of such talent and profound reputation had feelings like mine. The lying by omission done by my teachers cost me years of angst and led to self-denial that may well have contributed to my inability to perform academically to the standard expected of me, failing as I did both my eleven plus and my A levels, despite being seen as a leading student.

Despite my enthusiasm and wonder, my quest to find historical lesbians in the library was at the time not well received or understood by the staff at the British Library. I was not adept in the Dewey system and needed a lot of help. I think embarrassment and disdain describes their reaction. I do still have my stack of index cards of historical lesbians and hope one day to pass it on to someone who can bring them back to life.

Much of my research yielded discoveries of lesbians of the early 20th century who had gravitated to Paris. Finding out about them was a revelation. Many were writers and artists living a life imbued by their art and their women lovers. Their lack of politics did dismay me, although Gertrude Stein driving ambulances in the first world war was an epiphany. Knowledge of the existence of these lesbians and their romantic, exciting and artistic lives was inspiring and empowering, but the fact that they had been hidden from me meant that I felt a strange combination of thrill and anger. Reading about lesbian lives and discovering lesbians who had led full, rich, useful lives succeeding in their chosen fields and finding ways

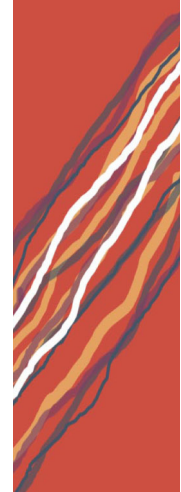
to make their mark gave me hope. It encouraged me to think that I might be able to do something useful and gave me a sense of a potential future that hitherto had been denied me.

As my career developed, I gradually started to make connections between my work and LGBT history. As a drama teacher and an out lesbian in schools I would often call myself a walking visual aid. As a kid, I had had no role models of political lesbians, although there were strong women in my life. My mother and my aunt had both forged their lives in the heat of the second world war in London. My aunt never married and had a career in the BBC. She bitterly complained about the men that she trained, and who then climbed the ladder and left her behind, but she did not make the connection to feminism and socialism.

I discovered Schools OUT, a small group of LGBT+ teachers who were working together to challenge homophobia. It was a vibrant group with people from all over the country, who were also union activists. It had been formed in 1974, known then as the Gay Teachers group. Initially it was founded as a social group, but quickly became political when one of their members was sacked when he was outed. I joined the group and met Paul Patrick, a fellow drama teacher. We eventually became the co-chairs and wrote resources for schools and delivered training together.

In addition to my work in schools I started to develop and run equality training workshops for a variety of voluntary organisations and local authorities. As part of this work, I wanted to offer to my students and my training participants solid examples of people who, at different historical moments, had bucked the norm and pioneered sexual and social revolution (www.schools-out.org.uk/?page_id=59; Devlin 2015).

It seemed to me that as humans we need both theory and concrete examples to inspire and inform our lives. Given that much of the training



I was delivering took place after the Stephen Lawrence report (www.theguardian.com) came out in 1999, it seemed vital to give examples of how people gained confidence and developed strategies to make the world a safer and more equal place for all.

The Stephen Lawrence report, or the MacPherson report as it also was called, was conducted to look into the mishandling of the investigation of the murder of Stephen, a black teenager in a suburb of London. It exposed the racism and corruption that had been at the root of the practice of the police at the time. Police had not arrested anyone for his murder, though there was a group of white boys who were well-known for their racism and violence. The report was the first thing that the first Home Secretary of the new Labour government Jack Straw set up. It proposed wide sweeping changes not only in the criminal justice system, but in all government departments including education. McPherson report defined institutional racism as

The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people (Home Office 1999).

What flowed from this report was landscape-changing. We had a new government that was keen to challenge the status quo that had supported the police in their practice of bullying and interfering with demonstrations and civil rights. Examples would be the brutal policing of the miners' strike, Greenham common and many marches for women's and 'gay' rights. There had also been several so-called riots in predominantly black areas of the country due to racist incidents of the police and the authorities.

Some of us were already working with the police to change their homophobic culture. We sought to get both the police and local authorities to take seriously the task of tackling homophobia. This was at a time when Section 28 was in place. Though we had vehemently fought against it, it was enacted in 1988, and was not repealed till 2003. It stated that a local authority "shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" or "promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship" (Section 28, en.wikipedia.org).

The fight against Section 28 was widespread and brought many members of the LGBT+ community together to challenge the virulent homophobia of the press, media, and parliament. I was involved in both the arts and education forums that worked hard to educate the politicians and the press about the dangers of such a discriminatory law.

Having such a law in place, though there were never any court cases, encouraged homophobic attitudes that of course spilled into discrimination and sometimes violence in schools, workplaces and on the streets. Many members of the community practised self-censorship and kept themselves firmly in the closet. Those of us who were already working with the authorities attempting to mitigate the damage of 28 and the attitudes it engendered welcomed the Stephen Lawrence report. One of the report's 70 recommendations was that every member of the criminal justice system should receive training on equality and diversity to challenge the racist culture that the report had exposed. I helped to design and deliver some of that training. I felt that to be effective the training needed to enable the participants to see that all stereotypes and prejudices based on class and/or about women, LGBT, older and disabled people, needed to be challenged. There was no way we could improve the service and meet the needs of the public if any one group that was a subject of prejudice was not included.

During the early 2000's I was delivering a variety of training in the diversity and equality field, often through the lens of antihomophobic training. For me, knowing that other lesbians had existed, and fought to forge a reality that acknowledged lesbian lives, was crucial. However, I found that it was hard to find the diversity of lesbian experience. We were all hidden but some, like working class and black lesbians and lesbians with disabilities, were even more hidden. Black feminist writers like Barbara Burford and Jackie Kay, who were friends and colleagues of mine in the UK, and Maya Angelou in the USA, were ensuring that we were discovering and celebrating historical black feminist and lesbian experience.

Black History Month was a very powerful influence on my work. It was a crucial resource for schools, local authorities, and libraries. Linda Bellos, a well-known black Jewish lesbian mother, was one of the founders of Black History Month in the UK. We knew each other, since she was working in Lambeth Council, a local authority in London, where she became its leader. We worked on campaigns like Women Against Violence Against Women and we were the founders of the LGBT Independent Advisory group to the Metropolitan police.

The month October was used, but not always effectively, to raise awareness of black history. Unfortunately, all too often in schools, the history was of the American civil rights movement, rather than of the struggles of the British black leaders, or, say, the Windrush generation, the name given to the first generation of African Caribbean people who come over to the UK after the second world war in a boat of that name. Saying that, it nevertheless did bring to the fore the potential to discuss black people's contributions to British society and gave space to discuss and raise awareness of racism and the ways to counter it.

The fact we had a month in the UK to explore and celebrate black experience was a crucial precedent for LGBT+ History Month. With Paul

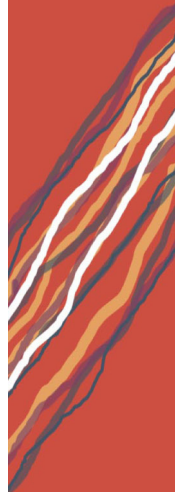
Patrick, my then co-chair at Schools OUT (www.schools-out.org.uk), we wanted to explore how we might set up such a month for LGBT+ people. We felt that if libraries and museums used the month, then teachers might feel emboldened to use it in schools. So we chose February, as it was at that time a quiet month for schools, and it had a half term. In the UK we became the mirror image of America, with our Black History Month in October and our LGBT+ History Month in February, and theirs vice versa.

After the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, an emphasis on anti-violence, equalities and diversity became more prominent in both the public and private sectors. With the abolition of Section 28 in 2003 (www.theguardian.com) and the plans of the Labour government to bring in a single equality act, it seemed to us that the time was perfect to launch the idea. The public sector equality duty expanded public protections for a range of people, including LGBT people. It ordered that:

In summary, those subject to the equality duty must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (www.equalityhumanrights.com).

It was very exciting anti-discrimination law, saying not only *thou shalt not* but also *thou shalt!* Although we set up LGBT+ History Month in 2004 and celebrated it for the first time in 2005, the public duty did not come into being until 2012, by which time LGBT+ History Month was pretty well embedded in museums, libraries, local authorities and union calendars. Schools however were much slower and their reaction to this day is very patchy!



The month was launched in November 2004 at the Tate Modern Art Gallery in London. We had 13 people on the panel: 3 trans people, several people of colour, disabled people and a straight ally, as well as a bisexual, gay men and lesbians. As evident, I was determined to send the message out that we were wanting to celebrate the full diversity of our community.

Since then we have launched LGBT+ History Month in some spectacular venues. From the Royal Courts of Justice to a school in Hackney, from Bletchley Park where Alan Turing among so many others worked on counterintelligence, to the famous Oval Cricket ground, and even in the Speaker's Chambers in the Houses of Parliament. We launch our theme in November, to give people time to learn about it and prepare their events for February. We are also careful to ensure a wider geographic coverage. Apart from London, among the cities where we have held launches are Liverpool, Cambridge, Oxford, and Birmingham.

Over the years the month has developed organically. The website www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk has been refreshed several times as we add more and more resources, all free to use. The month could not exist without the internet. It enables fast and effective ways of reaching people who want to be active on the issue or just want to know more about LGBT+ issues. The initial funding that we prized out of the Department of Education enabled us to set up the first website of which the most important component was the interactive calendar. This meant we needed a volunteer who could design the website for people to put up events. I was thinking that in the first year we might have ten events round the country. In fact, we had over a hundred!

The work is done by the unpaid members of the Schools OUT UK committee which is quite a fluid group. Many people have been part of it for a time and gone on to do amazing things for the community. Tony Fenwick, our CEO, and Steve Boyce, the chair of trustees, have been the



Fig. 1. The launch of LGBT History Month at Bletchley Park, where Alan Turing worked during the Second World War. Photo © Zfrog.

longest members of the committee apart from me. Paul Patrick alas died in 2008. We are all unpaid and work from home. We have no core funding but get support from a variety of sources. We have over the years had small pockets of money from trade unions, the criminal justice system, and LGBT+ networks of commercial firms. LGBT+ History Month also developed a couple of offshoots, such as The Classroom and OUTing the Past.

The Classroom was developed to give resources to teachers to celebrate and make visible the diversity of LGBT+ people all the year round, so that we were not just stuck in February. We were able to get some specific funding to set up the website and now one of our partners, The Proud Trust, an LGBT Youth Group Organisation that supports a variety of projects for young LGBT+ people, has undertaken a refresh of the resources. The website has over 80 lesson plans that usualise LGBT+ issue across the

curriculum for all ages. OUTing the Past is an annual festival of LGBT+ history for both the general public and academics. This year a television firm, Free at Last, sponsored the festival.

We have for some time now produced and sold a pin badge for each year. When we started to have a theme for the year, we made the badge to represent the theme. It is designed by students of a design course in a university, as part of their curriculum. Thus, we enable the students to learn about LGBT+ issues which they may not otherwise encounter. The badges have proved to be a good source of funding, along with rainbow lanyards we launched in 2020.

We also choose 4 members of the LGBT+ community to represent the theme, and we produce posters and info about them. Both the themes and people representing the theme are linked to the school's curriculum. The Proud Trust annually produces a massively popular workbook for youth groups and schools based on the theme. In this way we make it easier for schools to use the month and embed it into the school's fabric. At the same time, we can ensure it does not become a one-off event, unconnected to the ethos of the school.

Our Voices and Visibility poster, which shows the laws and people that have helped us get our human rights, will soon have its own interactive website as it has been a very popular resource.

Once we set up the month, other organisations and groups began to explore the rich territory of LGBT+ visibility and history. We have partnered with some of these organisations and attempt to signpost people to their useful resources by linking them to our website. So, people can celebrate the month and learn about the diversity of LGBT+ people and our history. Organising the website becomes an increasing challenge as we add more and more resources and links.



Fig. 2. Annual pin badges for LGBT+ History Month. Photo: © Zfrog.

On our website there is a general resource space with some indexing, and then specific resources under each year, some of which we have produced that are pertinent to the theme.

The website is accessed across the world, as is our Facebook and Twitter pages. This means that we are spreading the knowledge and increasing the visibility of the diversity LGBT+ people. Since we updated the website

in mid-January of 2020, we have had 55,000 visits to it. LGBT+ History Month @LGBTHM has 69.3k followers and our *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans History Month UK* Facebook page at has almost 98,000 likes.

I am amazed at the creativity of people in finding ways to celebrate LGBT+ histories, when I look through the calendar on the website and the reports people send in of what they did. The ingenuity is as outstanding as is the energy; so many hours of work, mostly unpaid, by so many people, to ensure the visibility of the community is my dream come true.

The number of events that occur in February have steadily grown, in 2019 we had over 1500 of them. In 2020 there were less reported events, but looking on the LGBT+ History Month Facebook, twitter and Instagram pages it is clear that now many people hold events and don't even tell us. The number of places that fly the rainbow flag during the month has steadily increased. Universities, town halls, places of work, libraries etc. The bureaucracy that must be navigated to make that happen is mind boggling, yet the effect powerful, showing as it does, public support and visibility of the LGBT+ community. This year we had a few zebra crossings turn into rainbows. There is a clear mixture of volunteer led activities, some in local clubs and pubs run by local LGBT+ groups. Often, they are low key events like quizzes, drag nights, fancy dress parties etc. Others that are organised with a little support by LGBT networks in workplaces can be more elaborate affairs. One firm uses our posters every year as the screen saver for the month as a simple and effective way of getting the message out.

Often February is chosen to launch a LGBT+ initiative or to hold a big conference. This year I attended several, three of which were linked to the Criminal Justice System.

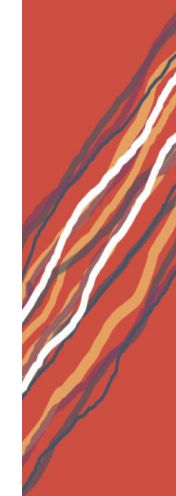
Any local authority worth its salt will not let February go by without organising something or working with a local LGBT+ group to enable a

few events. Camden & Islington, two adjacent London local authorities support the local LGBT+ forum. It has for many years produced a full programme of events, meaning they have an event for every day of the month! In year 2020 with our theme being Poetry Prose and Plays the programme was jammed packed with poetry reading, plays, under-fives story readings, art exhibitions, LGBT+ film day, and guided walks round the borough discovering LGBT+ history.

Many local forums up and down the country link up with commercial places like bookstores, cinemas and theatres, encouraging them to utilise the month. Such work is not just done in the big cities, but we see it happening in rural places such as Shropshire and Norfolk. In such places there is a wonderful synergy of dedicated and talented LGBT+ people using their creativity to produce events to celebrate our community. It is particularly exciting when this work is intergenerational, bringing together both younger and older people who learn from each other and forge links that are often hard to make otherwise in rural spaces.

It is particularly gratifying to see that libraries, national trust houses and museums are now positively working to find and celebrate their queer connections. We held our launch in the British Museum in 2014, which was a great success given that they have so many artefacts of a queer nature. Two years later, the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967, due to the Wolfenden report, we saw many museums and art galleries stage exhibitions celebrating their connections to predominately white homosexual men. There was great media interest, so we are now working through our websites and connections to museums to ensure that in the future they present a more inclusive picture of our community.

I wish I could be more positive about schools. The response from them is incredibly patchy. Some schools, colleges and universities have grabbed



the potential of both the month and our offshoot, *The Classroom*. They involve the whole school in celebrating the month, utilising our resources and making and sharing their own. In other schools it is perhaps one teacher who attempts to introduce the month to their students and in some schools, there is no involvement with the month at all. It is a problem that, due to the focus on academic achievement in the recent years, many crucial areas like music, drama and citizenship have become less important. It is also true that Section 28 has a long shadow. Even though it was repealed in 2003, many teachers know more about Section 28 than they do about the Equality Act and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

It will be interesting to see what the implications of the new Relationships and Sex Education curriculum will be from September 2020 onwards. Without the complications of the COVID-19 pandemic it might have been used to give schools more confidence to use the month. Now, given that much of the training for teachers was due to take place this summer, which is likely to be cancelled, we will await with interest, how and if the new curriculum will be delivered.

To my mind, if we are to tackle bullying and negative stereotypes, it is vitally important for young people to have access to LGBT+ history. Young people have to be taught to be prejudiced, so we need to educate out prejudice by informing our students about the diversity of the population. If the books we use to learn to read are reflective and mirror all humanity, then there is less chance for ignorance to take root and give rise to prejudice and abuse.

Schools sometimes offer classes on 'gays' or on disability in an attempt to challenge the prejudice by saying we are normal. I find that highly problematic, as I feel the word normal has highly problematic connotations. I prefer the approach I call usualising. On *The Classroom* website we offer over 80 free lessons that give students the chance to be introduced to the full diversity of the population in maths, history, English and so on, starting

with the very first reception class. Since the success of LGBT History Month we have produced *The Classroom* website so we enable teachers to educate about LGBT themes everyday in every lesson so we are not just a one month wonder (the-classroom.org.uk). Obviously, the lessons are not all focused on history – most merely demonstrate ways in which LGBT+ themes and people can be dropped into a lesson to make us *usual*. This website enables schools to do the crucial work of challenging stereotypes and celebrating diverse LGBT+ people and issues throughout the year.

One of my incentives for starting the month had been to find our history, as well as celebrating and making us visible as a diverse community. The latter was certainly happening; however, the history part was less obvious. The lack of inclusive recorded LGBT+ history was becoming a more evident problem. Although museums and libraries, including the British Library, were holding events in February for LGBT+ History Month, it was obvious that such institutions needed help in finding the LGBT+ information they held. So, we began to consider how we could help and influence that work.

Dr. Jeff Evans, a long-standing member of the committee, proposed a solution. In 2015 we held the first national LGBT+ history festival and academic conference in Manchester called *OUTing the Past* (www.outingthepast.org.uk). We put out a call for popular historical presentations and academic presentations. We set up an academic panel to vet the submissions and were able to choose and present over 30 popular presentations and 20 academic ones. The following year we had 5 hubs, but we did not stop there.

In 2020 we were offered over 100 presentations and had 22 hubs, 14 in England, 6 on the island of Ireland and 2 in the USA. Unfortunately, our Dublin, New York and Boston events had to be cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic. Many are held in very prestigious venues such as the British Museum, The Victoria and Albert Museum, the People's History Museum

Manchester, The National Archives Kew, The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, The Museum of Free Derry, and The Liverpool Museum. The timing of Jeff's work in Ireland was completely fortuitous, coming as it did when Westminster passed the same sex marriage bill for Northern Ireland.

OUTing the Past has most years another strand to it, which can be followed on the *OUTing the Past* website. We have commissioned theatre that explores hidden historical events. So, we can offer an immediate and exciting link to our past, bringing to life forgotten LGBT+ people that have played a crucial part in our journey to visibility. Steve Hornby is our national playwright in residence and has given us gems from the *Very Victorian Scandal* in the first year, which was a story of the Hulme Drag Ball raid of 1880 Manchester, to *A Queer Celli at the Marty Forsythe*, which explored the events of the first National Union of Students Lesbian and Gay Conference at Queens University Belfast in 1983. The programme has been expanded with plays about Walt Whitman, a lesbian bus driver being sacked for wearing a lesbian badge, a crucial first meeting of the Campaign for Homosexuality and the Gay Liberation Front held in a small northern town Burnley, and a story about a Victorian trans man, which was pieced together from local Manchester papers.

Much work has flowed from both LGBT+ History Month and OUTing the Past and we can see museums, archives and libraries working to find their links with the LGBT+ community, setting up LGBT+ tours, training their staff and working with enthusiastic volunteers to make their institutions more welcome and inclusive. Jeff worked in Northern Ireland with his many long-standing connections to facilitate the first exhibition of Northern Ireland LGBT+ History. It was launched at the Museum of Free Derry in 2020 and will, once the virus issues have subsided, tour in Northern Ireland, England and USA.

All these years later, I am continually surprised and humbled by how the LGBT+ History Month has grown. It has become a thing! Sometimes there is no thought that there is an organisation making it happen or that it had to be invented! That is both a joy and a problem. When people hold events and don't tell us, as they as often do, their ideas can't get shared on our website thereby depriving others of their ideas.

Not knowing the history of a people or a country is to make that place or people invisible, and worthless. It lays the foundation for discrimination and lack of respect. Watching how colonial countries organise education and lack of respect. Watching how colonial countries organise education in the countries they control demonstrates clearly how this works. The oppressed country is taught next to nothing about their own culture, their very language is degraded, and the oppressor's is taught. We live in a white able-bodied, Christian, heterosexual cis patriarchal culture. Given that, the need to educate in schools about the other characteristics is crucial. It gives members living with those characteristics confidence in themselves and promotes respect for those characteristics among people who do not personally exhibit such characteristics.

In the UK since the referendum on the membership of the EU in 2016, we have seen a frightening rise of reported misogyny and xenophobia; homophobic attacks have risen by 147% (www.theguardian.com). It is crucial therefore that we step up the work and use all the methods possible to challenge the ignorance, and educate out the prejudice. Teaching the history and placing the prejudiced groups in the forefront of our education is crucial. In doing so we need to take care not to set up a hierarchy of oppression. Much of the Brexiteers and Trumpists are demonstrating their frustration as white working-class folk who feel they have been left behind and ignored, and are now venting their anger against the elite who did the ignoring, and the women, gays and black people who they feel have been given undue attention.





Fig. 3. OUTing the Past event with Stuart Milk and Sue Sanders at the Peoples History Museum Manchester, 2015. Photo © Zfrog.

Looking back on all of this work we have done since launching the first LGBT+ History Month, I am delighted at our achievements – although at the same time it raises a variety of feelings, because you have to think about why there was the need for such a thing in the first place. Yet today, LGBT+ History Month seems just as important as ever, given the backlash we are facing. I am so proud of our community grabbing the opportunity that LGBT+ History Month offered. It is a joy to see the massive creativity every February. I am also proud that the month has helped to inspire the UK Women’s History month and the UK Disability History Month.

At Schools OUT UK we have always been dedicated to celebrating the diversity of our community and would labour to do so both linguistically and with our content. Language has caught up with us, so we now have the word intersectionality to describe our work. Language is on the move and

we have seen ‘usualise’, a word I coined, become more common. Young people are hungry for knowledge, and they love to hear about how people have overcome problems and made their mark. It has been a privilege to be part of the movement that makes resources available to ensure that everyone can recognise and celebrate the contributions made by LGBT+ people to our society.

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STRAIGHT FROM THE ARCHIVES

Reflections about Professional Engagement with LGBTQ+ Lives

Tom Furber

ABSTRACT

As records of LGBTQ+ experiences become more integrated into the wider historical record, many of us who work with archives are finding that our first exposure to LGBTQ+ records is professional rather than personal. Here I will share some of my practice and reflections on working with archives of LGBTQ+ experiences from the perspective of someone who does not identify as LGBTQ+. I discuss, proactively collecting oral histories, revisiting catalogue descriptions and adding new sets of search terms, working respectfully with personal collections and using LGBTQ+ collections in general and dedicated events, education and community programmes.

ABSTRAKTI

LGBTQ+ kokemuksia käsittelevien aineistojen yhtyessä enenevässä määrin yleisempään historialliseen aineistoon monet arkistojen parissa työskentelevistä tunnistavat, kuinka ensikosketuksemme LGBTQ+ arkistoihin on pikemminkin ammatillinen kuin henkilökohtainen. Tekstissäni pyrin valaisemaan ammatillisia työtapoja ja välittämään kokemuksia arkistotallennustyöstä sellaisen henkilön näkökulmasta, joka ei identifioitu LGBTQ+ henkilöksi. Käsitelen muistitietoaineistojen aktiivista keräämistä, uusien sisältöluokittelujen ja hakutermin käyttöä niin yleisille kuin spesifeille kohderyhmillekin suunnatuissa koulutuksissa ja yhteisöllisissä tapahtumissa.

Introduction

As records of LGBTQ+ experiences become more integrated into the wider historical record, many of us who work with archives are finding that our first exposure to LGBTQ+ records is professional rather than personal. Here I will share some of my practice and reflections on working with archives of LGBTQ+ experiences from the perspective of someone who does not identify as LGBTQ+ but works extensively with these archives as part of a wider portfolio of work.

I am not strictly speaking an archivist, which in a UK context is a specific professional title. Rather, I am an Engagement and Learning Officer with a remit of informal adult education and community projects. I have worked at London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) for the past 5 years and it will be this experience I draw on here.

By way of background, LMA is a large local authority archive covering all of London with around 100 km of records dating back to 1067. These holdings include records of local



SQS
1–2/2020

56

Queer
ViewMirror
Opinion
Pieces

Tom
Furber

government, churches, hospitals, prisons, businesses as well as records of individuals and communities. The collections are in a variety of formats including documents, books, maps, sound recordings, films and photographs.

LMA is an established presence in the field of LGBTQ+ history with well-regarded collections, events and community engagement programmes. As part of this wider scheme of work, I administer several programmes that cultivate and share LGBTQ+ perspectives on archives and history.

In this piece I will discuss issues that help to inform and guide this work, some of the policies and programmes that stem from them and some reflections and examples of my personal practice. In turn we will look at: proactively collecting oral histories, revisiting catalogue descriptions working respectfully with personal collections, and education programs.

Evidencing other sides of the past

For me, the simultaneous rewards and frustrations of working with archives are aptly captured by a couple of lines from Arthur Marwick. “Primary sources are full of prejudices and errors. They were not written to serve the interests of historians coming along later: they were written to serve the interests of those who created them, going about their own business.” (Marwick 2001). To many a contemporary reader working with archives of LGBTQ+ lives these prejudices and errors are particularly stark. LMA’s collections date back to 1067 and for most of this period LGBTQ+ people and their experiences have been marginalised. LGBTQ+ people have been variously depicted as criminal, ill or immoral with prosecution, medical intervention and moral judgement the results.

Our records relating to LGBTQ+ lives, like those in many other repositories, are often not a record of the lives themselves but other people’s judgements on those lives. Thankfully, this isn’t always the case, especially when dealing with more recent history. At LMA deposits by Peter Tatchell, Kenric, Ruckus!,¹ and others offer an alternative view on LGBTQ+ history that evidence LGBTQ+ lives from a community perspective. The clear value and richness of this perspective is a challenge to further evidence LGBTQ+ people through their own experiences and in their own voice.

LMA responses to this challenge include:

- Proactively collecting oral histories
- Revisiting catalogue descriptions and adding new sets of search terms
- Working Respectfully with Personal Collections
- Using LGBTQ+ collections in general and dedicated events, education and community programmes

Proactively collecting oral histories

The different approach offered by oral histories is valuable in a range of contexts but is especially so for LGBTQ+ histories. This is because for much of history the activities of LGBTQ+ people were taboo and in some cases illegal. As a consequence, central aspects of sexual, romantic and social relationships often do not exist on paper as to record them was to risk persecution and prosecution. Gathering oral histories allows people to speak about those very experiences that are otherwise likely to go undocumented.

As part of a project called Speak Out London Diversity City supported by the then Heritage Lottery Fund (now National Lottery Heritage Fund)

¹ Peter Tatchell is a British gay activist; Kenric a lesbian network of social clubs; Ruckus! a Black LGBT archive.

over 50 oral histories were conducted by combination of an experienced oral historian and by a cohort of volunteers that she trained. As part of this training the trainer asserted that it is better if both the interviewer and participant are LGBTQ+. Her reasoning being that trust and rapport are more easily established and that some experiences that might produce shock or judgement in a non-LGBTQ+ person can be understood in context. This gave me some pause for thought at the time and I continue to reflect on the fundamental, complex and contentious issues of epistemology raised by her assertion. In my practice, I moved from an initial reaction of “that could be true but ultimately I don’t think that it is, on a philosophical level” to a more settled and pragmatic position of “it is more true than it isn’t and it is a reminder of the need for professional and personal humility”. This is an important lesson learned early on that I have carried with me working with all types of archives.

Revisiting catalogue descriptions and adding new sets of search terms

Recognising the limits of an individual’s experience and knowledge is important in dealing with language that is archaic and potentially offensive. Records and their catalogue descriptions frequently use terms which reflect the marginalisation of LGBTQ+ people. For example, to locate LGBTQ+ archives you may need to use search terms such as “buggery”, “sodomy”, “gross immorality” and “gross indecency”. The terms noted above are often legal or otherwise technical. It therefore requires a degree of specialist knowledge to know which terms are likely to generate which kind of results. This creates a purely practical problem in that it makes records harder to find. Furthermore, as the terms change over time one must run multiple searches to bring up records from different time periods. For the veteran and dedicated researcher these are problems that can be overcome but they are a barrier to entry for the more casual researcher.

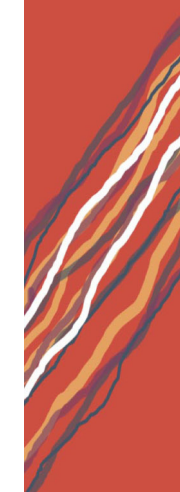
On a deeper level it is inhospitable, and to my mind frankly unjust to require people to research their history in terms that are the product of systems of persecution and marginalisation. Forced repetition of these terms not only perpetuates the norms behind them but in some cases can invoke past traumas.

However, as such archaic terms are themselves part of the historical record to remove them would be a different kind of distortion. At LMA we therefore decided to add a new level of description with more familiar tags whilst still preserving the older descriptions. The selection of tags was a collaborative process with a group of over a hundred volunteers who defined themselves as LGBTQ+ feeding into it.

The decision to use any modern term risks anachronism and mis-labelling people in the past who do not share our cultural frames. Ultimately, the consensus amongst those we consulted was that inaccessibility was a greater evil than anachronism and that researchers’ historical judgment could be trusted to place the terms used in their proper context. The terms chosen to identify records are unsurprising: lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans. Furthermore these terms are not seen as the last word on the subject and are subject to regular revision as the political and intellectual landscape changes.

Working Respectfully with Personal Collections

Set against a background of marginalisation, archives of LGBTQ+ experiences need not only the same level of care and respect afforded to other materials but in some cases more. Many of the collections that will allow us to evidence past LGBTQ+ lives are from individuals and small organisations. These potential or actual depositors often have a personal investment in their collections that may not be the case for professional



or institutional collections which depositors tend to be more detached from. The way institutions work with personal collections needs to adapt accordingly. As an Engagement and Learning Officer I have an idiosyncratic relationship with the depositing process and am usually involved only at the very beginning and then again at the end. With this perspective in mind I would like to touch on some points of practice that I have found helpful in response to recurring situations.

The parent organisation for LMA is the City of London Corporation (The City). The City is often perceived as being part of the establishment and being small-c conservative. For some people we work with and who may want to deposit with us this reputation is significant and can manifest itself in different ways. I have read volunteer feedback saying that working in a sustained and equal way with a City organisation was a very positive and meaningful experience for them. Conversely, I have talked to people who have said that despite valuing the work that LMA does that they could never deposit their collections in a state archive. Others who are no less wary of state institutions deposit with us so their archives will compliment and challenge existing records and provide LGBTQ+ people with a voice.

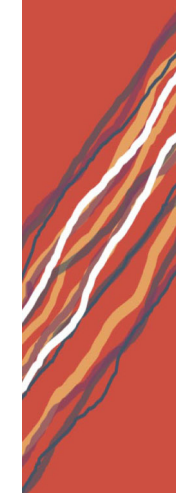
As an Engagement and Learning Officer I am one of the public faces of LMA and I often find myself having informal conversations with people who may be interested in depositing records of LGBTQ+ experiences in a formal archive. In light of the discussion in the preceding paragraph even in these informal conversations I now stress that there are different options available to people who are interested in working with an archive to help with the preservation and access to their collections. For those who do not want to deposit with us we can still offer advice on collections care or perhaps alternative repositories. For the wary depositors we can offer arrangements where LMA stores the collection and organises access to it, but the depositor retains ownership of it and can take it back at their discretion.

The bulk of my work with collections occurs once they are in building and are more or less ready for public use in events and community programmes. Again, one needs to be cognisant of the personal investment in these collections when working and the different ways this materialises. LMA has a busy education and community workshop programme and this can be part of the attraction of depositing with us. In these cases, we must make sure we keep our end of the bargain and take the time to immerse ourselves in a new collection and learn how to best interpret and engage people with it. But there is also a need to manage expectations about the scale of engagement in the face of time and financial constraints and the need to balance the competing demands of access and conservation.

A different set of considerations apply when individuals feel that their collections are being used in ways that they didn't expect or feel uncomfortable with. For example, the oral history collection was used as part of an exhibition in the gallery space at LMA. Transcribed sections of interviews were displayed prominently alongside displays of archival material. One of the interviewees invited to the exhibition felt very uncomfortable with her words being used in this way and asked for it to be taken down, which we did. Strictly speaking we did not have to do this as there was implied permission to use the material in this way. In reality though there was a clear obligation to do so despite the cost and inconvenience because of the personal nature of the collection and the distress caused.

Using LGBTQ+ collections in general and dedicated events, education and community programmes

Our oldest archive of an LGBTQ+ life has become something that I return to again and again when discussing and introducing our collections, the role archives and the puzzle of understanding the past through primary



sources. A court document dating from 1395, informally titled *The Questioning of Eleanor (John) Rykener*, gives us the following account (CLA/024/01/02/035). Eleanor (John) Rykener and John Britby were arrested close to Cheapside in the City of London. Eleanor (John) Rykener was dressed in women's clothes and was working as a prostitute. John Britby had agreed to pay for Eleanor's services. When Eleanor was brought before the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London, a complex story emerged. Eleanor had slept with many men and women, including members of the church and gentry. Eleanor had also lived and worked as a woman, earning money as an embroideress.

Here we can see evidence of sexual and gender non-conformity that is analogous to modern conceptions of trans and queer. But this instantly raises questions of whether these labels can be properly applied without permission to a person operating in a different milieu on the basis of a single piece of evidence.

Further questions emerge when we add that some scholars argue that rather than being a record of an actual case it is a satire mocking the clergy and gentry that has been inserted into the court roll (Goldberg, 2014). Finally, there is the suggestion that this document had been deliberately hidden from view by omitting it from the authoritative calendar of these records (Boyd and Karras, 1995). A calendar in this case is not something for keeping track of dates, but rather a summary and sometimes translation of a set of records. A reliable calendar is a good enough substitute for the original that there is usually no need to refer to it. Omitting a record from a calendar is thus akin to an act of censorship. This single document therefore begs us to consider the dichotomy between the universal and the particular, authenticity, and the role of the archivist as a gatekeeper of knowledge. The normalisation of once marginal experiences means I can pose these questions to all the groups that I work with be they students or

alderman and by doing this it properly locates LGBTQ+ lives as an integral part of London history.

This integration and mainstreaming does raise important questions about how institutions such as LMA work with the histories of marginalised people. A delicate and even contentious aspect of my role is that as a person belonging to many dominant socio-economic and identity groups, I am in a position of validating and interpreting the lives and cultural forms of people who do not belong to these groups. This is an issue I take seriously and it shapes the way I approach both individual events and programming as a whole.

As part of the events programme I lead LGBTQ+ themed walking tour around London. I have led walking tours on various subjects for many years, but I approach these LGBTQ+ ones somewhat differently. The standard format and expectation for most walking tours is pedagogical. The tours guide has knowledge and expertise that the participants do not, and it is the guide job to share this knowledge. At the end of the tours the participants come away better informed on the subject of the walk.

In many contexts this is a valid and useful format and I personally enjoy and benefit from leading and taking part in such walks. But in the context of a LGBTQ+ history walk led by a non-LGBTQ+ person this format would be inadvisable for several reasons.

Firstly, it reinforces the notion that archives, and other institutions are the arbiters of what is included in the historical record. This occurs because it is the employee of the archive who decides what is deemed historical. Secondly, it ignores the importance of lived experience and subjectivity as facets of skilful historical analysis and communication. Thirdly, there is a good chance that at least some of the audience will know more about some of the topics than I do.

In light of this I have started to think of LGBTQ+ walks as walking discussions in which the guide provides a route, shape and stimulus as well as logistical support, but the content is created in the space between guide and participants. In practical terms what this means is that I will have stops planned ahead of time and am able to provide some background information but when we arrive at each stop, we enjoy a seminar rather than a lecture.

Similar thinking applies to programming decisions more widely and when making decisions about collaboration and content we endeavour to make the process as open, egalitarian and eclectic as possible. To this end I administer several programmes that encourage new and outside perspectives on archives and history from an LGBTQ+ perspective and help LMA to make critical friends along the way. One of these is a monthly workshop programme which is a forum for sharing work and ideas in all stages of development. We think of it as a history laboratory where people are encouraged to experiment and tinker with new ideas as well as a place to demonstrate more finished projects. Topics and forms range broadly from month to month and formal scholarship sits alongside and mixes with more creative approaches. A separate but related programme is a stakeholder's group which provides support and expertise, but also serve as critical friends that can steer us and hold us accountable.

To be continued...

Documenting LGBTQ+ lives in their plurality and intersectionality has become part of LMA's remit to collect and preserve archives of London and Londoners. This is part of a wider cultural shift in many parts of the world that has seen a change in established attitudes towards gender and sexual minorities as well as new legal rights for LGBTQ+ people. This new

cultural context means that archives of LGBTQ+ lives are being treated as less of a unique and hermetic subset of records and more as entry points into broader discussions around historical inquiry and topics including identity, diversity and conformity.

There is much to be welcomed in the current situation. It is a timely corrective to persecution, and speaking selfishly, it makes the work of an Engagement and Learning Officer more stimulating. But some caution against complacency and haste is necessary too. Its very easy for people such as myself to think that the worst is behind us, read an introductory text on queer studies, and pat ourselves on the back for being critical and open minded and then carry on with something like business as usual. To guard against this we also need to welcome guidance and reality checks from critical friends and stakeholders. Ideally, an archive is a forum for enquiry and conversation rather than conclusions. This piece and especially my personal reflections contained in it are offered in the same spirit.

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BEYOND TOM AND TOVE

Queering Finnish Museums from an Intersectional Perspective

Rita Paqvalén

ABSTRACT

In this text, I will discuss the current interest in LGBTQ issues within the Finnish museum sector and suggest ways to address LGBTQ+ pasts from an intersectional perspective. I will start with a small detour into my own early experience of working in a museum, and then continue with a discussion on the history of queering museums in Finland and the projects *Queering the Museums* (2012–2014), *Finland 100 – In Rainbow Colours* (2016–2018), and Queer History Month in Finland (2018–). I end my article by suggesting that we, as researchers and professionals within memory institutions, need to pay more attention to what versions of LGBTQ history we are (re)producing and (re)presenting, and to what kinds of stories we collect and how.

ABSTRAKTI

Tässä esseessä keskustelen suomalaisen museokentän ajankohtaisesta kiinnostuksesta LHBTIQ+ kysymyksiä kohtaan, ja ehdotan tapoja, joilla käsitellä LHBTIQ+ vaiheita intersektionaalisesta näkökulmasta. Aloitan pienellä sivupolulla varhaisiin kokemuksiini museotyöstä, jatkan suomalaisten museoiden pervouttamisen historiaan ja kerron *Queering the Museums* (2012–2014) ja *Suomi 100 – Sateenkaaren väreissä* (2016–2018) -hankkeista sekä Sateenkaarihistoriakuukauden vietosta Suomessa (2018–). Lopetan artikkelini ehdotukseen, jonka mukaan meidän – tutkijoiden ja museoalan ammattilaisten – tulisi kiinnittää enemmän huomiota siihen, millaisia versioita sateenkaarihistoriasta tuotamme ja esitämme ja minkälaisia tarinoita keräämme ja miten.

In this commentary, I will discuss the current interest in LGBTQ issues within the Finnish museum sector and suggest ways to address LGBTQ+ pasts from an intersectional perspective. I will start with a small detour into my own early experience of working in a museum, and then continue with a discussion of the history of queering museums in Finland and the projects *Queering the Museums* (2012–2014), *Finland 100 – In Rainbow Colours* (2016–2018), and Queer History Month in Finland (2018–), in which I have been involved.

The Secret Past of Tammisaari

During my final years at high school, I worked as a museum guard and guide at the local museum in a Finnish coastal town called Tammisaari (in Swedish: Ekenäs). It was a small museum with some historical buildings and a museum hall, which during those years showed mainly art exhibitions. The museum did not yet have a museum shop nor a cafeteria, but it sold cards from earlier exhibitions in a small rack. One of these cards was a photo from the 1890s depicting a woman in a boat with the characteristic skyline of Tammisaari in the background. [Fig. 1.] I would look at the card during slow hours while waiting for customers to come, but never really payed attention to it or turned it over to find out who had taken it.

SQS
1–2/2020

62

Queer Mirror
Discussions

Rita
Paqvalén



Fig. 1. The South bay of Tammissaari. Photo Marie Høeg. The Raasepori museum collection.

Growing up in Tammissaari as a teenager in the 1980s was a suffocating experience – the town felt small and narrow minded. Queer presents or pasts were never discussed in my school or elsewhere, closets were firmly shut, and it was as if queers had never lived in this outwardly idyllic, yet secretly inhospitable, coastal town.

The postcard tells another story. Had I turned it over, I would have learned that it was taken by the Norwegian photographer Marie Høeg (1866–1949), who came to Tammissaari and opened her first photo studio there in 1888. [Fig. 2.] Hers was the first professional photo studio in the town, and in 1893 she opened another in the nearby town of Hanko. In 1895, she moved back to Horten in Norway, where she opened a studio with her “friend” Bolette Berg (1872–1944) and later became one of the pioneers of the Norwegian women’s movement (Stuksrud 2009, 2; Lindqvist 2018, 11).



Fig. 2. Self portrait of Marie Høeg around 1890. Photo Marie Høeg. The Raasepori museum collection.

This could have remained the official story of Marie Høeg, had it not been for the archival discovery made by the Preus Museum in Horten in the 1980s, when a small box labelled “private” was opened in her archive. The box contained 40 glass negatives from the turn of the century, ca. 1895–1903. These images opened up a very different reading of her and Bolette’s relationship and of Høeg’s life and work, but they might also tell us something about the queer past of Tammisaari. [Fig. 3–5.]

The pictures are playfully queer and subversive, quite different from the studio portraits and pictures of landscapes and buildings owned by the museum in Tammisaari. The private pictures portray Marie, Bolette, and their friends playing with and transgressing the socially accepted gender roles of the time. In the pictures we see an androgynous Marie with her hair cut short and a cigarette in her mouth, with a moustache and crossdressing as a man, and in one picture we see her in drag arm in arm with a female



Fig. 3 (left). Marie Høeg as a young boy with cigarette. Photo: Berg & Høeg, ca. 1895-1903. The Preus museum collection.
Fig. 4. (above). Photo Berg & Høeg, ca. 1895-1903. The Preus museum collection.



Fig. 5. Marie Høeg posing with an unknown male in the studio. Photo: Berg & Høeg, ca. 1895–1903. The Preus museum collection.

impersonator. We see Marie and Bolette sitting in their living room, posing in a boat as a “butch-femme” couple, or playing cards, drinking alcohol, and smoking cigarettes with their friends. The pictures, now around 120 years old, still have a very contemporary feel.

Besides these pictures, there is very little information on the private life of Marie Høeg and Bolette Berg, and no personal records that would tell us anything about the nature of their relationship. Nor do we know what brought Marie Høeg to Tammissaari in the first place. We can only guess, and through these guesses maybe find some clues to the queer past of the town.

One piece of context that might be useful for understanding Marie Høeg’s life is the Swedish-speaking teachers’ college for women, Ekenäs seminarium, which had opened its doors in Tammissaari in 1871. The teachers’ training school was one of the few colleges that were open to women at the time. Many of the Swedish-speaking pioneers of the women’s movement in Finland had studied in Tammissaari, and some of them, like for example Vera Hjelt (1857–1947), formed all-female communities and lived in same-sex relationships (Wikander 2018, 105, 121ff).

Since Marie Høeg lived in Tammissaari for six years, it is probable that she befriended students of the college, most of whom were, like her, newcomers without family ties in the small town. According to the local contemporary photographer Vidar Lindqvist, who has been a collector of her photographs, Høeg often used students of the college as models in her pictures, including the postcard mentioned earlier. The composition of a young woman in the centre of a landscape is typical for Marie Høeg, as Vidar Lindqvist’s private collection of her photographs from Tammissaari attests.¹

¹ Vidar Lindqvist in an interview in his home in Tammissaari 13.3.2020. Most of the pictures in his private collection are printed in his book *Ekenäs* (2018).

These staged photographs, some of some of which were also sold as postcards in her studio, are interesting in the context of her later private images. Even if many of her early commercial works are rather traditional, she nevertheless left small, subversive traces of herself in her pictures that can introduce new readings of the history of Tammissaari.

Queering Finnish Museums: A Short History

When the newly found photos by Marie Høeg were displayed at the museum in Horten, and later in Tammissaari, her relationship with Bolette Berg was described as follows in the exhibition catalogue *Marie Høeg – kvinnesaksaktivist, organisator og fotograf* (1996): “Marie Høeg and Bolette Berg were together throughout their lives” (Moksnes, 1996:8). Beyond the quotation above, the catalogue did not discuss her personal relationship with Berg. Høeg’s playful and genderqueer photographs and self-portraits were only briefly described as an expression her “drive, intelligence and fighting spirit” (Moksnes, 1996:17).

Although Marie Høeg’s self-portraits and other genderqueer photographs were included in the 1996 catalogue, they were not put into an LGBTQ historical or queer art historical context. In the framework of the catalogue, the pictures become an expression – or an extension – of her women’s rights activism, rather than an expression of an LGBTQ identity or a queer play on gender and sexual norms. The time was not yet ripe for that kind of a reading and (re)presentation.

LGBTQ history, memories, and culture were not embraced as topics for Finnish museums in the 1990’s, although some art museums in the late 1990s and early 2000s started to exhibit explicitly queer or gay art. Some such exhibitions included the art of Robert Mapplethorpe (Turku Art Museum 1993), Tom of Finland (Jyväskylä Art Museum 1999),

Pierre & Giles (Turku Art Museum 1999–2000), and Kalervo Palsa (Kiasma 2002), as well as the much-debated exhibition *Ecce Homo* by the Swedish photographer Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin (The Finnish Museum of Photography 2000). It was not until the new millennium that LGBTQ history became a major subject in Finnish history and cultural history museums, and when it did it was as a result of initiatives within the queer community.

The first museum to take on LGBTQ history as a subject was the publicly funded Finnish Labour Museum Werstas located in Tampere. It all started in 2002, when the researcher Tuula Juvonen contacted the museum director Pontus Blomster and suggested “that Werstas would start, as the first and only museum in Finland, to collect materials about LGBT lives” (Juvonen 2018 [2012], 24f). Juvonen managed to convince Blomster of the idea, and he also got the Finnish Labour Archives in Helsinki interested in the project. They began collecting LGBTQ materials and items in 2002, in cooperation with local – and later also national – LGBTQ organisations. (ibid.) Today, Werstas, as one of seventeen special museums in Finland, has an assigned national responsibility to collect labour and social history – and, as part of the latter, LGBTQ history – whereas the Labour Archive has become the archival repository for many LGBTQ organisations.

The first exhibition on queer history in Finland was a small show called *Vaarin paketti ja sateenkaarinappi* (Grandpa’s parcel and the rainbow badge), arranged by Werstas in 2005. The exhibition was the result of an initiative by the artist Raini Vallinharju, and it was linked to the new collecting policies of the museum. Its aim was “to raise awareness about the current lack of knowledge about Finnish LGBT history and hence the importance of new donations” (Juvonen 2012[2018], 25). A small booklet, *Vaarin paketti ja sateenkaarinappi* (2005), was also printed for the exhibition to introduce Finnish LGBTQ history and explain collection

practices. In 2013, the museum showcased its first large exhibition on the history of the LGBTQ movement, *Delight and prejudice* (Hilpeys ja ennakkoluulo).

The first major exhibition on LGBTQ history in Finland, *Rainbow-Finland* (*Sateenkaari-Suomi*), took place at the Vantaa City Museum in 2007, six years prior to *Delight and prejudice*. Like the exhibition in Tampere, it was initiated by the LGBTQ community, in this case researcher Kati Mustola (Hiltula 2007, 9). The exhibition was accompanied by a 300-page publication entitled *Sateenkaari-Suomi. Seksuaali- ja sukupuolivähemmistöjen historiaa* (2007), edited by Kati Mustola and Johanna Pakkanen, which was the first full collection of articles on queer history in Finland. The exhibition covered LGBTQ history from 1600 to the present day and was structured around themes including for example crime and punishment, religion, science, medicalization, the wars, Tom of Finland, invisible meetings, gender diversity, love and marriage, culture, the turning point of the sixties, the AIDS crisis, and the internet.

The exhibition project in Vantaa was impressive in many ways. The museum hired a group of queer researchers to work together with museum professionals on the exhibition manuscript. The president of Finland at the time, Tarja Halonen, agreed to become its protector, and the show was later converted into an online exhibition. But it was not only the exhibition itself and its publication that impressed me: it was also the impact that the process had on the people working at the museum. For many of them, it seemed to be a rewarding learning and unlearning process, and maybe also an affective one. Interestingly, enough the museum decided to include the faces of the museum personnel and of the other members of the theme in the rainbow-colored entrance banner – maybe as a way to show that queer history concerns us all, regardless of sexual or gender identification. In the preface of the book *Sateenkaari-Suomi* the director of the museum Leena Hiltula also approached the process from a personal perspective:

More than five decades ago in a particular small town in the North, a small girl was playing in the sandpit with seven even smaller boys. They were all good friends. Life was a big adventure. Their worries were small grains of sand. Only one question troubled their minds: how they could turn the girl into a boy. [...] The years passed. The girl became a woman, today quite happy that God did not turn their ear to the kids' prayer circle far in the North. But throughout her childhood and youth, the girl had to fight against the demands of the community: girls' clothes, girls' toys, girls' games, girls' manners ... and all the other demands of a girly life. [...] Maybe this is the reason why the same girl got excited about the possibility of arranging an exhibition on the history of sexual and gender minorities in the museum she is leading. To be amongst the ones telling how criminal, sick, and sinful people became almost equal citizens with the turn of the century. (Hiltula 2007, 9–11, my translation)

My exhibition experience in Vantaa shows how an LGBTQ exhibition project can have an impact not only on its audience, but also on the external experts involved in its creation and on the museum workers.

Much has happened since the first exhibitions on LGBTQ history at Werstas and the Vantaa City Museum. Many historical museums have arranged LGBTQ-themed exhibitions, including, for example, the exhibitions *Camp!* on queer theatre history in the Theatre Museum (Helsinki 2009), *Sealed with a Secret – Correspondence of Tom of Finland* on the letters by Tom of Finland / Touko Laaksonen at the Postal Museum (Tampere 2014–2015), and *Helsexinki* on sexual rights at the Helsinki City Museum (2017–2018). Queer art and LGBTQ themes have, since the early 2000s, become a central part of the art scene, as well as many art museums. Museums around the country have put on larger retrospectives on queer artists and curated queer art exhibitions.

Many of these queer initiatives and exhibitions have been created in cooperation with the local LGBTQ community and local and/or national Finnish LGBTQ and other human rights organisations; queer researchers have also often been involved in the planning and production of these exhibitions and audience outreach programmes. The degrees of these groups' involvement the planning process varies. In some cases, the initiative came from the community and the community was consulted (paid or unpaid) throughout the process of the producing of the exhibition; in other cases, LGBTQ experts were consulted only at some points in the process. There are also examples where the museum hired one or several queer researchers to develop the exhibition or to do research for the museum. One example of the latter is the Hotel and Restaurant Museum in Helsinki, which employed Kati Mustola to conduct research on the queer history of bars and restaurants for the exhibition *Rakkauden tiloja – Nautinnon nälkä* 2017 (Places of love – Hunger for pleasure) (Mustola 2007, 40–44). Many exhibitions and programming events, like memory cafés, have become ways to raise awareness of the invisible histories of the LGBTQ community as well as to collect missing materials and narratives.

During the past ten years there has been an increasing willingness in the Finnish museum sector to show solidarity with the LGBTQ movement. Besides LGBTQ thematic exhibitions, museums around the country have taken part in local Pride events, lent their premises to LGBTQ festivals (like the queer film festival *Vinokino 1992-* or the cultural festival *The Nights and Days of the Tribades* 2000–2009), and organized different forms of programming, like seminars and discussions or queer guided tours. In some museums, such as the museums of the National Gallery, the Kunsthalle (Taidehalli), and the Aine Art Museum, the queering of the institution has also involved trainings for museum staff on LGBT issues, equity, and how to queer art/history, run by external experts. Last year, the Finnish National Museum became Pride House for Helsinki Pride, and again in

2020, when Helsinki Pride was due to Covid-19 arranged in September and partly online.

The projects *Queering the Museums* (2012–2014), *Finland 100 – In Rainbow Colours* (2016–2018), and Queer History Month (2018–), have paved the way for such developments, and might reveal where we may go next. I will discuss these projects at length in the following sections.

A detour via Sweden

The responsibilities of publicly funded museums in their role as sites for learning and teaching critical thinking have interested me since my first experiences as a guide and guard in the early 1990s. As a former literary researcher, I am interested in narratives and in how and whose narratives are told. What kinds of art, representations, and aesthetics, or what readings and interpretations of history and art, are considered valuable or valid?

In 2012, when I became the Executive Director of Culture for All Service, I got the chance to continue working within the museum field and to help museums update their practices regarding questions of diversity, critical museology, and social justice. Culture for All Service is a state funded agency tasked with supporting the Finnish (especially publicly funded) arts and culture field in handling issues of accessibility, diversity, and equity. The organisation was originally a service within the museum sector. When I started working at Culture for All, it was a part of the National Gallery and located at the Ateneum Art Museum in Helsinki. As a queer person with ten years of experience organizing cultural events for the LGBTQ arts and culture festival *The Nights and the Days of the Tribades* (2000–2009), I saw my new position at one of the most prestigious art institutions in Finland as a great opportunity to engage in institutional queer activism.

With the help of my colleagues, as well as culture and art professionals such as Katriina Rosavaara (artist and art educator), Kim Amberla (house director and producer at The Finnish National Opera and Ballet) and Riikka Wallin (culture producer), we planned the first steps for a project that later became *Queering the museums* (2012–2014). A central part of the project was to arrange different kinds of trainings and seminars for the staff of the National Gallery (the Kiasma, Ateneum, and Sinebrychoff art museums) and for other professionals within the museum and archive sector on how to queer their practices and collections. Together with museum staff, we planned an online queer guided tour to the collections of the National Gallery, which we made available in Finnish, Swedish and English. The tour was curated and written by the art historian Juha-Heikki Tihinen. The project culminated with the seminar *Queering the Memory Institutions* in The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas in August 2013.

The project was inspired by the work of the Swedish Unstraight Museum and the work on LGBTQ art history in the British Museum.² The Unstraight Museum ran an online museum with “unstraight objects” located both in Swedish museums and in private collections, primarily in Europe. It also toured with the LGBTQ historical exhibition *Article 1* (a joint exhibition involving several museums) in Eastern Europe. The Unstraight Museum team additionally offered inspiring workshops in queering museums and we commissioned them to host a workshop for the staff of the National Gallery and other museum professionals. At that time, The British Museum had an online queer tour of its collections, which was later turned into the book *A Little Gay History: Desire and Diversity Across the World* (2013) by Richard B. Parkinson. He was also one of the key note speakers at the seminar at Werstas.

2 The project cooperated with Ulf Peterson and Anna Mazetti-Nissen from the Unstraight Museum and Richard Parkinson from the British Museum.

In addition to these two institutions, I was also deeply inspired by the work on queering museums and history that was being done in Sweden at the time, most notably the queer guided tours that were offered for the first time during Stockholm Pride 2005 by Moderna Museet (Åkerö 2011, 13). When I started working on queering museums, I had already visited Stockholm during Pride in 2008 and participated in queer guided tours in the Hallwyl Museum and the National Museum, in a lecture by Ingrid Svensson (Head of Division) on queering the collections of the National Library of Sweden, and in a boat tour on which the lesbian history of Stockholm was presented by Ingrid Svensson and the researcher Pia Laskar. My work was also inspired by Swedish projects such as *Norm, Nation och Kultur* at the Örebro County Museum and *Polysemantiskt digitalt museisamlade* (Polysemantic digital collecting (2012–2014)) and the JÄMUS project (2012–2013) at the Swedish History Museum in Stockholm. The latter was a project on equity and representation, especially with regard to gender and sexuality, within museums in Sweden. The Swedish History Museum, and the National Historical Museums of which it is a part, have continued to be role models for my own work. The museum has, through several projects, developed its practices regarding queer, intersectional, and decolonized perspectives (Furumark 2013, *Uppdrag jämställda museer* 2013, Paqvalén 2015, Fernstål, Kolker & Svanberg 2015, och Larsson Pousette 2017).

Before beginning our project, we needed to find out what Culture for All Service should focus on when it comes to the cultural rights of LGBTQ people. We started by launching a questionnaire for members of the LGBTQ community on their experiences with inclusion and exclusion in the cultural field in Finland, and by creating a public outreach programme for the museums of the National Gallery during Helsinki Pride 2012. Besides a more general questionnaire that was open to anyone, a separate questionnaire on how museums can and should be working with LGBTQ

themes was sent out to persons who had participated in any of the three queer guided tours that we offered. The results of the questionnaires were presented in the report *Hurjan paljon enemmän queer!* – Seksuaali- ja sukupuoli vähemmistöjen toiveita ja kokemuksia taide- ja kulttuuritarjonnasta (2014, “Tremendously much more queer!” – The wishes and experiences of sexual and gender minorities of art and culture offerings). The report consisted of an analysis of the general questionnaire written by Emmi Lahtinen, as well as a mapping of the museum field and an analysis of the museum questionnaire written by me. Based on these findings, we composed 20 suggestions for improving the visibility of LGBTQ themes and the inclusion of LGBTQ audiences in the arts and culture sector.

It was the first time the National Gallery had participated in Helsinki Pride and flown the rainbow flag, as well as the first time (to my knowledge) that any museum in Finland had offered a queer guided tour of its permanent exhibitions. The National Gallery received enormously positive feedback for taking part in Helsinki Pride, especially regarding the symbolic gesture of flying the rainbow flag. Being such an influential art institution, it also paved the way for other museums to follow. The following year, other museums in Helsinki brought out the rainbow flag and organised various different outreach programmes with queer content. Since then, queer guided tours of exhibitions and other LGBTQ thematic programmes have been offered in most major cities, especially during local pride festivals and, since 2018, Queer History Month.

Through my work with the project *Queering Museums* and the many discussions I had with museum professionals, I realized that many individual museum professionals were eager to reach out to LGBTQ audiences, either through specially designed programming or LGBTQ themed exhibitions, but were restricted by a lack of knowledge on queer theory and LGBTQ history within their institutions. In many cases, this

unfamiliarity with LGBTQ history was also accompanied by a shortage of items, photographs, or documents to use when presenting information. But even though there seemed to be a growing interest in the topic – especially when it came to the question of attracting new audiences – I was also at times confronted with scepticism, particularly when talking about representations, collections, exhibitions, and curating practices.

Queer and LGBTQ issues, like many other issues related to social justice and inclusion, were often referred to the audience development department, which is also the sector in Finnish museums that has taken an active role in addressing such issues. But it is not only the educators working in museums that have taken initiative in the queering of the museum sector; art education students, researchers, and university professors at Aalto University have also contributed the discussion. First, in 2015, they began offering the course *Gender and Art Education*, in which the Feminist and Queer in Art (Education) collective was established (Suominen and Pusa 2018). The collective published the anthology *FAQ: Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Art Education* (2018), which inspired Aalto University to partner with the National Gallery, Culture for All, and the Finnish Museums Association to create an art education seminar entitled *Toisin katsottu museo* in 2019 (Museums through different lenses, Ateneum Art Museum) (Järvinen 2020, 1–6).

Although many different efforts to address LGBTQ history had already been undertaken between 2012 and 2014, it seemed that queer issues were still regarded as marginal in the context of national history. Museum educators and audience development workers are often the ones bearing responsibility for ensuring diversity in exhibitions, yet they may often be left alone in this process (see for example Laskar 2019, 72, Ahmed 2012 and 2017). Instead, when diversifying narratives and museum practices one needs to find ways to involve the whole staff.

Queering Independence

In 2015, the year after the *Queering Museums* project ended, I was approached by the artist and art educator Katriina Rosavaara, with whom I had collaborated at the start of the project. She was now a board member of the national LGBTQ organisation Seta, and she suggested that we propose a project for the 2017 celebration of 100 years of Finnish independence. We wanted to continue queering the arts and culture sector, and came up with the project *Finland 100 – In Rainbow Colours* (2016–2018)³, through which we – Culture for All and Seta – offered tools, information, and training on LGBTQ history and queer art for professionals in the arts and culture.

The aims of the project were to make LGBTQ history a visible part of the history of an independent Finland, to acquire new knowledge about the history and daily lives of queer people, and to study and exhibit queer art and culture. Moreover, we wanted to pay special attention to accessibility and underrepresented groups within the spectrum of LGBTQ identities. We asked: which roles have LGBTQ people played in our national history, what are our milestones and who are our important pioneers, whose voices and perspectives have been heard, and who is still unheard, invisible, and/or silenced in the broader queer narrative? The project was granted Finland 100 state funding, and it also received funding from two private foundations (Kone Foundation and The Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland). In order to make the project as visible as possible, we asked national art institutions and a few other cultural institutions to become our partners.

3 The project was a collaboration between Culture for All Service and Seta. I was the Project Director, Katriina Rosavaara was the Artistic Director, and the Secretary General of Seta, Kerttu Tarjamo, was in charge of the administration of the project. The communication team consisted of Outi Salonlahti and Mira Haataja Culture for All Service) and Eliisa Alatalo. The webmaster of the project was Petja Kauppi (Tekstihuoltamo), who in addition to planning and maintaining the webpages also helped me to edit our blog posts.

The project consisted of four parts: 1) *an LGBTQ internet portal*, 2) *consultations, trainings, and support for professionals*, 3) *archival cooperation*, and 4) *events and artistic productions*. In the online portal, we collected information and tools on how to queer art practices and cultural institutions, kept a calendar of queer art and cultural events, provided information on archival projects with queer content, and published twice-monthly blog posts by artists, activists, politicians, researchers, and cultural workers. A central part of the project was the support that we offered for free to art and cultural institutions. For example, we provided consultations and support for programming, assistance with exhibition planning, and trainings for personnel. Interestingly enough, we were mainly approached by museums, and most cooperation was with memory institutions (Culture for All and Seta 2018).

Our engagement with different memory institutions in queering memories and practices also included collecting LGBTQ memories. For this work, we collaborated with several archives, most notably the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland (SLS), with whom we also produced the oral history questionnaire *Minoritet i minoriteten* (Minority in the minority, 26.6.2016–10.7.2017)⁴, which was directed at the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. The questionnaire, which I created in collaboration with queer and LGBT researchers Tuula Juvonen, Kati Mustola, and Riikka Taavetti, received 32 responses in total. The project and SLS additionally organised several memory cafés, discussions, and seminars on queer memories in cooperation with other partners. We also produced a pack “memory cards”⁵ with SLS, the Finnish Literary Society (SKS), and Helsinki City Museum,

4 The answers to the questionnaire can be studied at the archive in Helsinki: <https://sls.finna.fi/Collection/sls.SLS+2324> (accessed 10.7.2020).

5 A video presenting the memory cards can be found here: http://www.kulttuuriakaikille.fi/about_us_projects_finland_100in_rainbow_colors (accessed 13.7.2020).

which could be used in memory cafés and other workshops relating to queering memories. Our cooperation with these archives is detailed in the report *Minns du? Vårt queera kulturarv och arkivens roll* (Paqvalén 2018).

One of the key benefits of the project was close cooperation with archives, and with SLS in particular. We discussed issues surrounding the accessibility and findability of queer materials, anonymisation and usability, and the division of labour between different archives. Through our partnership, SLS became aware of the cis- and heteronormative practices that would have made it hard for queer subjects to respond to the questionnaire, and hence the project led to some permanent changes in SLS's personal data management practices.

In addition to seminars, discussions, workshops, and other events, the project also partnered with artists by commissioning works of art relating to LGBTQ themes. The commissioned art pieces included the music video *Tahdon* (I do/ I want 2017) by the music group Tero Hetero featuring Hildá Länsman, the community art project *Queercache Helsinki* (*Queerkätkö Helsinki* 2017) by the artists Kalle Hamm and Dzamil Kamanger, and the poem *Terveisin nimimerkki "Ihmiset ovat hulluja, lesbot vielä hullumpia"* (Greetings from the signature "People are insane and lesbians even more so" 2018) by author and poet Helena Sinervo.⁶

⁶ The music video was a multilingual celebration of the new Finnish Marriage Act (legalising same-sex marriage), which went into effect 1.3.2017. The video included Sámi yoik and singing in Finnish Sign Language, and you could choose subtitles in Finnish, Swedish and North Sámi. It also had a choreography by Henna Helasvuo, and different communities were challenged to celebrate the Marriage Act by performing and sharing the dance on social media: <https://www.facebook.com/events/d41d8cd9/tahdon-tanssihaaste-tahdon-utmaning/401893996843284/> (accessed 15.7.2020). Links to all the artworks can be found here: http://www.kulttuuriakaikille.fi/tietoa_meista_hankkeet_suomi_100-sateenkaaren_vareissa (15.7.2020).

In selecting these art projects, we wanted to focus on the diverse realities and histories of the LGBTQ community. We wanted to show that the Finnish queer art scene and LGBTQ history are more than national icons like Tom of Finland (Touko Laaksonen, 1920–1991) and Tove Jansson (1914–2001), and to reveal some of these hidden histories. In the community art project *Queercache Helsinki*, the urban landscape of Helsinki was approached through the eyes of minorities and subordinated groups within the LGBTQ community. Through geocaches distributed throughout the city, one could learn about being queer with a disability or belonging to different linguistic and/or cultural minorities, about the history of trans people in Helsinki, and about homonationalism and racism within the LGBTQ community and in gay bars.

Celebrating LGBTQ History

When *Finland 100 – In Rainbow Colours* came to an end, we – the team behind the project and our project partners – saw it as an opportunity to begin something new. We wanted to continue our collaboration around promoting LGBTQ history and art, as well as to find ways to address gaps in representation and silences within LGBTQ historical narratives. For instance, the trans and genderqueer communities are still largely invisible in the popular narrative of LGBTQ history, as are several other minority perspectives. In the spring of 2018, the project team organized a breakfast for our project partners to discuss how to proceed, and during this breakfast, the idea of arranging a Queer History Month was born.

Currently, Queer History Month in Finland takes place in November. In its first year, the month began on October 20th and concluded on November 20th with events for the International Day of Transgender Remembrance. For the first two years, 2018 and 2019, Queer History Month was coordinated by Culture for All and Seta, but from 2020 on it will

be coordinated by the newly founded organisation Sateenkaarihistorian ystävät ry – Friends of Queer History – this year in cooperation with the Finnish Labour Museum Werstas.⁷

Unlike in many other countries, where the celebration of Queer History Month has been initiated by the education sector, the Finnish Queer History Month is a direct result of the work in queering memory institutions that has been ongoing since the start of the millennium (Peake 2019). Thus, during its first two years, most of the cultural institutions taking part in Queer History Month have been museums and archives, which during this time have arranged, for example, queer guided tours, discussions, and seminars, and published information on LGBTQ history on their webpages and different social media channels.

Queer History Month has not only raised awareness about hidden LGBTQ histories, but also about the importance of collecting and documenting untold stories and about the responsibilities of memory organisations to do so. During its first year, the researcher Tuula Juvonen and the Labour Archive (Työväen Arkisto) used Queer History Month and its Facebook page as a tool to collect new materials and narratives for its archives through the oral history project *Unohtumattomat hetket* (Unforgettable moments, Juvonen 2019, 3). The Facebook page has also been a practical channel through which to inform audiences about archival updates. In 2019, the Finnish association for transgender and intersex rights, Trasek, used the Queer History Month Facebook page as a conduit to advertise its own newly created archive in the Labour Archive (a posting 30.11.2019).

⁷ The web page Queer History Month can be found here: <https://sateenkaarihistoria.fi/> – and the Facebook page here: <https://www.facebook.com/sateenkaarihistoriakuukausi/?ref=bookmarks>

Queer History Month has also encouraged individual LGBTQ activists to share their memories on Queer History Month's Facebook page and elsewhere. One of the most important contributions to the Finnish Queer History Month was by the LGBTQ pioneer Eva Isaksson, who every day in October and November 2018 shared memories, pictures and stories from her youth and activist years, starting in the late 1960s (Isaksson 2018). The following year, she continued to share LGBTQ-related posts almost every day, this time using her own experience as a librarian to provide tips on how to find information on, document, and share LGBTQ history (Isaksson 2019).

Like many great initiatives for queering and diversifying representations of history, this initiative operates mainly without a budget and with the help of many volunteers. The Facebook pages and other social media channels have, in the first years of the Queer History Month, been valuable sources of information, but now the challenge for the team behind Queer History Month is to extend this information outside of bubble of previously engaged audiences, to memory institutions, to other cultural fields, to the education sector, and to the general population – not to mention the challenge of finding funding to coordinate the month.⁸

Towards a More Diverse Narrative

I have been very happy with the huge amount of interest in queering and diversifying museum praxis that I have seen from museum and archival professionals since beginning my work with *Queering the*

⁸ In December 2020, after this text was written, the association Sateenkaarihistorian ystävät (Friends of Queer History) got a huge grant from Kone Foundation for the years 2021 and 2022 for the project “Sateenkaarihistoria näkyväksi” (Making queerhistory visible). The grant will enable the association to recruit a coordinator och pay reserachers.

Museum, Finland 100 – In Rainbow colours and Queer History Month. At the same time, however, it has become apparent to me that we need more than just additional knowledge about LGBTQ history in Finland. We, as researchers and professionals within memory institutions, need to pay more attention to what versions of LGBTQ history we are (re) producing and (re)presenting, and to what kinds of stories we collect and how (Paqvalén 2015a-c, Quinn 2020). It is not enough to go beyond the canonized narratives of Tom of Finland and Tove Jansson; we must also strive to approach LGBTQ history from an intersectional, antiracist, and decolonial perspective.

As the historian Pia Laskar writes in her book on queering museums, *Den outställda sexualiteten* (The Undisplayed Sexuality, 2019), the museum (and the rest of us) needs to re-examine its use of history. By studying the ways in which it uses history, the museum can become aware of the ideals and norms that it, along with the surrounding society, have been reproducing. Instead of applying a modern understanding of gender and sexuality when approaching history or simply adding new layers to the dominant history, museums should analyse and publicise what kinds of historical processes (for example, criminalisation, medicalisation, and religious violence) have produced contemporary understandings (Laskar 2019, 22f). By studying and exhibiting museums' earlier approaches to history relating to sexuality and gender, institutions can demonstrate how the creation of the nation state is linked to the regulation of gender and sexuality, as well as the representation of certain kinds of bodies (ibid 26). Or, as Therese Quinn suggests, the studies of a museum's norms and its approaches to history can also be "entry points for teaching to and about social justice" (Quinn 2020, 69).

We need to ask who we are excluding when writing and presenting Finnish LGBTQ history, and what national narratives we are reproducing in doing

so. What does, for example, the current interest in the life and art of Tom of Finland within the museum sector tell us about the national narrative of Finnish history and Finnish masculinity? How can we move past the dominant gay, white, male, and ableist narrative?

Decolonizing and queering museums and national history also demand educational tools⁹ that are inclusive, critical of social norms, and sensitive towards the diversity of histories and lived experiences within the LGBTQ community. But I am optimistic. The FAQ collective at the Aalto University, the Queer+Crip guided tours developed by the art educators Kaura Raudaskoski and Jemina Lindholm (originally for the Finnish Museum of Photography in honor of Queer History Month 2018), and recent demands by art students in Finland for the addition of "Anti-racist strategies into the curriculum" (6/ 2020)¹⁰ make me believe that the museum sector in Finland will have a much more diverse future.

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- 9 For concrete tools see for example Therese Quinn, *About museums, culture and justice to explore in your classroom* (2020), Pia Laskar, *Den outställda sexualiteten* (2019), Anniina Suominen & Tiina Pusa (ed.) *Feminism and Queer in Art Education* (2018), and the report, *Museerna och HBTQ* (2015).
10 "Template to include anti-racist strategies into the curriculum," <https://equaledu.cargo.site/> (accessed 20.7.2020). See also Black Lives Matter -liike sai suomalaisopiskelijat vaatimaan antirasismia opetusta – Näin vastuuopettajat vastaavat vaatimuksiin. Yle 17.7.2020. https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-11449419?fbclid=IwAR3M2OyEtVg4c8PuqvpCMbIOQGthEelPyCYguyKpXA_IIF7IVE-B0AZqNdb4 (accessed 20.7.2020).

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SQS
1-2/2020

77

Queer Mirror
Discussions

Rita
Paqvalén

Exhibiting Regional LGBTQ History in Dallas, Texas

Jaimi Parker and Morgan Gieringer

SQS
1–2/2020

78

Queer Mirror
Discussions

ABSTRACT

From 2017 to 2019 archivists and librarians at the University of North Texas Special Collections have worked with community members and city officials to create exhibits featuring archival materials from the LGBTQ Archive. There have been several obstacles to presenting accurate historical interpretation of Dallas LGBTQ community history, including lack of sufficient archival documentation, and differences between archival sources and community members' personal experiences. Grappling with these challenges has allowed UNT Special Collections archivists and librarians to engage community members in a personal, meaningful discussion, and ultimately have led to both successful exhibits as well as strengthened relationships to LGBTQ community members.

ABSTRAKTI

Vuosina 2017–2019 University of North Texas Special Collectionin arkiston- ja kirjastonhoitajat ovat tehneet yhteistyötä lhbtq-yhteisön ja kaupungin virkailijoiden kanssa rakentaessaan LGBTQ Archivesin kokoelmiin perustuvia näyttelyitä. Historiallisesti tarkan tulkinnan esittämisessä Dallasin lhbtq-yhteisöstä on ollut monia hankaluuksia, mukaan lukien arkistoinnin puutteellisuus ja arkistolähteiden ja yhteisön kokemusten väliset ristiriidat. Arkiston- ja kirjastonhoitajat ovat käsitelleet haasteita käymällä henkilökohtaisia ja merkityksellisiä keskusteluja lhbtq-yhteisön kanssa, mikä on johtanut sekä onnistuneisiin näyttelyihin että vahvempaan yhteisösuhteeseen.

Introduction

University of North Texas Special Collections holds one of the largest LGBTQ archives in the Southwest, and has worked with community partners for years in building and sharing the LGBTQ Archive. For three years, beginning in 2017, Special Collections worked with The Dallas Way, an LGBTQ community archives organization, to create three major exhibits for display at Dallas City Hall during Pride Month. The placement of the exhibits at Dallas City Hall has validated the personal experiences of many community members who have been challenged by homophobia and bigotry throughout their lives, by showing the acceptance of the LGBTQ community by the local government. The creation of these exhibits has been rewarding, but presented several obstacles including representing accurate historical interpretations of Dallas LGBTQ community history by depicting negative aspects of the LGBTQ community, discrepancies between archival sources and community members' personal experiences, and a lack of diverse representation within the LGBTQ Archive. Grappling with these challenges has allowed Special Collections librarians and archivists to engage in meaningful discussion with community members, and expand their understanding of the collections and history of the Dallas LGBTQ community.

Jaimi
Parker
and
Morgan
Gieringer

Founding of the LGBT Archive of the University of North Texas Special Collections

University of North Texas Special Collections initiated a major collection development project to collect and preserve LGBTQ history in 2012 with the acquisition of the Resource Center Collection. At over 600 linear feet of materials, the Resource Center Collection documents social services outreach activities and health services for the LGBTQ community of Dallas. Additionally, the collection includes a wide variety of personal and organizational materials donated to the Resource Center over time. The Resource Center Collection began in the 1960s as Phil Johnson, a local gay activist and archivist dedicated himself to preserving the history of the Dallas gay community as it was unfolding. Phil Johnson was a member of almost every gay organization in Dallas, from the first he helped create in 1965, Circle of Friends, to charity and athletic organizations in the 1990s. He dedicated himself to personally collecting materials to document this history. Along with documentation regarding organizations, Johnson collected ephemera for all types of gay and lesbian organizations and events in north Texas, as well as publications from across the country related to gay and lesbian culture. As the collection grew, the Phil Johnson Historic Archives, as it was now called, were transferred to the Resource Center, a community-based organization originally founded to assist the Dallas gay community during the AIDS crisis in the 1980s. The Resource Center was, and continues to be a major hub of healthcare information for the Dallas LGBTQ community, with the primary mission of improving the lives of LGBTQ people and those affected by HIV/AIDS through health and wellness (Resource Center n.d.).

The Resource Center opened the Phil Johnson Library with this collection in 1995, allowing community members access to view and check out materials like books, periodicals, and VHS tapes. The Resource Center

found that caring for such a large collection and making it accessible to the public was too great of an obligation which did not fit into their primary mission of providing health and social services to the LGBTQ community, and so began searching for a new repository for the collection in the early 2010s. Resource Center eventually selected UNT Special Collections to be the new repository for this massive collection after years of relationship building.

Since Special Collections acquired the Resource Center Collection, the LGBTQ Archive has continued to grow with individuals and organizations donating their collections. Additionally, Special Collections formed a partnership with The Dallas Way, a non-profit community archives organization focused on collecting the LGBTQ history of Dallas. The Dallas Way has supported Special Collections by facilitating the acquisition of significant collections, fundraising for digitization efforts and by working closely with archivists to accurately describe LGBTQ collections.

Shortly after acquiring the Resource Center Collection, Special Collections created an exhibit from those materials, highlighting major themes, people, and events in the Dallas LGBTQ Community. This exhibit was on display in the Special Collections Reading Room on the UNT campus and was recreated in a digital surrogate (University of North Texas 2014). The materials utilized for this exhibit were digitized, but the expanse of the Resource Center Collection, over 640 boxes of materials, has made full digitization impossible for the time being.

Over the past eight years, Special Collections has prioritized major efforts to collect, digitize and preserve other LGBTQ collections. In addition to personal papers and organizational records, Special Collections was able to acquire a full run of the *Dallas Voice* newspaper, a weekly LGBTQ newspaper based in Dallas, founded in 1984 and still in publication today. A grant funded project to digitize the *Dallas Voice* newspaper was

completed in 2015. Additionally, Special Collections maintains the digital archive of newspapers published from 2004-present day (Dallas Voice, 2014). As part of Special Collections' agreement with The Dallas Way, all collections contributed to the archive by their organization would be digitized as funding allowed. To date, The Dallas Way has contributed over \$60,000 in funding. This has led to a dramatic increase in the number of LGBTQ primary sources available on the Portal to Texas History and the UNT Digital Library. As of March 2020, Special Collections has nearly 12,000 LGBTQ items available for view on the Portal to Texas History, with that number ever increasing (The Portal to Texas History n.d.).

The focus on digitizing LGBTQ collections has allowed Special Collections to easily utilize this content for social media posts throughout the year, highlighting milestones and anniversaries. Though Special Collections is part of a larger institution, they have their own Facebook and Twitter accounts managed by staff within the department. These accounts serve not only as a means to share basic information about the department, but are also a key way to communicate new collection acquisitions, digitization milestones, and research opportunities for all collecting areas. While Special Collections utilizes social media platforms to promote all collecting areas, there has been a major push to share the LGBTQ collections, in an effort to both stay connected with the community and to let potential researchers know what types of materials are available in these collections.

In 2017, Special Collections curated an exhibit, *Threads of Remembrance*, to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the creation of the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Drawn from the archive of the Dallas Metroplex Chapter of the NAMES Project Foundation, the exhibit includes information on Dallas' efforts in displaying and adding to the AIDS Memorial Quilt, as well as photographs of quilt panels that were donated through the organization, honoring local people lost to AIDS and AIDS complications through the

early 2000s. This exhibit was displayed in the Special Collections Reading Room on UNT's campus, as well as through an accompanying digital exhibit (University of North Texas 2018).

As UNT Special Collections established a reputation as a responsible steward of LGBTQ historical materials, more collections have been acquired. Being recognized as a good steward is significant for people considering a donation of LGBTQ archives. Since LGBTQ people have traditionally been marginalized, there is prevalent fear among LGBTQ community members that their histories will be marginalized as well. However, frequent engagement with LGBTQ people at events and exhibits has helped to demonstrate the library's dedicated and ongoing interest in preserving LGBTQ history. The LGBTQ Archive has been a valuable tool in many scholarly and journalistic works, as well as a resource for visual artists and filmmakers. UNT Libraries was credited for research assistance in the 2013 film *Dallas Buyers Club*.

LGBTQ Archival Materials in Pride Month Exhibits

Though Special Collections is part of a larger institution, and must focus on supporting the needs of students and faculty, they have a wider reach like many similar institutions and must "welcome and serve a broader community of scholars and researchers" (Harris, Weller 2012). The role of outreach activities for special collections departments to share their collections has been proven necessary to accomplish their goals of providing information to researchers, be this outreach through creating accessible finding aids online, digitization of collections, public programming, or other related activities. One strong method for special collections to share their materials with a large audience is by exhibiting those materials. Placing materials on display and including informative

text about the materials and background story allows viewers to interact with primary source materials, and allows the special collections to take on the role of disseminating knowledge. As Gelfand (2013) describes, exhibits have become increasingly popular in the archives and special collections professions since the end of WWII, as “an essential part of their educational mission, as well as a method of outreach.” Exhibits are an easy way to promote the institution and allow archivists to be more proactive in helping researchers to discover collections (Gelfand 2013).

Exhibits form a significant means of outreach to underrepresented communities, both as a method of recognizing and honoring their history, but also as a means to connect with individuals and organizations which may become future donors to the archive. However, collection and exhibition of LGBTQ historical materials by institutions is a sensitive subject and can represent specific challenges to the institution. These challenges may also be amplified significantly based upon geography. In the United States, LGBTQ people and organizations in the South, and outside of major metropolitan areas are more likely to face broad inequalities. So far, no southern US state has passed anti-LGBTQ discrimination bills, and states such as Texas and Tennessee continue to introduce legislation specifically allowing businesses, health care providers and other workers to deny services on the basis of sexual orientation. This lack of legal protection leads to overall disparities in social and economic outcomes for LGBTQ people in all communities, but especially in more rural communities where LGBTQ people are isolated and less likely to have support networks in place. The history of inequality in the southern United States is particularly notorious. According to a survey by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (n.d.), people in the South report discomfort with LGBTQ people at higher levels than people in non-Southern states. The additional burden of being LGBTQ in the South brings with it an additional need for archivists and curators to recognize that “the lived experience of an LGBT-identifying

member of a regional community may be significantly different to those in bigger urban settings” (Lynn & Leah 2017).

The 50th anniversary of the 1969 New York Stonewall Riots was a time of great celebration in many LGBTQ communities across North America. From this point on, it is easy to tell a simplified narrative of LGBTQ history based on an upward trajectory in LGBTQ rights starting in 1969 and continuing forward, in an ever-evolving narrative of positive moments and betterment for the community as a whole. However, individual archival collections reveal a much different and nuanced story which is greatly influenced by gender, race, socio-economic background, culture and religion. Additionally, although the LGBTQ community was marginalized and largely invisible to mainstream culture prior to 1969, gay, lesbian and transgender people existed prior to that time. For example, in Dallas, the Circle of Friends was founded in 1965 to “to establish and promote communication, understanding and harmony between the homophile community and the general public” (Circle of Friends 1965). Jessie Lynn and Sam Leah (2017) have argued that “there is a dominant narrative of progress” in regional history in particular, and that “regional optimism” is at odds with social histories of communities outside the mainstream culture. For exhibits pertaining to regional queer history, it is important to acknowledge the complex and sometimes negative narratives alongside the positive and progressive narratives which permeate regional historical discourse.

People in the LGBTQ community continue to face harassment, discrimination, and hate crimes. In 2019, the state of Texas ranked number one in the number of murders of transgender people, with over half of those murders occurring in Dallas (McGaughy 2019). It is important to recognize the inequalities and significant danger faced by some members of the LGBTQ community while also celebrating the many accomplishments documented in the archive.

Many people outside of Texas know of Dallas as the site of President John F. Kennedy's assassination, and the resulting nickname given to Dallas: The City of Hate (Siegal 2017). As a stronghold of ultra-conservatism, Dallas historically resisted progressive movements, and it is no surprise that persecution of LGBTQ people has been common. LGBTQ people have faced extreme legal, political and social barriers in Dallas, which is well documented in the archive. The city of Dallas has come a long way in terms of creating policy protecting the LGBTQ community from discrimination, with a score of 100 out of 100 (including bonus points) from the Human Rights Campaign (n.d.) in 2020.

Though Pride Month has been celebrated by the Dallas community for decades, the first Pride Month officially celebrated at Dallas City Hall was in 2012, with the first official proclamation of Pride Month and the unveiling of the Pride Flag in the Dallas City Hall Flag Room (Gerber 2012). This push to celebrate the Dallas LGBTQ community in an official capacity was made by the Dallas LGBT Task Force, led by its founder Dallas Councilwoman (2009–2011) Delia Jasso. D. Travers Scott (2016) describes the important symbolism of the rainbow Pride Flag in showing acceptance of LGBTQ people, as well as the persistence of a community who refuses to be silenced. Scott (2016) goes on to say that this type of representation by the state “connects to, not only, material benefits and protections for certain queer citizens, but also recognizing those citizens as material resources for the state,” i.e. generating revenue from Pride events. Having Pride Month officially acknowledged by the City of Dallas and the Pride Flag hung in the flag room is of great significance to the Dallas LGBTQ community.

Dallas City Hall itself is an iconic building designed by I.M. Pei with a large six-acre plaza in front, complete with landscaping, benches, fountains, a reflecting pool, and large sculptures (City of Dallas n.d.). This plaza in front

of Dallas City Hall was created to be a public space, inviting the people of the city to come together. Similarly, the interior of Dallas City Hall is a place for the public. People go to City Hall to pay bills, access city services, and attend public meetings including those of the various city councils working to create public policy. The display of LGBTQ artifacts within Dallas City Hall is a symbolic action meant to prominently acknowledge the journey of LGBTQ community members in Dallas. Creating opportunities (through funding or providing space for exhibits) for the LGBTQ community to learn about and celebrate their history is a common theme among cities, states and major corporations who wish to signify their allyship to the queer community.

The exhibit space at Dallas City Hall is located on the first floor on the west side of the building, pictured in Fig. 1. This area has a massive atrium going



Fig. 1. Dallas City Hall exhibit area and atrium prior to reception for “Pride in Dallas” reception, June 1, 2017.

up five stories, with walkways around the perimeter of each floor. From the entrance of the building, the exhibit space is directly across the open hall, consisting of four large glass display cases and a row of rotating walls that are nearly 3 meters tall and 16 meters across when the walls are locked in place to create a single long surface.

Each of the exhibits Special Collections created for display at Dallas City Hall during Pride Month were created specifically to fit the exhibit space in this large atrium. The large wall panels for each exhibit were designed to be eye catching so that passersby would be drawn in by the imagery. The cases displayed in front of the wall were filled with original artifacts and reproductions where appropriate, and in each exhibit each case had a large t-shirt or similar article of clothing displayed on a mannequin at the center of the case to help draw people in, as can be seen in Fig. 2.

Exhibit Site and Themes 2017–2019

When the initial exhibit, titled *Pride in Dallas: Landmarks in Dallas LGBT History*, was requested by the LGBT Employee Association of Dallas in 2017, it was meant to be a one-time project to share Dallas LGBTQ history. Special Collections immediately asked The Dallas Way to be a partner on this project for funding and assistance in creating the exhibit text. The idea of creating a timeline to share major milestones in the city's history seemed like the best approach. This would allow for a great overview and some more in-depth information on specific areas of interest. The authors began compiling the timeline information consisting of major events, important people, organization establishments, court cases, etc. After the first draft was created, it was sent to the board members of The Dallas Way to add any major points that were missed and to verify dates and names.

With this initial exhibit, it became obvious that there were not many materials within the LGBTQ Archive that reached into the present day. The LGBT Employee Association of Dallas helped to gather information on major initiatives being focused on in the Dallas LGBTQ community at the time. The topics they chose to represent were LGBTQ youth homelessness and a program founded to address those needs, a recent push to increase safety in Oak Lawn, the historically gay neighborhood of Dallas, after two years of increased violence, and the creation and work of the LGBT Taskforce under the Dallas Mayor's office.

Because of the broad range of topics for this exhibit, and because Special Collections collects artifacts in the LGBTQ Archive, it was easy to find materials to fill the four large exhibit cases. The display contained 62 individual archival items and artifacts as well as 10 reproduction images. Each case had an overall theme, namely organizations, recreation, AIDS, and activism, and each side of each case shared one main story related to that theme.

The request for the second exhibit in 2018 came as a surprise, even though the first was a great success. Because of the time restrictions and other projects happening concurrently, the authors decided to offer a remake of an exhibit that had just been created for the Special Collections Reading Room exhibit space titled *Threads of Remembrance*. This exhibit was focused on the AIDS Memorial Quilt in Dallas and utilized materials from the Dallas Metroplex Chapter of the NAMES Project Foundation Collection, as well as many other LGBTQ collections held by Special Collections. For Dallas City Hall, the focus of the exhibit was expanded to cover the AIDS crisis in Dallas more broadly, with focuses on community health and fundraising programs, the Dallas Buyer's Club, an organization that imported illegal drugs for HIV/AIDS patients in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and a major court case related to discriminatory hospital

practices in the treatment of people with AIDS. This exhibit was titled *Being Here: A Glimpse into the LGBTQ Movement in Dallas and the Fight Against AIDS*.

For the second exhibit, the LGBT Employee Association of Dallas assisted in gathering information about what was currently happening concerning HIV/AIDS in Dallas. They provided a narrative of the populations most affected in Dallas at the time, young African American and Latinx people, as well as information on PrEP to help stop the spread of HIV. With the more narrowed topic for this exhibit there were not enough items to adequately fill all four of the large display cases, so only two display cases were utilized with each side of these cases covering a topic, as in the previous exhibit. The display cases for this exhibit contained 38 archival objects and artifacts.

Realizing through the previous two exhibits that the diversity within the LGBTQ Archive was lacking, it seemed appropriate to represent an underrepresented group in the third exhibit in 2019. The authors selected the theme of women in the Dallas LGBTQ community for this exhibit. It would highlight new collection materials (Lory Masters Collection), bring notice to some less researched areas of the collections, and address issues of discrimination within the LGBTQ community that had not been adequately included in the prior exhibits. When creating this exhibit, it was important to all involved that the recent killings of black trans women in Dallas be addressed in some way. This exhibit was titled *Women in the Dallas LGBTQ Community*.

Assistance with present day information was provided by members of The Dallas Way in the form of highlighting notable women doing work to further women in the community. Again, with this more narrowed topic, there were not adequate items to fill all four of the display cases provided by Dallas City Hall, so only two cases were utilized. The two cases contained 34 archival objects and artifacts.



Fig. 2. Case display at Dallas City Hall during “Being Here” exhibit, June 1, 2018.



Fig. 3. Shannon Walker speaking during reception for “Women in the LGBTQ Community” exhibit at Dallas City Hall, June 5, 2019.

Drafting the Texts

When taking on the first exhibit in 2017, it was clear that the authors, two white heterosexual cis women who did not live through or personally experience the history being represented, could not present this history without input from members of the Dallas LGBTQ community. It was immediately determined that the board members of The Dallas Way should help to create this exhibit. The scope of their involvement was limited to the most critical aspect, drafting the text. It was determined that having too many parties assist in other aspects of the exhibit creation, such as artifact/image selection and design concept, would be too time consuming and unnecessarily difficult. The Dallas Way assisted in drafting the text for each exhibit, while Parker took on the role of artifact/image selection, and both authors worked with members of the UNT Libraries graphic design team to create the wall panel designs for each exhibit. For each exhibit, the text and digitized materials for the wall panels had to be compiled first so that the UNT Libraries graphic designers had adequate time to create the designs and ensure they were printed before the exhibit installation deadline.

For the first exhibit in 2017, the authors began compiling the timeline text with information that was previously utilized in an exhibit on the Resource Center Collection. Additional relevant information had also been gleaned over the years from visiting researchers. The LGBTQ Archive is heavily requested by researchers studying various aspects of LGBTQ history and culture for academic and creative projects, including recent research requests focused on conversion therapy and religion in the LGBTQ community and anti-sodomy laws in Texas. Researchers often spend multiple days, if not weeks, looking through collection materials in the reading room, and employees often take these opportunities to discuss their research and discoveries within the collections with each researcher.

Special Collections also offers Research Fellowships, with part of the stipulation of funding being a final presentation on what the researcher found in the collections and how they plan to incorporate that information into their greater research project. Once the basic timeline was created, spanning 1967 through 2007, the document was shared with The Dallas Way board members for their input and corrections.

Working with The Dallas Way to create the exhibit text for these exhibits was rewarding but presented a few challenges and conflicting ideas that needed to be worked through. One of the major issues that The Dallas Way board members brought up in editing the first exhibit text was the use of the acronym LGBT. In the first draft of the text for this exhibit, this acronym was used throughout, but The Dallas Way suggested that it was inappropriate to use in situations where bisexuals and transgender people were not included and to represent time periods where the term lesbian was not widely used. For example, when talking about the first gay/ally organization founded in Dallas in 1965, the Circle of Friends, The Dallas Way specifically wanted to refer to this as a gay group because the term lesbian was not widely used until the 1980s and this group was specifically for homosexual men and women. This desire to show a more accurate representation of the members of the LGBTQ community that were actually included in these specific historical moments seemed like such an obvious need in writing this narrative, but the authors came of age after the acceptance and widespread use of the LGBT acronym and did not consider this in the first draft.

The Dallas Way were also particular when using the acronym, that it should read GLBT instead of LGBT. Until 2019, The Dallas Way utilized the qualifier “a GLBT history project” when they switched the acronym to LGBTQ. The requested changes from LGBT to GLBT did not seem like a battle worth having at the time, though the authors were aware that this

was a signifier of the pervasive sexism that has been prevalent throughout the history of the Dallas LGBTQ community. In hindsight, the authors should have insisted on leaving the acronym as it is generally accepted, with lesbians being represented first, but the requested changes were approved. The Dallas Way also requested that the name of the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights have the words lesbian and gay swapped to read National March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights. Because this was a matter of a historically documented title of a major event, for which a flyer was to be displayed, there was not even discussion from the Special Collections team that this change could not be made. The title of the event in the written text of the exhibit would reflect what was on the archival documents in the collection and on display. Another similar request from The Dallas Way was the removal of the apostrophe from Dallas Buyer's Club. Though the apostrophe is not grammatically correct, it is included on archival materials produced by the Dallas Buyer's Club, such as their *NEW Source* newsletter and product lists. Because the official name of the organization included the apostrophe, and it is well documented as the standard in their original documents which would be on display in the exhibits, that requested change was also not made.

Some of the most helpful feedback offered by The Dallas Way revolved around how to address certain issues or appropriate phrasing. A notable example was in the second exhibit covering the AIDS crisis, where there was a section focused on a famous local drag queen from the 1980s and 90s named Patti Le Plae Safe, whose act focused on sharing information about safe sex practices. When referring to the man playing Patti, the author's original text read "As himself." The Dallas Way corrected this to read "Out of drag." What seemed like a minor adjustment, made a huge difference in showing an understanding and acceptance of drag culture.

Material Selection and Exhibit Design

In selecting archival materials for display in each of these exhibits, it was important to create a visually interesting display to draw in viewers. As Vassari (2018, 97) describes, a display highlighting the different formats of archival materials in a collection "allows for an enriched narrative to be told." The LGBTQ Archive is much more varied in content compared to many archival collections, which often consist mostly of paper materials such as documents, correspondence, and photographs. The LGBTQ Archive contains paper materials as well as artifacts, including t-shirts, stuffed animals, awards, buttons, and all manner of materials that relate to LGBTQ history in Dallas. Utilizing these types of artifacts makes the history come alive. Viewers can imagine members of Team Dallas wearing their uniforms with white Stetson hats to the 1994 Gay Games. The handmade binder with information on creating AIDS Memorial Quilt panels, with pages of various fabrics showing decoration ideas, shows the personal touch of those locals attempting to help the people of Dallas honor their lost loved ones. These three-dimensional objects that relate to everyday life, make the history being told more tangible for viewers.

Documents and photographs were utilized in display cases for each exhibit, alongside artifacts. Because so much of history is captured through writing, documents can help to symbolize events and individuals, or add further context that artifacts cannot (Aubitz, Stern 1990). A few examples of important documents that were utilized in the exhibits are a Gay Games ticket, an "AIDS and Deafness" pamphlet, Dallas Buyer's Club newsletters, handwritten notes from the head writer for the Dallas Voice newspaper, and many covers of the Dallas Voice newspaper showing striking images related to the topic being presented. Each of these items added to the story represented in the case and gave a little more context without adding more narrative text. The ticket for

the inaugural Gay Games in 1982 tells a larger story than just the event information. The ticket shows the original title of the event as the Gay Olympic Games, with the word Olympic crossed out with a single narrow line. This piece of ephemera visually helps to tell the story of a lawsuit being filed only weeks before the event, by the International Olympic Committee, forcing the Gay Games to change names (Blackwell 2001). The Dallas Buyer's Club newsletter was a wonderful addition to the AIDS related exhibit, because of its notoriety after the release of the 2013 film of the same name, sans apostrophe. Sharing this history in a more historically accurate context, showing images of the real Ron Woodroof (founder of the Dallas Buyer's Club), and showing viewers that physical materials from this organization still exist, adds legitimacy and realness to the story they might already know. The use of Dallas Voice newspaper covers benefited these exhibits in two ways, first by taking up a large portion of visual space in the cases with interesting graphic materials, and second by showing that the issues that were discussed in the exhibit were issues that the LGBTQ community of Dallas had been discussing while they were occurring.

The wall panels for each exhibit were a major factor in terms of being able to attract visitors of Dallas City Hall to the exhibit space and to tell the bulk of the information being presented. A great deal of thought and time went into the design and image selection for each exhibit, with the authors working closely with graphic designers at UNT Libraries.

The design for the wall panels of the first exhibit in 2017 utilized a clean basic design for the timeline panels so that they could be easily read. Large images from the collections, consisting mostly of original unedited photographs were positioned next to the timeline text to represent some of those major events. It was decided that the images used for the timeline would simply be enlarged, but would not be edited in any other way, allowing viewers to have an accurate representation of the history being presented, and the types of materials in the LGBTQ Archive.

When selecting color options for the wall panels, the idea of going with the obvious rainbow theme was thrown around at first, but it was quickly agreed that too bright and colorful of a design concept would wash out the wonderful photographs from the 1980s and 1990s with that typical sepia hue. The graphic designer chose to focus on a color palette that would complement the images without being overwhelming, and so a simple light tan background color was chosen, with orange and blue as accent colors.

When discussing the design for the AIDS exhibit in 2018, the obvious main color option was red, as it is the color for AIDS awareness, but it also seemed stark and unwelcoming. The graphic designer chose to bring in the main color of The Dallas Way branding, hot pink, and contrasted it with black and white throughout the design to create an eye-catching display. The designer put a great deal of focus in having the graphic design help to tell the story of the pain and loss associated with the AIDS crisis, by utilizing empty black backgrounds on panels describing the early outbreak, fear, and uncertainty that spread through the community. For this exhibit, the graphic designer wanted to incorporate imagery from the collections more fluidly into the graphic design, as opposed to the previous exhibit where each image stood alone. For this exhibit, the graphic designer pulled imagery from the collections, changed their colors to fit into the three-color design, and photoshopped them into the overall design to create a stunning visual narrative to go along with the text.

When selecting the color palette for the 2019 Women exhibit, early ideas focused on colors often gendered as "feminine" in the United States. Lavender was an early first choice, as it could be seen as a reference to the Lavender Scare, a period in American history where the federal government searched out and fired more than 5,000 homosexual federal government employees between the late 1940s and 1960s (Adkins 2016). Because lavender alone did not seem like a striking enough color to draw in viewers, the designer went with a selection of pastel colors in purples, pinks and

blues offset with bolder teals and reds. For this design, images from the collections were inserted into the designs with minor editing, like cropping.

Negative Representations

One major area of disagreement between Special Collections and The Dallas Way came up in the editing of the 2019 exhibit, *Women in the LGBTQ Community*. Special Collections wrote some general language about the sexism and racism prevalent in the Dallas LGBTQ community, specifically in the 1970s and 80s. Special Collections' LGBTQ Archive contains a recently recorded oral history from a prominent lesbian couple, in which they share their experiences with sexism in the LGBTQ community. These issues have been well documented in various formats, including in the documentary *Finding Our Voice* (2000), created by the local Dallas Public Broadcasting Service station KERA, where women and people of color discuss the various ways that they were denied access to local bars because of sexism and racism. When creating this exhibit, Special Collections and The Dallas Way President, a woman at the time, agreed that sharing this struggle and theme of sexism within the LGBTQ community was important, as it was such a defining factor in how women navigated their place within the community. And, as in the greater American cultural landscape, sexism is still prevalent in even small encounters, such as was witnessed by the authors, with past members of The Dallas Way requesting men be represented first in the acronym (GLBT) used in the first exhibit, instead of sticking with the generally accepted acronym representing women first (LGBT). To represent these general inequalities and sexism within the community, the authors included the following paragraph in the original draft of the exhibit text:

Women often found themselves invisible compared to the larger gay community and were sometimes purposely excluded. Early

gay bars would discriminate against lesbians by prohibiting women wearing jeans, or not allowing open toed shoes. Other forms of discrimination were used to target women and people of color at these bars, such as requiring multiple forms of ID to enter.

One of the male board members of The Dallas Way objected to this general representation of white men within the Dallas LGBTQ community, and asked that the language be removed all together, or that a “not all men” type of statement be added to the text. Considering the various discriminatory issues that were to be addressed in the exhibit, as well as their broad representation throughout the LGBTQ Archive, there was no way to justify removing this part of the text because of one man's objection. It also seemed inappropriate to add a statement that not all men were like this, which might not come across well in the current social justice era. The compromise was to add a line about the Dallas Gay Alliance's Social Justice Committee eventually shutting down discriminatory practices related to keeping women and people of color out of gathering spaces like bars and clubs.

This exhibit also discussed issues of women's groups excluding other women based on sexual orientation or gender-identity, and women of color feeling underrepresented and creating their own organizations based on cultural background. It was important to not only say that men in the community were against women, but to also represent the breakdowns within this already twice-marginalized group. For instance, Umoja Hermanas (Sisters United), an organization for lesbian women of color founded in 1992, did not initially allow bisexual women to join, until there was a call to action by bisexual women in the community.

These types of discrimination within the LGBTQ community have always been prevalent, and often follow the lines of greater societal prejudices. As the authors began creating these exhibits, the issue of representing the

wide swath of diversity in the community was important, but as exhibit creation continued, the idea of representing these internal rifts became just as important to sharing history accurately. As future exhibits are created, these types of issues will continue to be addressed so that a clear understanding of this history can be presented, and so that members from all aspects of the community can feel that their experiences are being fairly represented.

Lack of Diversity

The main issue revealed during the creation of each of these exhibits was the lack of diversity within the LGBTQ Archive. Three main issues that Maxine Wolfe (1998) describes in creating the Lesbian Herstory Archives apply to all minority groups in the LGBTQ population: they have historically been afraid to be publicly visible as a member of the LGBTQ community, they have historically been oppressed and believe their stories are not important, and they do not trust major institutions with their history. Each of these issues create a barrier in collecting and preserving more diverse historical materials from the LGBTQ community. With each exhibit, a point was made to include information about often excluded groups or individuals--women and people of color, for example--, even if representative materials were not present in the LGBTQ Archive. It was important to share what history was known, so that complete subsections of the LGBTQ community were not left out of an exhibit about them. With each exhibit, it became more and more clear that there was much work to be done in collecting and representing the history of this diverse community. The first steps in that process were to acknowledge the issue, and put in effort to represent as many diverse experiences as possible without archival materials, instead of simply saying the history does not exist. As an effort to remind people of the need for more diverse voices

in the LGBTQ Archive, members of both Special Collections and The Dallas Way mentioned, in their speeches at the reception events for these exhibits, the need for community members to preserve their own history, and the willingness for each organization to help in that effort.

Much of the information gathered on diverse groups and individuals not represented in the LGBTQ Archive was pulled from the *Dallas Voice*. Many women's organizations and organizations for people of color were listed within the calendar sections of the *Dallas Voice*, such as Men of All Colors Together and Dragonflies of Dallas, while others had stories written about them like the Flying W Motorcycle Club, Dallas' first lesbian motorcycle group founded in 1975. In some instances, present day representation of minority groups was needed, such as information about transgender women and the work being done for their rights in the Women in the LGBTQ Community exhibit. Some information on transgender women was gathered from the *Dallas Voice*, but additional information was gathered and supplied by The Dallas Way, including some documents and images to be used for display in the exhibit.

Though Special Collections was previously aware of the general lack of diversity within the LGBTQ Archive, the creation of these exhibits highlighted the vast absence of women, people of color and transgender people. Though it is not encouraging to realize these gaps, coming to these realizations has allowed Special Collections and The Dallas Way to begin developing plans to correct the issue. The Dallas Way has diversified its board in recent years, and these new younger members represent people of color and transgender people, and they are excited about tapping into their communities to find and preserve these areas of history that are not currently being collected. There are still other sections of the LGBTQ community that have not been reached, including the queer Spanish-speaking

community and LGBTQ people living in suburban or rural areas outside of Dallas. Special Collections has begun efforts to “Document the Now” as another strategy to create a more inclusive LGBTQ archive, and web archives have become an increasingly important way to document and preserve diverse community histories.

Programs and Reception

For the initial exhibit in 2017, the LGBT Employee Association of Dallas and The Dallas Way worked together to plan a one-hour reception on June 1, that included short speeches from Dallas LGBTQ City leaders and allies, including two individuals that were mentioned in the exhibit, Judge Barbara Rosenberg and former Dallas City Councilman Chris Luna. The speaker for Special Collections shared the importance of creating this exhibit, and explained that it is a representation of what is available in the LGBTQ Archive, and if any attendee did not see their experiences represented, then they needed to ensure that their history be saved, and Special Collections was there to help. This event also included the annual Pride Flag unveiling. Members from each of the groups involved in putting this exhibit and program together were asked to help unfurl the flag on the second-floor walkway, so that it could hang above the exhibit for the full month of June. Attendance for this inaugural exhibit reception was around 60 individuals with many people from the LGBTQ community attending. As attendees viewed the exhibit many commented that they remembered the events and the people in photos that they hadn’t seen in so long. They were excited to have been a part of this history being represented in Dallas City Hall.

The second exhibit reception in 2018 took on a more somber tone, because of the more serious theme of the exhibit. The Dallas LGBT Employee Association and The Dallas Way again worked together to

bring in speakers to talk about their experiences during the AIDS crisis in Dallas, with one speaker in particular leaving many in tears after sharing his personal experience battling HIV, the loss of his vision to the disease, and the loss of so many of his friends and loved ones along the way. Again, the speaker representing Special Collections explained to those present that if their experiences were not represented in the exhibit, then they need to take care to document and save that portion of history. Dallas Voice TV recorded the full program, which is available to view on their website (Dallas Voice 2018). Attendance at this reception increased from the previous year, with around 75 people. Again, the Pride Flag was unveiled above the exhibit to hang for the month of June.

For the third exhibit reception in 2019, Dallas Mayor Pro Tem Adam Medrano asked to incorporate the annual Pride Month proclamation and annual awards ceremony celebrating work being done in the Dallas LGBTQ community. The combination of these two events allowed for an increased attendance for both events, with about 150 individuals present. The event began with a moment of silence to honor the four black trans women that had recently been murdered in Dallas and ended with a speech by Dallas transgender rights advocate Shannon Walker (Fig. 3), who was represented in the exhibit.

Positive Outcomes

The work put into these exhibits has been completely worth the wonderful response and the benefits to the LGBTQ Archive and in developing relationships with the LGBTQ community. Though there were some challenges throughout the process of creating these exhibits, there is clearly a strong desire from the Dallas LGBTQ community to share their history with others and to support the efforts of Special Collections and The Dallas Way in preserving that history.

Through the creation of these exhibits, the authors have learned a great deal about Dallas LGBTQ history, as well as more detailed information about what is in the LGBTQ Archive. With such a vast array of materials, it is difficult to be familiar with the entire collection, but as Michael L. Taylor (2018) describes in his article “Special Collections Exhibitions: How They Pay Dividends for your Library,” one of the major benefits of creating exhibits is that it allows the creators to gain a greater familiarity with the collections, which in turn allows them to offer greater assistance in helping researchers of collections find the types of materials they are looking for. This has been true for the authors, as their work in researching and selecting display materials for the exhibits has allowed them to discover new and interesting materials in the collections, which could be pointed out to researchers hoping to find specific information within the collections on multiple occasions.

The idea of learning history through the creation of exhibits is one that has been of interest to Special Collections for a while now. There are clear benefits to having people develop a narrative from primary sources, and this type of project could be a good way to connect with students, faculty and community members. Special Collections has helped to implement two class projects around the creation of an exhibit utilizing collection materials, though they did not utilize the LGBTQ Archive. These projects utilized smaller collections with a much narrower scope, which seemed to work well for the classes of about fifteen students. If the scope of the exhibit and research was narrow enough, a similar exhibit creation project based on the LGBTQ Archive could be a worthwhile undertaking in helping to teach this history and share it with an audience. Special Collections has taken on similar projects with community members, and have found myriad complications, with one guest-curator of an exhibit abandoning the project with no notice, and refusing to respond to communications, leaving the authors to pick up the pieces. This is not to say that the authors

would not entertain the idea of a community-based exhibit project if the right situation presented itself.

Taylor (2018) notes that another major benefit of creating exhibits with archival materials is the creation and strengthening of relationships with community members and donors. This has been true with regards to the Dallas City Hall Pride Month exhibits as they have been a wonderful tool in creating connections within the Dallas LGBTQ community. The first new connection Special Collections made was with the group that initially reached out about creating these exhibits, the LGBT Employee Association of Dallas. After working with them on the first exhibit, there was no question about continuing to work with them to create additional exhibits, as they were a wonderful partner. Through them, Special Collections has also received numerous requests for information regarding the LGBTQ Archive, for displays, and information on happenings in the community.

Special Collections’ relationship with The Dallas Way has strengthened during these collaborations. Everyone from The Dallas Way has been enthusiastic about the opportunity to share their collections with the public. Previously this relationship was based primarily on bringing in new collections and creating project plans to have materials digitized. Getting the opportunity to truly create something from scratch together has given all involved a sense of accomplishment and visibility.

During the receptions for each of these exhibits, members of Special Collections met various individuals that have chosen to support the LGBTQ Archive by donating collection materials. Since the first exhibit display in 2017, eight new collections have been donated to the LGBTQ Archive through The Dallas Way including 22 oral history recordings. Accretions have been added to another four collections originally facilitated by The Dallas Way. Special Collections has

brought in an additional six collections independently and one accretion to an existing collection. Special Collections and The Dallas Way continue to build relationships with potential donors, and emphasize the fact that these materials may be utilized by researchers around the world, and will be used to showcase local history through exhibits like those displayed at Dallas City Hall.

Some new relationships have come out of requests for reuse of the exhibits. Many of these requests have come to Special Collections via the LGBT Employee Association of Dallas or The Dallas Way, as these two entities are more well known within the Dallas LGBTQ community.

The first request for reuse of the 2017 timeline exhibit was for the 30-year anniversary holiday party of the Dallas chapter of the Human Rights Campaign Federal Club. It was exciting to be able to give this exhibit a longer life after its display at Dallas City Hall, so there was no question of taking on this opportunity. The party took place in two large ballrooms on either side of a large atrium on the 40th floor of a building in downtown Dallas. Members of the Federal Club had movable walls that the Special Collections team set up in the atrium to display most of the wall panels, and a small display of artifacts was included, set up in two table-top display cases. About 200 guests attended the party and had the opportunity to view the display.

Employees at the Dallas Public Library Archives saw the 2017 exhibit when it was on display at Dallas City Hall and requested some archival materials to create visual interest for a display in their space for Pride Month 2018. The wall panels were suggested, but their space could not accommodate the size, so they opted for the three-dimensional objects instead. For this request, Special Collections provided a selection of materials used in the original display, along with the text of the exhibit that the Dallas Public Library Archives could use as needed.

There was even a request to reuse the AIDS related exhibit, which was a surprise because of its very specific and somber theme. The organization that requested it was the Dallas chapter of The Red Door Foundation, an HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention non-profit. The organization throws a large fundraising party each year, and the people requesting the exhibit mentioned that they wanted to help bring people's attention back to the roots of the organization and the party by sharing the history of the disease and all the work that had been done in Dallas to help during the crisis.

In 2019, the Oak Lawn Branch of the Dallas Public Library requested the panels of the 2017 timeline exhibit be displayed in their library for Pride Month. Oak Lawn is the Dallas gay neighborhood, and their library holds major collections of LGBTQ literature for their patrons to use. This was a great opportunity to have our exhibit available to a wide-ranging audience for an extended period. The library has a gallery rail system along many of the walls in the library, but because of a lack of hardware associated with this gallery rail system, only a portion of the exhibit could be installed. The timeline portion of the display was the main focus, in order to share the most information possible. The timeline was accompanied by a few images, with a few additional images hanging alone around the library where there was less vertical space available.

During this same time, The Dallas Way requested the use of the 2017 timeline exhibit panels for display at the 2019 Dallas Pride Parade at Fair Park. Because of the number of requests for this exhibit, Special Collections decided to reprint the panels so that multiple organizations could use it at once. Because 2019 was the 50th anniversary of the New York City Stonewall Riots, the Dallas Pride Parade was held in June for the first time in its existence, and it was partially televised live. The Dallas Way and the exhibit were part of that live broadcasting.

More requests for Pride Month displays have come into Special Collections than can be accommodated, since 2017. The size of the wall panels printed for the Dallas City Hall displays, however, has proven to be a problem. Since this exhibit was specifically created to fit the expansive wall space at Dallas City Hall, despite the panels being modular, many spaces cannot accommodate their size. For these instances, Special Collections created a set of shareable files including the text documents and high-resolution images used in the Dallas City Hall exhibits for organizations to create a display that works for their space.

Conclusion

The LGBTQ Archive at the University of North Texas is an important resource for teaching and research, however, it is also an equally important resource of community memory for the Dallas LGBTQ community. Exhibits have played a crucial role in the development of the LGBTQ Archive by providing a way for a non-scholarly audience to engage with these historical materials. The location of the exhibits at Dallas City Hall has been a symbolic victory for many LGBTQ people who felt politically disenfranchised within the city for many years. Archivists and curators working on these exhibits were sensitive to the many special considerations that LGBTQ history present, such as addressing the great strides of LGBTQ rights activists, while also addressing discrimination within the LGBTQ community itself. Although the exhibits draw from extensive archives of people and organizations, the curators also faced stark absences of women, people of color and transgender individuals. The continued demand for Pride Month exhibits, both at Dallas City Hall and from other local organizations and institutions, indicates that there are many in the community who are eager to create opportunities for education and engagement with LGBTQ history. Additionally, the archive

has benefited greatly from the positive publicity and personal connections made through the exhibits, and so Special Collections will continue to provide archival LGBTQ history displays to satisfy the demand.

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THE COMPASSIONATE WAY

Towards Trans and Non-Binary Inclusive Narratives in Museums

SQS
1-2/2020

95

Queer Mirror
Discussions

Dan Vo

ABSTRACT

Often associated with compassion and mercy, Avalokiteshvara Guanyin is a figure that can possess masculine and feminine attributes, as well as exist in a space both between and beyond genders. The successful dissemination of the bodhisattva among communities has always involved metamorphoses and the being can also provide a new, and yet also very ancient, perspective on transgender and non-binary narratives in a museum context. There is a special opportunity for collections to adopt inclusive practice and use this figure as a way to connect with transgender and non-binary people

ABSTRAKTI

Avalokiteshvara Guanyin, joka yhdistetään usein myötätuntoon ja armollisuuteen, voi ilmentyä niin maskuliinisena kuin feminiinisenäkin hahmona ja ottaa paikkansa niin sukupuolten välissä kuin niiden tuolla puolenkin. Tämän muuntautumiskykyisen valaistuneen olennon tuleminen osaksi eri yhteisöjä voi tarjota museoille uuden, mutta samalla myös muinaisen näkökulman trans- ja muunsukupuolisiin narratiivihin. Näin se tarjoaa kokoelmille erityisen mahdollisuuden mukaan ottaviin käytäntöihin ja tavan luoda yhteyden trans- ja muunsukupuolisiin henkilöihin.

As I gazed up at the serene face, with heavily lidded eyes, without even looking at the label I knew who I was in the presence of. Wearing a five-pointed crown, delicately patterned robes, and holding up their right hand with incredibly well-detailed fingertips in a noble gesture, I could see the fifteenth century sculpture retained just enough flecks of bronze gilding to suggest how glorious it may once have been as a sacred object of reverence in a Buddhist temple in the Wutai Mountains of Shanxi in China. [Fig. 1.]



Fig 1. Avalokiteshvara Guanyin (15th century China) at Amgueddfa Genedlaethol Caerdydd National Museum Cardiff. Photo: Dan Vo.

Dan
Vo

Standing in a sumptuously red-painted gallery in Amgueddfa Genedlaethol Caerdydd National Museum Cardiff, the figure of Avalokiteshvara Guanyin, the Buddhist bodhisattva associated with mercy and compassion, has been an unexpected connection in my ongoing work in developing LGBTQ+ tours in Cardiff, with the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. It was unexpected, because despite being very familiar with the icon throughout much of my childhood, there were aspects of the story which were not known to me until more recently. Growing up I was aware of the deity as a favourite of the hundreds of thousands of grateful refugee Vietnamese ‘boat people’ who had traversed watery horizons in search of a new home. Called Quan Am in Vietnamese, it was believed the being provided devotees safe passage from the perils of the sea, and the icon was often seen in local temples and domestic altars.

It wasn't until 2016 in the booklet *Out In Oxford*, which presented a trail of LGBTQ+ treasures across the University of Oxford's collections, that the potential for Avalokiteshvara Guanyin to provide a new, and yet also very ancient, perspective on transgender and non-binary narratives in a museum context was revealed to me. G R Mills described the seated figure of the bodhisattva in the Ashmolean Museum as an icon that was in a “transitional phase in the transformation of the male form of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara into the Chinese female deity Guanyin” (Ashmolean Museum. <https://www.glam.ox.ac.uk/out-in-oxford-ashmolean-museum>). This referred to the centuries-long trek that the figure took, initially from the first century in India as Avalokiteshvara, crossing the Himalayas and arriving in China by the third century (Bailey 2009). During their journey the deity became “increasingly androgynous, incorporating both male and female characteristics”. By the twelfth century in China the icon was almost entirely represented as the familiarly white robed Guanyin, the “one who hears the cries of the world” (Ashmolean Museum. <https://www.glam.ox.ac.uk/out-in-oxford-ashmolean-museum>). As the figure

moved further east into Korea, Japan and Vietnam, it also metamorphosed in ways that allowed the icon to fit within the needs of the receiving people: the successful dissemination of the bodhisattva into new communities required localisation and multiple transformations. The deity evolved into whatever form devotees needed most, and in museums today depictions might be called Avalokiteshvara or Guanyin, but may also be given the composite name Avalokiteshvara Guanyin.

In various places the gender fluidity was interpreted in different ways. For example, in the Vietnamese musical theatre Hat Cheo tradition, a morality tale dating from around the tenth century explains how an individual who bore much suffering throughout their life with boundless compassion became Quan Am Thi Kinh, the embodiment of Avalokiteshvara (Pham 2014). The play begins with Thi Kinh as a terribly wronged wife, who wanted to escape into a life of prayer, but could not because at the time it was considered the sole province of men. Thi Kinh assumed a male identity and became a monk, yet later in the story they are falsely accused of fathering a child with a local young woman. Even though their innocence could be proven through a biological defense, Thi Kinh maintains their male identity and instead accepts responsibility (Dharma Talk: Liberating Our Hearts - Practicing with the Paramita of Inclusiveness. #29 Summer 2001. <https://www.mindfulnessbell.org/archive/2015/12/dharma-talk-liberating-our-hearts-practicing-with-the-paramita-of-inclusiveness-2>). With this old folktale of Thi Kinh, we have an ancient tale which seems to deftly distinguish between gender roles and biological sex, while having a protagonist that challenges gender norms. Given the era in which the tale became popular, it is tantalising to consider the implications for the ancient audience. [Fig. 2.]

It is perhaps easier to assess the impact of such a story on contemporary transgender and non-binary people. I try to be careful when using pronouns

to describe Guanyin, and I know I am not the only one to agonise over what might otherwise seem like a casual use of ‘he / him / his’ or ‘she / her / hers’. In the T.T. Tsui gallery at the V&A, which exhibits Chinese objects from the museum’s vast collection, there are quite a few representations of Avalokiteshvara Guanyin. In one particular cabinet, the label for a grand sculpture with faded paint, dated between the fourteenth and sixteenth, explains, “she stands upright on a lotus” (Guanyin. Victoria & Albert collections. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O493331/guanyin-figure-of-guanyin-unknown/>). In an adjacent cabinet, there is a magnificent seated figure which, like the aforementioned one in Cardiff, also hails from Shanxi Province in China. This one is older, though, dating to around the thirteenth century. The bodhisattva adopts a position of calm repose called “royal ease”, with the right knee bent and the right arm resting on it. The accompanying label uses the pronoun “he”, though the online description does also include a reference to finely carved “faintly feminine features” (Guanyin. Victoria & Albert collections. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O72412/guanyin-figure-of-guanyin-unknown/>). [Fig. 3.]

On LGBTQ+ tours when I take people to these two sacred figures, I ask visitors to look carefully at the faces, the poses, the gestures, the slightly varied forms of dress. I ask them, “what do you think is masculine or feminine? At what stage of transition or androgenisation do you feel the figure is at?” After a short pause for reflection I then add, “as you consider these visual references, also ask yourself if it at all matters? Perhaps we should instead ask how you feel in their presence.” Indeed, gender is said by some to be unimportant in attaining enlightenment, and attempting to hold onto binary positions may be unhelpful on such a journey. For me it also recalls a distant childhood memory, from when I was too young to understand the nuances of adult discussion and I overheard family members appraising the feminine and masculine attributes of the wood carved bodhisattva that lived on our family altar, ultimately with no resolution or judgement made. I believe this links with what author AKE at the Ashmolean Museum said on the matter, “in Mahayana Buddhism, physicality of gender is considered a delusion of the unenlightened”. Indeed, a person of any gender may achieve enlightenment (Chennery 2015). When examining images of Avalokiteshvara Guanyin it may be therefore a folly to weigh up its maleness or femaleness, instead it may be more useful to consider the figure’s “transcendence beyond gender” (Ashmolean Museum. <https://www.glam.ox.ac.uk/out-in-oxford-ashmolean-museum>).



Fig 2. Female Guanyin (around 14–15th century China) at V&A.
Fig 3. Male Guanyin (13th century China) at V&A. Photos: Dan Vo.

It is Avalokiteshvara Guanyin's unsettled gender fluidity that has led to an increased interest in the icon's role among transgender and non-binary communities. As a figure that can possess masculine and feminine attributes, as well as exist in a space both between and beyond genders, there is a logic to the association between Avalokiteshvara Guanyin and those who have a gender identity that is not that the sex assigned to them at birth, as well as those who identify as genderqueer, non-binary, agender, or somewhere along or even outside of the gender spectrum (Human Rights Campaign: Understanding the Transgender Community. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/understanding-the-transgender-community>). Professor of Gender and Women's Studies at Western Michigan University, Cathryn Bailey, in her weighty treatise *Embracing the Icon: The Feminist Potential of the Trans Bodhisattva*, described Avalokiteshvara Guanyin's shifting gender and the way in which the figure "slips past male / female binary" as something that "startles, intrigues, and comforts, depending on one's circumstances" (Bailey 2009). In a museum context this icon of compassion also provides an opportunity for engagement with the diverse transgender and non-binary communities. [Fig. 4.]

For Laura Bauld, Project Curator at the Burrell Collection, the exploration of the transgender and non-binary narrative of the deity has allowed "inclusion through integration" (Bauld 2018). Prioritising the telling of the often hidden or underappreciated LGBTQ+ history of museum objects, through an ongoing collaborative partnership with Glasgow's LGBT Health and Wellbeing's T-Time group, trans and non-binary individuals have helped guide the museum's interpretation and reinforced the notion of Avalokiteshvara Guanyin, through their eyes, as a "transgender icon" (Bauld 2018). There is meaningful power behind Bauld's method of including often marginalised voices and raising them up to a level equal to that of the museum curator. Bailey put it succinctly, by saying, "part of what it means for a people to construct an identity is to construct a history, some sort of



Fig 4. Avalokiteshvara (14th century Nepal) at V&A. Photo: Dan Vo.

cultural memory, the inclusion of a figure like (Avalokiteshvara Guanyin) as trans icon is especially important” (Bauld 2018).

It is clear that transgender and non-binary people are included in some of the most vulnerable and at risk minority groups. In this context, it might be said that museum activities that support and engage with transgender and non-binary communities have real urgency. Museums have a responsibility in shaping community and culture, and challenging intolerance and prejudice (Museums Association: Museum Manifesto for Tolerance and Inclusion. <https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1214164>).

Recently, my work with the volunteer team of guides who lead the LGBTQ+ Tour at the V&A has led to an adoption of a values-led approach to training and recruitment, as well as the reinforcement of our affirmative practices to be more inclusive. We make it clear we proudly support transgender and non-binary people. At the start of each meeting we acknowledge that we have marginalised voices missing from the table, and commit ourselves to making it possible for them to join. This may include people of colour, those from working class backgrounds, disabled people, as well as people from a diversity of religious and cultural beliefs. While we do have transgender and non-binary colleagues, we would always encourage more to join. [Fig. 5.]

Having a more diverse team means the objects that we interpret and present will be more varied, and we would therefore better represent our audience. It is a sensible approach in our goal to show the existence of LGBTQ+ people throughout time, place and culture. Furthermore, as museum workers, in taking this stance, it is not just a fulfilment of our public duty to uphold the tenets of the Equality Act 2010, which provides a range of legal protections to transgender people in the UK, but also a true act of human compassion. Much of my own values-led work has stemmed from a long standing relationship with LGBT+ History Month. Initiated



Fig 5. Guanyin (14th century China) at Fitzwilliam Museum. Photo: Dan Vo.

in the UK in 2015 by Sue Sanders and Paul Patrick, each year museums around the country mark February with relevant LGBTQ+ themed public programming (Barr 2019). Since 2015 I have been involved initially as a volunteer, then also as a lecturer, and more recently as a patron. In a museum context I develop LGBTQ+ tours and programming: Amgueddfa Genedlaethol Caerdydd National Museum Cardiff, Gunnersbury Park Museum, National Gallery, Imperial War Museum, Queer Britain, Tate Britain, University of Cambridge Museums, and others. It is at the heart of my work as the project leader for the UK Queer Heritage and Collections Network founded by English Heritage, Historic England, Historic Royal Palaces, the National Trust and the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries at the University of Leicester. [Fig. 6.]



Fig 6. Guanyin (17th century China) beside Meeting by Su Xianzhong (2018) at V&A. Photo: Dan Vo.

In 2020 for International Transgender Day of Visibility on March 31 Amgueddfa Genedlaethol Caerdydd National Museum Cardiff posted a video with an image of the Avalokiteshvara Guanyin from the collection with the statement, “Avalokiteshvara Guanyin helps explain the diverse understanding of gender and sexuality many ancient communities had” (Amgueddfa Genedlaethol Caerdydd National Museum Cardiff. 2020. “Today is Trans Visibility Day”. Twitter, March 31, 2020. https://twitter.com/Museum_Cardiff/status/1244995159709843457?s=20). Indeed, for transgender activist Pauline Park, Avalokiteshvara Guanyin is part of a long roll call of Asian mythological and legendary narratives that involves

the sexual transformation of individuals she calls “proto-transgenderal”: those who may be considered transgender centuries before the term was used (Park 2011). It can be suggested such narratives were suppressed, obscured or obliterated following the period of colonial contact and still even potentially difficult in a supposedly post-colonial world. Yet, the act of decolonisation in a museum context is now a possibility, and the understanding and sharing of stories of difference and diversity, alongside stories of unity and inclusion is essential. For our transgender and non-binary visitors coming to see Avalokiteshvara Guanyin, as Park so eloquently puts it, “it is fitting that mercy should be the province of transgendered people, because of the power of the transformation teaches compassion to the transformed” (Park 2013).

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ALVIN BALDROP

Queer Photography as a ‘Counter Practice’ in the Archive

Leslie Wooden

ABSTRACT

Alvin Alvin Baltrop (1948–2004), a queer African-American male, was a Bronx-born photographer who persistently documented men, women, and trans people on New York City’s Hudson River piers from 1975 through 1986. This essay considers Baltrop in the category of contemporary post-black queer artists. I examine the importance of Baltrop’s works through the archival concepts of value, representation, and provenance. I argue that Baltrop’s artistic practice is what scholar Brent Hayes Edwards recounts as a black practice of the archive, or, a counter-practice, formed by a desire to contend the particular way that the art world portrayed queer histories in the late-twentieth century.

ABSTRAKTI

Bronxissa syntynyt afroamerikkalainen queer-mies Alvin Baltrop (1948–2004) oli valokuvaaja, joka määrätietoisesti kuvasi miehiä, naisia ja transihmisiä New Yorkin Hudson-joen rantamilla vuosien 1975–1986 aikana. Rinnastan Baltropin nykypäivän ”post-black”-taiteilijoihin ja tutkin hänen työnsä merkitystä arkistotutkimuksesta tuttujen arvon, representaation ja provenienssin käsitteiden kautta. Baltropin taiteellista toimintaa voi kuvata tutkija Brent Hayes Edwardsin sanoin arkiston ”mustaksi” käytännöksi tai vastakäytännöksi, joka pohjaa haluun haastaa se tapa, jolla taidemaailma kuvasi queer-historiaa 1900-luvun loppupuolella.

Introduction

In the late 1990’s, the term ‘post-black’ was coined by curator Thelma Golden and multi-media artist Glenn Ligon “[to name] a new generation of African-American artists, who [...] were adamant about not being labeled as “black” artists, though their work was [...] deeply interested in redefining complex notions of blackness” (Copeland 2010, 78). In the early 1970’s, prior to artists such as photographer Lyle Ashton Harris, documentarian Marlon Riggs, and multi-media artists Glenn Ligon, and Iké Udé – who explored themes related to gender and sexual discrimination in the 1980’s and 1990’s – Alvin Baltrop’s work was informed by sexual politics (Murray 2016, 26).

As a queer African-American male photographer, Baltrop persistently documented men, women, and trans people, on New York City’s piers located on the Hudson River from 1975 through 1986 (Crimp 2008). Inspired by personal experiences and the surrounding unstable social and political climate, he contested demeaning and objectifying representations of homosexuality, and amended the erasure of queer people of color in late twentieth-century visual art.

SQS
1–2/2020

102

Queer Mirror
Discussions

Leslie
Wooden

Baltrop's work was dismissed by galleries and museums for decades. Scholar Brent Hayes Edwards explains, "the archive, as an institution and as a 'social construct,' seems to enact a foundational violence: the constitutive definition of blackness in terms of dispossession" (Edwards 2019, 1). His obscure trajectory exposes the prevalent obstacles, such as inadequate exposure, representation, and funding, that many African-American artists face in the art industry (Crimp 2008). Even so, Baltrop countered the absence of people of color in contemporary art by meticulously recording, cataloging, and protecting images that now permeate the art historical canon.

Accordingly, this essay examines Baltrop's works that portray diversity, pleasure, sexual and artistic experimentation, and destruction in Manhattan's queer community in the 1970's and 1980's. Drawing upon 'post-blackness,' I consider Baltrop in the discussion around contemporary artists such as Glenn Ligon, Kehinde Wiley, Mickalene Thomas, and Kalup Linzy, whom art historian Derek Conrad Murray examines as post-black queers (Murray 2016, 14, 29). Examining the importance of Baltrop's works through the archival concepts of value, representation, and provenance, I align his artistic practice with other well-known photographers who also documented Manhattan's underground gay scene in the late-twentieth century.

Lower West Side Waterfront

Alvin Baltrop was born in the Bronx, New York in 1948. Yashica twin-lens reflex camera in hand, Baltrop started photography as a teenager and continued while serving in the Vietnam War as a Navy sailor and medic from 1969 through 1972. He studied at the School of Visual Arts New York City in Manhattan, New York from 1972 through 1975, following an honorable discharge from the Navy. As a student, Baltrop began shooting

sunbathers, creatives, voyeurs, illegal drug users, and sex workers who frequented the abandoned warehouses located on the Lower West Side piers. He worked temporarily as a cab driver and eventually a self-employed mover for the financial support and a flexible schedule that permitted more time at the piers north of Christopher Street (Oliver 2013, 67; Crimp 2008). Baltrop may have been drawn to the waterfront by his experiences as a Navy serviceman documenting the daily routines of sailors at sea. In the preface to an unfinished collection, the artist wrote:

Although initially terrified of the piers I began to take these photographs as a voyeur [and] soon grew determined to preserve the frightening, mad, unbelievable, violent and beautiful things that were going on at that time. To get certain shots, I hung from the ceilings of several warehouses utilizing a makeshift harness, watching and waiting for hours to record the lives that these people led (friends, acquaintances, and strangers) and the unfortunate ends that they sometimes met. [...] The rapid emergence and expansion of [AIDS] in the 1980s further reduced the number of people going to and living at the piers, and the sporadic joys that could be found there. (Crimp 2008.)

Baltrop captured exceptional and audacious images of Manhattan's unpredictable gay sub-culture in the 1970's and 1980's. Determined to preserve ephemeral happenings on the piers, the photographer practiced as a spectator who carefully observed transient occupiers and commonly avoided self-portraiture, with the exception of works such as *Untitled* (1966–1967), which portrays Baltrop in the nude and in a private domestic space, posing from behind with a towel hung from one shoulder (Oliver 2013, 67). Other queer artists such as David Wojnarowicz, Peter Hujar, Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Robert Mapplethorpe, Nan Goldin, Lenard Fink, and Miron Zownir also documented the underground gay scene from the 1970's through the 1990's – some who were also personally affected

by the AIDS epidemic that surfaced in 1981. Baltrop's photographs are compelling because they communicate particular stories about queer people, especially those that precede the epidemic.

The desolate Lower West Side waterfront emerged as a territory for gay cruising following an economic decline in the mid-1950's and changes in transportation, the labor force, and migration in the 1960's (Anderson 2019, 1–2). This new playground provided spaces for anonymous sexual exchanges that were also targeted with violence and homophobic attacks (Anderson 2019, 3). Baltrop explained, “[t]he casual sex and nonchalant narcotizing, the creation of artwork and music, sunbathing, dancing, merrymaking, and the like habitually gave way to muggings, callous yet detached violence, rape, suicide, and, in some instances, murder” (Crimp 2008). Although many gay venues in or nearby Greenwich Village provided some protection for homosexual and transgender groups from authorities, these venues were also discriminatory as they restricted entry to specific groups based on skin color and gender (Anderson 2019, 24). Policing same-sex cruising in public subway stations, bathrooms, and parks, and the repeated raids of venues by authorities relocated cruising to the waterfront in the 1970's (Anderson 2019, 2–3). Consequently, the waterfront became a complicated place of opportunity, pleasure, vulnerability, and threat that attracted regular people and creatives alike (Anderson 2019, 3–4).

In contrast to Polish-American artist David Wojnarowicz, whose liberated experiences on the piers from the late 1970's through the early 1990's inspired works like *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978–1979) (Carr 2012, 131), Baltrop's experiences as a Black gay male influenced a practice that was sometimes restricting and onerous (Oliver 2013, 66; Bessa 2020, 55). The

photographer covertly zoomed in on other people, indicating the fashion in which some groups, especially people of color and women, cautiously roamed the waterfront because they were not equally uninhibited in gay spaces, either public or private.

Architectural destruction is the subject and backdrop in many photographs taken by Baltrop and American photographer Peter Hujar. In *Pier 52 (four people sunbathing near Gordon Matta-Clark's Days End)* (1975–1986) Baltrop captures four African-American and White or Latinx men partially nude and sunbathing on a wooden shipping dock with the Hudson River below. [Fig. 1.] Because the intimate scene is photographed from a



Fig. 1. Alvin Baltrop: *Pier 52 (four people sunbathing near Gordon Matta-Clark's Days End)*, 1975–1986. Photo Credit: Courtesy Alvin Baltrop Trust, Galerie Bucholz, and Third Streaming LLC.

distance, the men are relatively miniature, and the abandoned warehouse in the background surrounds the men like a protective wall. The small figures among architectural disarray are described by art curator Antonio Sergio Bessa as Baltrop's "trademark compositional style" (Bessa 2020, 55). Previously operated for the purpose of industrial labor, the structure resembles an enclave or exclusive resort. Both artists discovered beauty in the disintegration. In many works by Hujar like *Pier - Four Doors* (1981), the queer body is absent. Baltrop's images of interior and exterior spaces, however, broadly combine the ruin with people whose lives and pleasure are grounded in this world. As explained by art historian Joan Kee:

defiance of property norms resulted in the production of spaces that a vilified queer community used in nonnormative and nonpejorative ways. As chronicled so eloquently by the photographer Alvin Baltrop, the pier looks less like a forbidden no-man's-land and more like a domestic space (Kee 2019, 118).

An opposition to normative spaces that allowed gay men to congregate freely, Baltrop's *The Piers (River Rats III)* (1972–1975) captures two African-American men posed in the nude and sitting in a composed manner on stacked wood, with one man wearing reading glasses and colored socks. [Fig. 2.] Glaring sunlight is apparent by the posterior shadows on their bodies, and in their squinting eyes as they stare into the distance. Because the men are sitting in close proximity, unclothed, and "cool," with their vision compromised by the sun, the scene was perhaps staged by the artist. It's not possible to know if the men are conscious of the camera or passersby. Either way, this composition transforms the public space into a private one.

Contrary to American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe's controversial work *Black Book* (1986) that published exploitative images of Black men, and on a par with *Untitled (Techniques of Ecstasy)* (1986–87) by

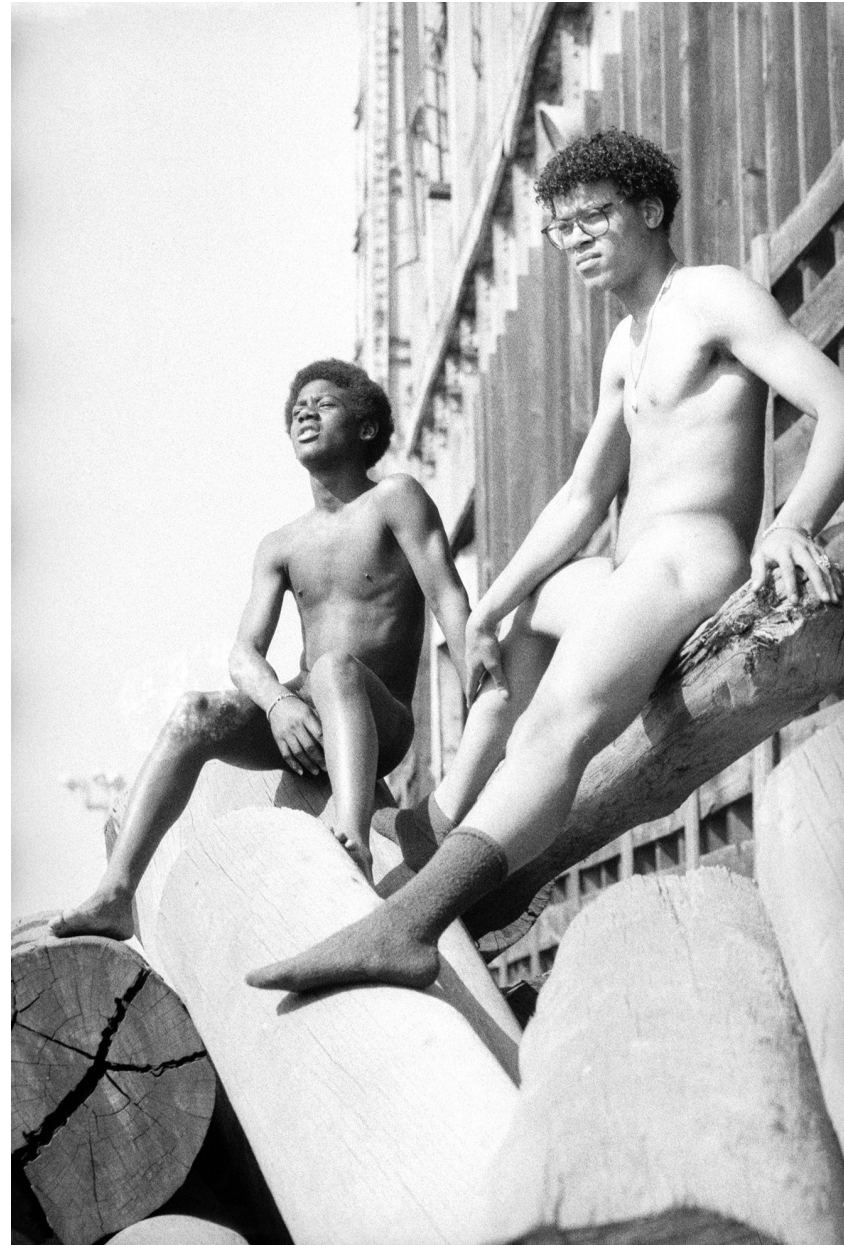


Fig 2. Alvin Baltrop: *The Piers (River Rats III)*, 1972–1975. Photo Credit: Courtesy Alvin Baltrop Trust, Galerie Bucholz, and Third Streaming LLC.

Nigerian-British photographer Rotimi Fani-Kayode or *Femme Piquee par un Serpent* (2008) by American painter Kehinde Wiley, Baltrop's works depict Black men as desired subjects as opposed to objects of ethnographic study (Bourland 2019, 4; Enwezor 2009, 218; Murray 2016, 108). They encourage the viewer to discover "a voyeuristic pleasure in its spectacle and to contemplate the intimacy and eroticism of black masculinity" (Murray 2016, 109).

Archiving the Black Practice or the 'Counter Archive' as Value

How do the concepts of value, provenance, and representation used in archival studies work when taking into account Baltrop's presence within 'the archive'? Scholar Michelle Caswell explains, "like 'evidence,' 'value' exists for someone in a particular place at a particular time" (Caswell 2016, 7). Archivists determine value by appraising collections based on their evaluations, selected according to their abiding value proposed to a repository. Not accessed monetarily, but by their relationship to history, and contribution to current and the future generations (Caswell 2016, 7).

Archives are socially constructed spaces of power that include the stories of some and exclude the stories of others (Schwartz and Cook 2002, 3; Carter 2006, 216). Accordingly, archivists have the power to select materials based on personal discretion, constructing historical and social memory (Caswell 2016, 7; Cook 2006, 170). Materials created or collected by Black queer people have been doubly devalued in archival appraisal because their identity resides in a racial and sexual intersection that traditional archival practice has not valued, or has found threatening, and thus not kept.

Baltrop's personal experience with rejection impelled an unconventional practice or "black practice of the archive" (Oliver 2013, 66; Edwards 2019, 1). Scholar Brent Hayes Edwards explains:

It should be apparent that such a black practice of the archive must be understood as necessarily a sort of *counter-practice* [...]. To call it *counter* is to say that it is shaped by an ambition to contest the particular way that the archive constructs and authorizes knowledge about the past (Edwards 2019, 2, 4).¹

Like Edwards, I am not using the term counter-practice to consider Baltrop's archive contrary to, or a substitute for, the canonic archive. Rather, I am using the term counter to describe Baltrop's archive, which is embedded in blackness and entangled in intersectionality and queerness, and was created with an equivalent objective to "authoritative documentation, classification, and preservation" (Edwards 2019, 3–4).

Following a cancer diagnosis in the late 1990's, Baltrop worked on a publication of his photographs (Crimp 2008). This practice was executed with the intention to redress the art worlds' exclusionary methods, in particular, the way contemporary images of Black queer bodies photographed by African-American artists were rarely collected and exhibited in the late twentieth-century. Today, Baltrop's archive reinforces Black queer histories, and accounts for Black queer representations as they circulate in the contemporary art world now, and in the future (Edwards 2019, 2).

Archiving Queer Black Representation

In the late 1970's, Baltrop sought to exhibit alternative representations of blackness in galleries around the city, yet his photographs received little interest from galleries, even those that exhibited homoerotic art, and were rarely shown to the public. In 1977, the Glines (a non-profit organization

¹ Emphasis in original.

that supported gay-themed art) was one of the only art spaces that agreed to show Baltrop's work in a solo exhibition (Crimp 2008). Murray also explains:

post-black is not about post-racialism. It is on the contrary a term that signifies a desire to question constructions of African-American identity that negate forms of difference, particularly the subjectivities of women and those who are queerly identified. For many in the African-American community, the visual and ideological emblems of normative blackness have not spoken to the complexities of their experience. (Murray 2016, 2–3).

Through the concept of representation, the subjects of collections are described by archivists, producing descriptive points of entry, stored in collections for researchers. However, a researchers' accessibility to collections is dependent on the accuracy of those points that support the material's subjects or 'aboutness,' in which archivists maintain physical and intellectual authority (Caswell 2016, 8). Archival description is inherently subjective, so researchers may access collections that may not be described correctly (Jimerson 2007, 278; Caswell 2016, 8). Because the vernacular associated with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) communities is constantly evolving, a continuous collaborative process between archivists and the public, or community members which these collections describe, is required to ensure proper interpretation (Caswell 2016, 9).

Oftentimes, same-sex or sexually ambiguous materials are omitted, selectively disclosed or exhibited to the public, or obscured because they are problematic for some archivists to comprehend. However, an intentional approach to preserving material that is indefinable is described by Edwards as a "queer practice of the archive" (Edwards 2012, 970). I argue that Baltrop's practice was also queer. Not because he was a queer

artist, or observed or participated in same-gender sexual behavior, but because he recorded, catalogued, and protected images of people in peculiar places and in circumstances that are not easily interpreted, explained, or categorized (Edwards 2012, 970).

In the decade following an *Artforum* article about Baltrop's life and work published by art historian and critic Douglas Crimp in 2008, a number of galleries and museums featured the photographer's work in temporary exhibitions (Bronx Museum of the Arts, n.d.). Now recognized in the international art world, Baltrop's photographic images are housed in private and permanent collections and reproduced in several publications.

Archiving Ethnicity as a Form of Provenance

Through the concept of provenance, archivists search for the source, origin, and/or possession of an item or collection (Caswell 2016, 5–6). Scholars such as Joel Wurl, have suggested community-based structures like 'ethnicity' as a form of provenance, to preclude erroneous and destructive presumptions about ethnic identities and community experiences (Caswell 2016, 6; Wurl 2005, 69). As Baltrop's archive becomes more dispersed throughout repositories for international audiences, grounding ethnicity as provenance would situate it as a starting point for researchers interpreting his work, considered beyond a mere "theme" for categorization Wurl 2005, 69).

Many collections are distorted to compose particular ideologies that ignore existences and histories outside the boundaries of whiteness and masculinity (Caswell 2016, 9; Brown 2020, 30). While the growing attention on Baltrop's work is commendable, many art scholars, critics, and curators have not decoded the cultural language rooted his work. When archivists leave out the "ethnic dimension" of subjects in the 'aboutness'

of collections, researchers are incapable of accessing those collections for valuable information regarding specific communities, which in turn, marginalizes their existences in history (Caswell 2016, 8; Wurl 2005, 69).

Conclusion

Baltrop's gritty, provocative, and appealing images of people participating in explicit sexual content, relaxing, sunbathing, and reading, among other things represent the gender, sexual, racial/ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of the piers' sub-cultures in the 1970's and 1980's. His practice succeeded an ethnographic shift in contemporary art since the early 1960's (Foster 1996, 172, 184). Yearning to understand the existences of queer people through photographs that "resemble the material collected by an anthropologist rather than objects of fetish," by compulsively observing the piers as a form of site-specific art; where conditions like desire, addiction, AIDS, prostitution, leisure, violence, and poverty, and pleasure laid out sites for art (Bessa 2020, 56; Foster 1996, 184–185).

Throughout this essay, I have considered the archival concepts of value, representation, and provenance to examine Baltrop's archive within the nuances of post-blackness. Baltrop's experiences as a queer African-American male photographer prompted an artistic originality that exposed the beautiful and ugly realities of the piers. Creating not merely queer photography, but photography that commanded the viewer to closely consider the dismantlement of normative African-American identity (Murray 2016, 9).

Like 'the archive,' blackness is composed of many assemblages and narratives (Edwards 2019, 4). Baltrop sought to "escape the limitations imposed by race" (Murray 2016, 25). Moreover, his existence as "the artist and the other" allowed for unrestricted access to the Black queer

community (Foster 1996, 173). Consciously documenting their existences to capture them beautifully, even amongst the debris, to challenge gender and sexual stereotypes – which distinguishes Baltrop from other queer artists in the 1970's and 1980's.

Baltrop's career lays bare the biases in art history and archival science. The now grainy images in his archive demonstrate today's technological advances, yet, are also reminders that social stigma and discrimination continues to be experienced by queer people and people of color. Baltrop's archive continues for the purpose of inclusion and visibility, for people who are misrepresented, ignored, forgotten, and silenced (Opotow and Belmonte 2016, 447). Fundamentally, Baltrop created a Black queered visual chronicle of personal experiences and memories, and a message for equality that if given the opportunity early on, and without prejudice—could have been valued and communicated to the world during his lifetime.

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THE SPACE BETWEEN THE LINES IS NOT NEUTRAL

Pedagogical Labour in Failing Institutions

Jemina Lindholm and Kaura Raudaskoski

ABSTRACT

In this essay we analyze the current status quo of art and cultural institutions in relation to social justice, and how the question of change is inherently pedagogical in nature. Throughout the text, we highlight the need for various feminist pedagogical approaches and nuanced methods that are pivotal in learning, unlearning and dismantling oppressive structures within institutions. We discuss failure as an inevitable dimension of transformative learning and contemplate different pedagogical approaches to disrupting oppression both on institutional and individual level. We do that by addressing the various silences that perpetuate the status quo, and finally ask what it means for art and cultural institutions to become accountable.

ABSTRAKTI

Tässä esseessä analysoimme taide- ja kulttuuri-instituutioiden nykytilaa suhteessa sosiaaliseen oikeudenmukaisuuteen ja sitä, miten muutokseen liittyvät kysymykset ovat perusluonteeltaan pedagogisia. Tekstissä korostamme tarvetta erilaisille feministisen pedagogiikan lähestymistavoille ja sensitiivisille menetelmille, jotka ovat keskeisiä oppimisessa, (pois)oppimisessa ja instituutioiden sortavien rakenteiden purkamisessa.

People acknowledgement:¹

We want to publicly acknowledge that the State of Finland exists partly on Sápmi, the lands of the Sámi people. We pay our respects and show our support to the Sámi people as the indigenous inhabitants of the Sápmi, and we recognize their rights as an indigenous people. We recognise and respect their sovereignty, their culture, their stewardship, and their continuing contribution to the life of this state.

Failing as an institution

Working in various positions with and within art and cultural institutions in Finland – from working as freelance educators and pedagogues, to working on a monthly salary on projects or in public programs in general, to working as outsourced trainers in social justice and feminist pedagogy in different contexts – we have witnessed that public institutions strive to embrace content involving marginalized people and their experiences

¹ This acknowledgement is a tentative example on how to recognize Finnish colonialism while working in Southern Finland, and it has been drafted in collaboration with a group of Sámi cultural workers.

SQS
1–2/2020

110

Queer Mirror
Discussions

Jemina
Lindholm
and
Kaura
Raudaskoski

as well as initiatives for social justice. The interest is simultaneously very welcome and needed, but it also entails pitfalls that we all should pay close attention to.

The trend to include marginalized perspectives as a subject matter but not as sustainable and transformative practices indicates a mere charitable interest towards these topics or communities, and is simply not enough to actualize changes. The value of such content is too often only regarded as a sign of diversity and progress of a certain institution, which also means that too often public programs that include these perspectives remain as superimposed mentions or annual special happenings during Pride Month or other campaigns. Without actual change and widespread dismantling of the hurtful power structures, this embracing may in reality further assimilation, tokenism and commodification — a fact repeatedly voiced by marginalized communities (Liu 2018, 12–27).

Working in these institutions as queer or crip humans feels contradictory: we are both disappointed and hopeful at the same time. Disappointed that enhancing social justice in these institutions seems to be very slow and often an unfamiliar idea to others working in the same institutions; and hopeful as these institutions still have the potential to work as sites for generating more just practices and as spaces for conversations and societal change.

Even though we are inherently entangled with and navigate these issues from our multiple positions, we have to admit that it is hard to recognize or locate the reasons why social justice and enhancing marginalized voices seem to be something that most institutions are rooting for but, at the same time, fail to take necessary actions. These contradictions seem to be thoroughly pedagogical as they involve questions of learning social justice, learning intersectional feminism, and unlearning oppression.

In the light of the insufficient efforts of the institutions to dismantle inherent oppression and the subsequent commodification of marginalized identities, we want to bring forth the failure of social justice advancement in arts and cultural institutions. In our experience, this failure is currently the status quo in the institutional environment in Finland. Arts and cultural institutions seemingly aim at just practices and diverse programming, but continuously thus failing at taking the necessary last steps in really listening to people they are trying to engage, fail at operating responsibly or being accountable when being in the wrong or making mistakes.

We also need to point out that we are constantly failing as well: failing as (freelance) pedagogues, failing as workers, failing as parts of institutions to engage in feminist work although we are feminists. Why is this, and why is it so hard to be a feminist in an institution? Why are so many feminists overwhelmingly tired, worn out, or “closeted” as feminists at their workplaces? One possible answer is that this kind of failure is in reality not about the individual failing to follow their own values but rather the institution failing us in not providing emotional, moral, ethical and strategic support or in not carrying out the necessary changes to accommodate social justice. In our experience, almost all of the structural social justice initiatives are done by freelance and part-time workers with poor terms and conditions of employment, and this work is overwhelmingly often unpaid. This indeed reminds of the queer and crip aspects of failure (Halberstam 2011; Mitchell and Snyder 2016, 37–53; Oakley 2018, 6–11), which regard failure as an inevitable necessity in an oppressive and socially exclusive environments, where no other option than to fail is open for those who wish to change things or remain as unmolded as possible by cis-heteronormativity, ableism, racism, or other oppressive hegemonies. In a failing institution, these oppressive traditions live on and thrive as there are few supporting structures for efforts to disrupt them.

In this context, we need to look closely at what an institution actually does and what does it mean for an institution to fail. In most institutional critique over the past 30 years, institutions are seen as part of a larger environment where institutions affect each other in various ways (Powell and DiMaggio 1991). This is called institutional peer pressure, and it drives the goals of economic success and institutional legitimacy, i.e. the need to be associated with being current and trustworthy. The peer pressure may be the reason why museums, for example, jump at the opportunity to tap into popular content and practices that have been successful in other institutions. Logically, this has led to a culture of imitation and conservatism instead of building institutional cultures that are in mutual conversation with the broader and more diverse cultural environment, let alone subcultures that are marginalized in Finland, such as queer and crip communities or communities led by people of colour or Sámi people.

Our critique, then, is aimed towards the unjust operations that such institutional peer pressure makes possible in arts and cultural institutions, and especially in museums: as museums have tried to evolve towards more participatory, equal and open spaces, they have simultaneously maintained the overriding norms of economic success and peer legitimacy which, in reality, hinder the social justice based intersectional feminism² to enter and shape museums. This has led to museums proclaiming to be “for everyone” while they fail to see that their “everyone” is quite an exclusive category. Many museums might be afraid of losing their institutional legitimacy if they actually were to be equally open to everyone, including the feedback and critique that this openness would entail.

2 We understand social justice as the idea of all-encompassing transformative fairness inside society, and also as the structural change enabling an equal distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges as possible. This is the premise of the kind of intersectional feminism that we mean by the word “feminism”.

This failure to accommodate social justice at the expense of institutional legitimacy is of course embarrassing, in the sense that many of us who are working in museums actually want to promote equality, to change things for the better and open up museums to be more feminist, transformative and political places. Somehow it seems that this collective shame over failing at accommodating actual change has also been institutionalized to a certain extent, as museums strive for credibility in the eyes of a supposedly critical visitor as well as colleagues, but as a result, end up creating content that still does not acknowledge that the museum itself is not a neutral space³. Just as Therese Quinn describes in *School: Questions about Museums, Culture And Justice to Explore in Your Classroom*, museums have a history, and as memory organizations, they are already political to begin with (Quinn 2020, 63–65). This is still not generally understood or accepted: while working with value strategies in Finnish museums, we have witnessed that people who have worked for a long time in executive positions in museums regard many Finnish museums as non-political because they are younger institutions than the internationally recognized Central European museum giants. Some try to justify this view with the fact that Finland is not seen as a settler colonialist state (which it is, see for example Ranta and Kanninen 2019), a common misunderstanding that is based on the fact that Finland did not occupy overseas colonies. However, this exceptionalist argument

3 #MuseumsAreNotNeutral was a campaign in 2017 initiated by LaTanya Autry and Mike Murawski to refuse the myth of neutrality that many museum professionals and others put forward. They further contemplate on the campaign as follows: “Some people routinely state that museums should be neutral or that museums can’t be ‘political.’ As museums are cultural products that originate from colonial enterprise, they are about power. They are political constructs. Their ongoing practices also are rooted in power. The very fact that this field has a long history of excluding and marginalizing people of color in terms of selection, interpretation, and care of art and other objects, jobs, visitor services, board representation, and more indicates that museums are political spaces. Everything in them and about them involves decisions.” (Autry and Murawski 2018.)

fails to recognize the various, sometimes subtle ways that more recent colonialism, nationalism, commodification, and assimilation operate, and how museums as memory organizations are often complicit in these processes by virtue of their own ideological history (Kostet 2010). But can institutions learn to think differently?

Towards Transformative Pedagogies

In pointing out that unlearning oppression requires vast pedagogical efforts, a central question often is: what are these efforts, by whom and for whom they are for, and why? We often find ourselves using our pedagogical efforts to educate the institution in which we are working about social justice, and the institutional conventions drain a lot of resources that could be used to directly benefit the marginalized.

What kind of pedagogies would it take for an institution to unlearn oppression and become socially more sustainable? Trying to resolve that question, we have found it useful to distinguish different pedagogies used in different contexts. For us, the typology of anti-oppressive education by North-American educationist Kevin Kumashiro is quite relevant in conceptualizing this.

Kumashiro identifies four types of anti-oppressive education. First is the “Education *for* the Other”, which comprises practices that aim to improve the experiences of the marginalized people. The second type, “Education *of* the Other”, focuses on educating people about the experiences and perspectives of the marginalized instead of carrying on as if there were no problem of oppression in the society. The third type, “Education that is critical of privileging and othering”, exposes the inequalities by focusing on structures that create privileges to some but marginalize others. “Education that changes students and society” is the fourth pedagogical approach, and

it regards oppression as a discursive practice that perpetuates inequality in often implicit meanings. (Kumashiro 2002, 31–76.)

Often good feminist pedagogical practice needs to handle all of the approaches mentioned above in appropriate situations and with people in different positions. In our diverse work in museums, we focus and aim at providing a platform for “education *for* the Other” and “education that changes the museum visitor and society” (types 1 and 4), in particular while working as museum educators. But as mentioned above, we end up providing education for our working communities, emphasizing thus “pedagogy that educates *about* the Other” and “education that is critical towards privilege and othering” (types 2 and 3). In many Finnish cultural institutions, it seems there is not enough knowledge about societal privileges and inequalities that museum work involves, and that only a few people recognize advancing social justice as an obligation by virtue of their job. The need for a feminist pedagogical interventions to change workplace cultures and the need to pay someone to facilitate that tend to stay unrecognized on an organizational level. Salaried people working in executive positions inside the institution are the gatekeepers who have the power to realize structural changes and whose job it is to do so. However, in real life the collegial training work comes as an unpaid addition to the job descriptions of the contracted workers.

As unlearning and change seem to be shameful and scary processes, additional facilitation and resources are needed. We wonder how an institution would work with designated community pedagogues whose responsibility it would be to facilitate these learning processes and hold the institution accountable – and who would get paid for this work. We cannot stress enough that this cannot be done by a single person in an institution, so we literally call for many feminist pedagogues (with different standpoints) for this job as this is draining emotional labour and requires

high pedagogical skills and intersectional approach. It is draining to recognize, facilitate and witness the moments of crisis (i. e. defensiveness, resistance, agitation, disbelief) in the learning processes, be they individual, communal or societal — and most often they are all of the above. On top of this, the crisis emerges in an environment where emotions and personal perspectives are traditionally dissipated: the workplace. There is also the risk that the work of social justice would simply be outsourced to these community pedagogues while the rest of the working community would just continue the way they have always done.

Nevertheless, no matter how many pedagogues are employed in an institution, in intersectional feminism, failing is still often inevitable. When goals of disrupting oppression and building equality are set high and the structural premises of the society are overwhelmingly capitalist and patriarchal, many efforts may feel insuperable and often leave people working in institutions disappointed and unsatisfied. This is partly due to feminism being an inherently critical movement and the fact that dismantling oppression altogether or establishing equality will never be over and done with. In a neoliberal society, where we expect to see results and impact right away, say and receive our “thank yous” and move to the next issue, the work may feel discouraging and unworthwhile. To a non-feminist, the constant criticality and the demands may seem like splitting hairs, and one might think: “We already gave you this, what more could you possibly want?” However, the motivation in working for social justice should never be based on praise or prizes; it is commitment to the change without gratification, simply because it is the right thing to do; it is duty before personal or institutional utility. This kind of work can be terrifying at first, and we believe that community pedagogues could help with getting started. After all, there is no other way transformative learning could unfold but through failing, recognizing the shortcomings and becoming internally motivated to change oneself, as personal change precedes organizational and societal change.

Addressing silences

A lot of institutions are encouraged by the public or activists to do “the work” in order to understand what it is that actually needs to be done to advance social justice. We ponder on what should and could be done to prevent institutional failure (assimilation, tokenism and commodification) and instead actualize the change that would be needed in order to truly support social justice and equality. How can institutions show allyship, and where should they start the work? The fact remains that there are a lot of silences that should be broken, worked on and taken seriously, in order to dig deeper into these problems, or even to recognize that there are problems in institutional practices and attitudes to begin with. These silences have been brought to light in public discussion especially during the year 2020, see for example a Facebook thread initiated by performance artist, writer and teacher Niko Hallikainen (2020), on the striking institutional silence in Finland on Black Lives Matter -movement. It must also be mentioned that such silences are not always coincidental and that there are actual oppressive, widespread, and deeply internalized conventions that actively produce silence, such as exclusive professionalism, anti-queerness, anti-blackness and classism, to name just a few.

Our approach is critical, and that is often misunderstood in such institutional contexts that shun un-marketable and negative emotions. By addressing different kinds of silences we hope to open up fruitful and important discussions in a way that would really facilitate change towards real anti-oppressive structures. This is what we call feminist pedagogy.

Strategic silence

Museum and public institution strategies are full of beautiful language such as “societal impact”, “thought provoking”, “diverse”, “inclusive” and so on. The obvious beauty of these words is that they are more often than

not left undefined, which allows everybody to fill them with their own projections of what they entail in practice. This leaves the actual meaning and implied values most often undiscussed. Hence one might understand “societal impact” as alt-right-populist steps towards fascism while another understands it as radical anti-oppressive steps towards social justice and liberation. The truth is that without discussion, strategic punchlines can mean whatever. This kind of strategic silence — a central tool in everyday liberalism — allows us to work side by side without ever truly knowing what others actually think, need, want or dream of. More broadly, this means that institutions with strategic silence are not really taking any stances while still claiming to be “thought provoking”, “brave”, “diverse”, or “inclusive”. In that case, “everything for all” yet again seems to be “nothing for nobody”.

Importantly, this leads to a norm where the professional communities dissipate their values by either actively or passively making them opaque. How is it possible to hold institutions morally accountable for their actions and promises, if we do not know what their core values or responsibilities are or what it means for an institution to act according to those values and responsibilities? It seems that the value discourse has been thoroughly commodified in many cases, meaning that values are only discussed as an instrumental part of marketing. Institutions and working communities should have an urgent responsibility to map out their values and communicate them internally as well as to others in as much detail as possible: What kind of societal impact are they aspiring to and why? What kind of thoughts do they want to provoke, how and why? How do they want to be diverse, and who do they want to include, and why? If this is not done, it leaves no other option than reading between the lines and trusting the institution — and that space in between the lines is certainly not neutral.

In our work as feminist practitioners within museums, a frequent problem has indeed been internal communication: while some working within the institution understand the significance for a cultural institution striving towards equality, there remain considerable gaps in mutual understanding of the necessary actions. This is especially alerting while engaging in pedagogies and practices that are meant to enhance the safety of the marginalized, such as gender-neutral bathrooms and labelling the museum as a discrimination free zone, for example. It is irresponsible for an institution to claim these labels at the expense of the marginalized without doing the very best they possibly can to fully accommodate the people they are “embracing” by doing so. This requires extensive internal (value) discussions with everyone in the organization’s working community, a platform that focuses on debating on the core values of the institution, verbalizing them together, discussing differing opinions and arguments, gathering and welcoming critique and feedback also from outside the institution, and facilitating emotional discomfort. If this is not done inside the institution, it will project outside and as a result, the space will be unwelcoming or even hostile to the marginalized. This is one of the reasons why some people never set a foot inside museums.

Emotional silence

As professional pedagogues, we are very much oriented to thinking about emotional labour and its role in learning, unlearning and defensive resistance to learning, which can sometimes be described as the crisis of unlearning (Kumashiro 2002). Consequently, we have been really struck by the extreme landscape of emotions that surround feminist labour. There are countless cases where providing feminist learning spaces come to a halt because of these emotions, and we have been wondering what they are and what kind of emotional pedagogies they call for. In professional environments, such as workplace communities, it can be hard to open

discussions about strong discomfort, or fear – let alone shame. The backlash that happens when these emotions are left unattended or are avoided is easily camouflaged and turned into something trivial, or even projected towards the marginalized people instead of seizing the opportunity to introspect and unlearn oppression. Many workplace communities, including arts and cultural institutions, would benefit from training for staff members in working towards distinguishing personal opinions, feelings, and discomfort from what is actually right and good for everybody, especially for people in less privileged positions. Doing “the work”, as many intersectional feminist activists say, is a vital element of the learning process. The real emotional challenge is that it can be extremely hard to recognize one’s own position in relation to social justice, both inside the institution and as an individual in society at large.

Our pedagogical approach very much relies on this extensive emotional labour. We analyze our own emotions as part of the work, together and individually, and we create a sort of ethnographic space to reflect them before and after the actual working situations, such as workshops, lectures, guided tours or other events. Extremely often we recognize very collective forms of emotions such as anger and being “pissed off”, feelings of resistance and crisis, shame and failure, joy and pride. Many of these emotions have a certain role in the dynamics of the situations. Anger is a good example of a complex pedagogical territory that calls for commitment and skill to be facilitated: in the form of “moral outrage” it can play an important role as motivation to change society and fuel feminist work when facing injustices. On the other hand, the dark side of angry emotions is the fact that it is not far away from bitterness, vindictive fury or hate (Nussbaum 2016). We aim to create room for anger in the social situations where we work, as it is hard to manage alone, and more than often it is an understandable reaction to the shortcomings of an oppressive society. In this case, we believe the role of an educator or a pedagogue is to regulate the situation

according to their capabilities in order to create room for transformation, be that individual, communal or societal. Previous work done in cultural politics of emotions, notably the works of Sara Ahmed (2013) and Martha Nussbaum (2016), can help feminist pedagogues to analyze the needs for emotional labour in their communities and societies.

Moral silence

In today’s society, it is possible to avoid moral decision-making and responsibility. This is due to the fact that modernist society and culture has taught us that it is possible to live our lives in a moral contradiction, meaning that our actions can differ from our beliefs without us feeling it, or more precisely, witnessing the consequences of such contradiction. Some have described this contradiction as alienation or estrangement.

According to philosopher Tere Vadén, this estrangement is possible in a modern society where a subject is not aware of or does not acknowledge its conditions of life (Vadén 2016, 134–141). The liberal subject refuses to change, as change is a threat to the subject itself, who believes in and lives off its own permanence, individual freedom and increasing possibilities of choices. No amount of piled factual knowledge will enable actual unlearning without other changes in skill, meaning or cognition. Unlearning and change are then possible not with increased rationality but decreased and deconstructed individualism. This takes place when the subject acknowledges its own boundedness and dependency within existence. (Vadén 2016, 134–141.)

This kind of silence, the disconnection or denial of dependency and boundedness, has left the liberal society without moral fibre, as it does not recognize its own preconditions, deeper roots nor material and spiritual interdependence (Vadén 2016, 134–141). When facing a situation where moral decision making should take place, one tends to put their hands up

all too easily. What kind of work and pedagogies are needed in order to reconnect, align and refamiliarize oneself with these conditions, or in other words, learn, unlearn and change? And what would this kind of unlearning, change and responsibility mean in an institution? One example of how to approach the estrangement within institutional context, as absurd as it may seem, is what we call discussing “death strategy” for the institution: defining what is the lifespan of the institution and its deeper meaning in society, and under what circumstances should the institution stop operating altogether. We have tried this thought experiment in a workshop with people working in various arts and cultural institutions, and overwhelmingly many of them voiced that potential rise of fascism or ultra-commercialism over art and freedom, or their institution’s significant contribution to the worsening climate crisis, would justify ending the lifespan of their institution.

The phenomenon of estrangement we discuss here is fundamental to the feminist pedagogical interventions in contemporary arts and cultural institutions. On some level it may be hard or sometimes impossible for an institution to accept that fighting for social justice is at its core anti-capitalist work and that social and environmental struggles are caused by these preconditions and deeper roots of our existence, which for the most part are white supremacist, settler colonialist and capitalist — in other words, inherently oppressive. Therefore, intersectional feminist interventions always undermine the status quo and the very foundations of the modern society.

Towards accountable institutions

Discussions about silences are hard to conduct, yet also vital, since without addressing the silences things cannot change. That is also why, to keep on going, to keep on operating, to keep on keeping on, is often done at the expense of having these discussions, because these discussions prevent and

work against silent, pseudo-neutral and valueless action. These discussions are critical and will not let anyone off the hook. In our experience, some people in key positions in arts and cultural institutions are afraid that discussing values openly would steer them away from the core subject matter of the institution. Behind this unfortunate conclusion there is an absurd presupposition that there could be some discrete world of art or culture that would be distinct from society anywhere. Every museum and art institution is inherently involved in society by their very existence, and their silence is active.

Value discussions and discussions about silences frame responsibility and accountability. When stating our values and writing them out, we are letting others know what we are ready to be accountable and responsible for. Given that institutional accountability seems to be a complicated concept for many, it might be useful to define what accountability means for us. This is important as accountability as a term and action is in turmoil in contemporary feminist discourse and the transformative justice framework: we should be asking questions such as what kind of structures being accountable actually requires, how to build circumstances that support accountability, and what to do if an individual or an institution fails at being accountable for their actions. We believe that there is a wide range of nuances in the strategies of holding individuals and institutions accountable, and it always involves real learning, real unlearning, and really confronting the obstacles, be they structural (organizational level) or psychological (personal level).

Writer, educator, and community organizer Mia Mingus (2019) defines accountability as follows:

True accountability is not only apologizing, understanding the impacts your actions have caused on yourself and others, making amends or reparations to the harmed parties; but most importantly,

true accountability is changing your behavior so that the harm, violence, abuse does not happen again (Mingus 2019).

Defined this way, accountability is transformative learning. According to Mingus, harm occurs and a process of accountability is needed when an individual acts out of alignment with their *values*. Thus, it is essential for self-reflection and true accountability that we are clear about the values, as suggested earlier. Without writing out our values and actively reflecting them the practice of accountability is not possible (Mingus 2019). Although Mingus focuses on individuals and small non-institutional settings in their work, we find this framing of accountability useful also while talking about institutions.

While we believe that being accountable is essential, as pedagogues, we are also simultaneously wary of the consequences that call-outs and, more precisely, cancel culture⁴ might lead to, if there is no proper pedagogy involved. Unlearning takes time and emotional effort, and these factors should always be facilitated by insightful pedagogies that support change. One might also pay attention to when, where, in what position and during what period of time one has the capacity of being accountable. The power dynamics are very different if an individual calls out a cultural institution to hold them accountable compared to when a raging twitter mob is harassing a private person with a modest following. The latter, in fact, is not true accountability, because, as Mingus (2019) frames it, also accountability must be consensual. Thus, you cannot force someone to be accountable.

4 “Cancel culture” is a phenomenon where public figures with past oppressive behaviour are “outed” and boycotted or de-platformed in order to restore justice. The dynamics of “canceling” have been criticized from various perspectives, and we see it as pedagogically dubious and risky, aligning with analyses by Kai Cheng Thom (2019) and Natalie Wynn (2019).

How can we call people or institutions out without being ableist (e.g. requiring emotional processes that might break justified personal boundaries) or harmful (e.g. exiling, seeking revenge or punishment, inducing further harm), and simultaneously defend ourselves and demand change? How can we generate real unlearning and keep the conversation nuanced without excusing oppressive behaviour and structures as well as accidentally justifying the silencing of the most marginalized? As writer Clementine Morrigan (2020) puts it, accountability does not mean punishment or humiliation or that we break our own boundaries while being responsible. Asking these questions of course does not justify oppression or cruelty towards any individual, but strives to further enhance the possibilities for unlearning and more just practices and ways of life. While we discuss here the pedagogy required for unlearning oppressive structures within institutions, it is necessary to point out that the oppressed are not obligated to stay calm or patient, nor are they obligated to teach the oppressor. As facilitators of unlearning, we are willing to take on the role of an intersectional feminist community pedagogues. But we also acknowledge that it cannot simply be assumed or forced on an individual, since it involves balancing different personal capacities, extreme regulation of intense emotions, and exposing oneself to possible harm and hurt. Not everybody has the chance of learning as quickly as one would hope.

To be accountable before and after a call-out requires understanding what one is being held accountable for, what one actually did and why it might be wrong. It is impossible to apologize, show remorse or change one’s ways if the actions and consequences are not genuinely understood. For example, Nancy Jouwe (2018) writes about oppression within the museum field in relation to colonialism as follows:

[...] the museum, despite great curators and artists, can still function as a violent contact zone for people like me. These are not isolated incidents and it’s not just about me; for this is coloniality in practice,

the everyday utterings of a system. To become aware of this is part of the process of unlearning. (Jouwe 2018, 138.)

Jouwe's text suggests failed accountability in that institutions perpetuate the understanding of colonial practices as isolated incidents that simply went unnoticed by accident. However, the size of the problem is manifested by the accumulation of these incidents and their unproportionate impact on certain groups of people.

As Mia Mingus (2020) points out as well, we need different strategies for working with accountability on interpersonal and institutional levels. An institution does not necessarily require as much compassion or empathy in the process of accountability as an individual does. An institution has always more resources than an individual, which means that change cannot simply be the responsibility of individuals on their own. But as institutions and other communities are formed and led by individuals, both of these levels should be taken into account. To make this process possible, we suggest that institutions should urgently get started with the value discussions, which would enable them to have a common starting point. To end strategic, emotional, and moral silences is a communal process which requires us all to rethink our positions and change our actions, as individuals and as members of institutions. Sadly, it is also possible that an institution, regardless of these discussions, still aims for exclusivity and works in oppressive ways. Through open value discussions, at least some transparency about their underlying conduct would be provided. Conversely, if they are not ready for accountability, superficially embracing the marginalized communities as content or "accidentally" operating in oppressive ways should not be an option. This is probably the most elementary condition for institutional accountability.

Maybe accountability, then, for the people in power positions in public institutions, means having a genuine will to change and unlearn, to engage

in critique, debate and feedback without fear, judgement or shame, to continuously acknowledge one's position in relation to others, to step away or give space when needed and also to admit publicly if one cannot or is not prepared to have this conversation right now. This view is especially timely considering the new museum law in Finland which defines the purpose of the museums, among other things, as follows: "to promote community, continuity and cultural diversity; to promote civilization, prosperity, equality and democracy" (Finlex 2019). In our recent work, we have also witnessed these conversations starting to take place, in all their complexity, and this certainly gives us reason to stay hopeful, and no reason for arts and cultural institutions to resist change and stay silent.

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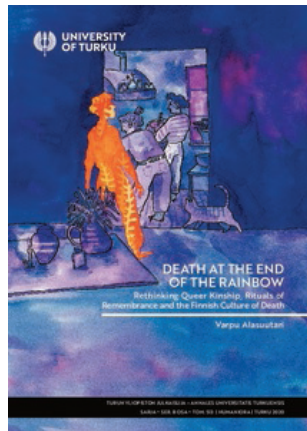
On Death and Loss in Queer and Trans lives

SQS
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121

Lectio
Praecursoria

Varpu Alasuutari



Varpu Alasuutari's Ph.D. dissertation *Death at the End of the Rainbow: Rethinking Queer Kinship, Rituals of Remembrance and the Finnish Culture of Death* was publicly examined on 5 June 2020 at the department of Gender Studies, University of Turku. Opponent was doctor Riikka Taavetti, University of Helsinki, and Custodian was professor Marianne Liljeström, University of Turku.

Alasuutari's dissertation is available in electronic form through UTUPub service:

<https://www.utupub.fi/handle/10024/149503>

We are here today to talk about death.¹ As grim as it sounds, life and death are closely linked to each other. As death is always part of life – both in the form of people's own, eventual deaths and the deaths of others – it is also part of queer and trans lives.

In my dissertation, titled *Death at the End of the Rainbow: Rethinking Queer Kinship, Rituals of Remembrance and the Finnish Culture of Death*, I have studied death and loss among LGBTQ people living in Finland. The alphabet, here, refers to lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people and queers, describing how the participants of the study self-identified.

I have approached my topic by interviewing and collecting written narratives from 14 bereaved LGBTQ people living in Finland. Their rich and detailed stories describe a variety of losses, including deaths of partners, ex-partners, parents, grandparents, friends and other people who the interviewees found meaningful in their lives in one way or another. In addition, following the principles of scavenger methodology, as described by Jack Halberstam (1998), I have collected complementary data in order to contextualise the personal stories of loss with Finnish society in which

¹ In Finland a doctoral thesis defence is a public event, in the beginning of which the doctoral candidate gives a 20 minute talk about their thesis, called lectio praecursoria.

Varpu
Alasuutari

they have occurred. This complementary data includes legislative texts, church guidelines, online ethnography, and an expert interview.

Challenging compulsory happiness

In choosing this topic, I have been following the research tradition emerging around negative affects in queer studies. This tradition calls for research that sees through the compulsory happiness of queer existence (Love 2007), and while doing so, does not overlook the negative or painful aspects of the lives that are lived outside, or in the margins of, the heteronormative and cisnormative ways of living.

It can be said that in conducting this study, I have, in the words of Donna Haraway (2016), ‘stayed with the trouble’. Death certainly is something that troubles us as human beings. Although death often appears as a taboo and as something not easily discussed, the current times of the COVID-19 pandemic have reminded us all of the inherent vulnerability of our lives and the lives of others. With or without a global pandemic, however, death is always waiting behind the corner. Thus, death is hardly a marginal topic when studying any kinds of human lives.

Queering death studies

When I was sketching the early research proposal for this study in 2014, the interdisciplinary research field called queer death studies did not yet exist. Today, such a field is emerging through the joint efforts and collaboration of an international group of scholars in the *Queer Death Studies Network*, interested in queering the field of death studies in different ways (Radomska et al. 2019).

Besides gender studies and queer studies, I consider queer death studies as one of the fields I am contributing to with this dissertation. My contribution in this regard is both empirical and theoretical, in the sense of “searching points of exit from hegemonic narratives” describing death and loss, which often have focused on normative understandings of losses that matter (QDSN 2020).

My theoretical framework is interdisciplinary, drawing mainly on feminist affect theories, queer theory, death studies, and bereavement studies, but also on trans studies, social sciences, anthropology, and religious studies. I have found such a wide array of theories not only useful but also necessary in analysing and understanding the versatile and entangled issues discussed in my dissertation. Methodologically, I have followed feminist methodologies when discussing how the vulnerable stories of not-only-vulnerable others can be told in ethical ways and aiming to be a vulnerable observer, writing vulnerably, and self-reflexively, about my observations.

Hidden inequalities of death

Temporally, the events shared with me by the interviewees took place between the 1980s and the late 2010s. This was not a planned temporal frame, but rather, a result from reaching interviewees who happened to tell their stories from this era. However, this is also a rich and interesting era because of the legislative and attitudinal changes that have taken place in Finland during those same decades. For example, homosexuality was depathologised in 1981, the laws on gender reassignment and registered partnership of same-sex couples took effect in the early 2000s, and, eventually, the law on same-sex marriage took effect in 2017. This is not to say, however, that equality would have been achieved in Finland by these changes within this time period, despite the popular progress narrative celebrating Finland as the role model country of equality.

In my dissertation I go against the grain of this narrative and pay attention to the hidden inequalities prevailing in the Finnish culture of death. Some of them are structural or cultural, resulting from legislation or cultural habits. In addition, as I show in the study, inequalities may also operate on the level of affects. This means that they appear on the level of intensities, sensations, and emotions that may be difficult to verbalise or pin down, experienced in relation to their structural and cultural surroundings. Such inequalities may surface in relation to questions such as: what counts as a meaningful loss or a relationship, what counts as a family or the next of kin in the context of death, what are the proper ways to bid farewell to and to remember the lost other, who can we turn to for support when losing people we care about, and how, and by whom, do we want to be remembered when we die. These are questions that I address in the empirical chapters of the dissertation.

The changing scope of research

Conducting this study has been a lively process. In other words, it has changed and evolved along the way, and its scope has not always been so wide. Instead, I started it as a study of LGBTQ people and partner-loss in Finland, inspired by other studies conducted abroad with similar topics. At the time of planning the study, same-sex marriage was in the process of being legalised in Finland, but the law had not yet come into effect. Although the law on registered partnership already existed, same-sex couples often found a separate law demeaning and, as a result, did not always consider it as a viable or fair option for making their partnership official. In this societal context, I suspected that partner-loss among LGBTQ people could have distinctive features worthy of studying.

In the process of researching, however, I realised that there is much more to be said about death and loss in queer and trans lives. Focusing only on

the loss of romantic relationships through death would leave out a variety of relationships that are, in different ways, significant in the lives of LGBTQ people. In order to avoid amatonormativity – that is, an unjustified privilege and overemphasis of romantic relationships (Brake 2012) – it was thus reasonable to widen the scope of the research to include other kinds of losses as well. Through this decision, it became possible to discuss not only partner-loss, but also losses of friends and ex-partners, for example. Moreover, the change of scale made it also possible to discuss the affective specificities of losing parents and grandparents. As I found out, these were quite different experiences depending on how the lost family member had dealt with sexual and gender minorities. For example, if the relationship with a parent had been a complicated or disrespectful one, this affected also the loss of, and the grieving for, such a parent.

Queer kinship in the case of death

Meaningful relationships in varying forms, theorised as queer kinship, ended up becoming one of the key themes of this study. In my process of analysing and making sense of the stories told, I relied on feminist affect theories with a focus on families, happiness and the good life, especially by Sara Ahmed (2010) and Lauren Berlant (2011). I argued that the normative ideals of what counts as families in the fantasies of the good life affect also what counts as families, or meaningful relationships, in the context of the good death. The normative family ideals prevail and manifest, for example, in the family grave tradition supported by Finnish legislation and in the funeral etiquette supported by guidelines given by the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the biggest religious institution in Finland. The established traditions hierarchise and differentiate between family members and other mourners. In these contexts, what counts as family is defined by law and shared bloodlines.

For people leading queer and trans lives, however, this normative matrix may not be sufficient when considering the myriad of meaningful relationships. While people in general, and LGBTQ people in particular, may live their lives according to more diverse family ideals, the normative ideal catches us up in the context of death, suggesting that a difference needs to be made between those family members who are official in the eyes of the state and those who are not. The former includes parents, siblings, biological or adopted children, and registered or married partners. The latter, in turn, includes friends, unofficial partners, multiple partners, ex-partners, and other meaningful relationships that are not legally recognised as familial. This differentiation comes up, for example, when deciding who are treated as the primary mourners of the deceased, who can organise the funeral, who can be buried together, who can inherit the deceased, or how people are expected to grieve the loss. However, the official or unofficial family status does not always predict or define the depth of the relationship, the intensity of grieving, or the ways people want to participate in the rituals and processes following the loss.

In queer kinship studies, a differentiation is often made between the biological and the chosen kin. My focus on the official and the unofficial kin aims at complicating this differentiation, focusing not on choice or biology but on what is legally recognised. However, legal recognition does not always lead to social recognition; and sometimes relationships not legally recognised may be socially recognised, which further complicates this division. Moreover, as I propose, kinship is not something that only appears among the living. The lost meaningful others kept having importance in the lives of the interviewees, suggesting that the feeling of kinship does not necessarily end in death. Therefore, I suggest that kinship is complex, breaking the binaries of the biological and the chosen kin, the official and the unofficial kin, as well as the living and the dead. Given this multi-layered nature of kinship within the stories of bereavement, I argue that

my dissertation ended up becoming a study of the complex relationships of LGBTQ people, of the complicated affects that were ingrained in those relationships, and of what happened to kinship when death cut some of those relationships apart.

Complex losses and rituals

Over the course of conducting this study, as I encountered increasingly complicated and multi-layered relations, I ended up problematising, or rethinking, the concepts and theories I was drawing on. For instance, I noticed that the theories I initially followed, including sociologist Kenneth Doka's (2002) theory of disenfranchised grief and queer theorist Judith Butler's (2004; 2009) theory of ungreivability, return, first and foremost, to questions of inclusion and exclusion. These theories ask who can be grieved and recognised as lost; and who can be recognised as people grieving the loss. However, as my study shows, these are not simple, black-and-white questions. With an analytical focus on norms and affects attached to them, or affective normativities as I call them, I have shown that often it is a question of feeling included or feeling excluded, manifesting in different ways in different contexts. Thus, instead of being entirely disenfranchised or ungreivable, I argue that the lives and losses of LGBTQ people in Finland can more often be seen as both disenfranchised and enfranchised, both ungreivable and greivable at the same time, depending on the context.

Rituals, too, appeared as complex. In this study I have made an analytical differentiation between rituals of death and rituals of remembrance. The former refers to rituals aiming to bid farewell to the lost person, often in culturally prescribed and established ways, like funerals. The latter, in turn, refers to rituals created by the interviewees themselves, often less strongly culturally prescribed, performed either in private or with their

private networks. Instead of bidding farewell, these rituals were about keeping the memory of the lost one alive. These included, for instance, creating commemorative events, talking to the lost other, holding on to keepsakes as memory objects, and visiting the grave or other places with similar affective significance. With the inspiration of queer theory and bereavement studies, I have theorised the rituals of remembrance as examples of melancholic attachments, or continuing bonds, which can be beneficial in the midst of grief and, in the words of José Esteban Muñoz (1999), help to ‘take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names – and in our names.’

Culture(s) of death in Finland

The final question I wish to address is: what can we say about the Finnish culture of death based on this study? I argue that the Finnish culture of death heavily prioritises the official family of the deceased, as well as the Evangelical Lutheran Church as an institution. The official family of the lost are those heightened as the primary mourners with both rights and responsibilities in the context of loss, granted by legislation and cultural habits. The Church institution, in turn, has power to influence and maintain these cultural habits in defining death rituals and maintaining the vast majority of Finnish cemeteries, guiding also how lost people can be honoured in gravesite memorials. Given the tense relationship between LGBTQ people and the Church institution in Finland, resulting from the inability of the Church to treat LGBTQ people with “fully equal respect” (Hellqvist & Vähäkangas 2018), I argue that having to face this prioritised role of the Church can be challenging for bereaved LGBTQ people, regardless of their personal worldviews.

However, I do not claim that the Finnish culture of death is a monolith with no variation nor a possibility to change and be altered. Instead,

I suggest that there are, and could be, cultures of death in Finland, in which also the needs and specificities of LGBTQ people are taken into consideration. Such culture is important also in terms of cultural memory and in deciding which lives get remembered in public. In my dissertation I argue that the public rituals of remembrance performed by Finnish LGBTQ communities, including, for instance, the Transgender Day of Remembrance, can be seen as examples of queer and trans culture of death in Finland. At the moment, such culture seems to focus more on public, political and internationally circulated queer and trans deaths and losses than on private and unpolitical ones.

On this note, I propose that we need also other types of queer and trans culture of death: culture that would focus on death and loss as inseparable parts of all queer and trans personal lives. It could include, for example, taking different family forms into consideration in the case of death, offering information and examples of death rituals that go beyond the culturally established and hierarchical ones, making queer and trans lives visible in the Finnish cemeteries through techniques of queer monumentality, and creating queer- and trans-sensitive bereavement support services. Because all of us are eventually dying and losing our meaningful others to death, having varied cultural examples to follow, having accessible support services, and having communities to back us up when that happens would, as I suggest, help LGBTQ people to live through the emotionally demanding times of bereavement.

This study has evolved, broadened and crystallised when necessary, and as a result, ended up answering to much larger questions than what I initially had in mind. As it stands, it is a study that brings new insight into the experiences of death and loss in queer and trans lives in Finland. This insight is applicable also in terms of other lives that are in different ways casted in the margins within the Finnish culture of death. Moreover,

the study produces new knowledge on the conditions of living queer and trans lives in Finnish society, particularly in terms of kinship, rituals and different kinds of affective normativities attached to them.

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Making Museums Relevant in a World of Diversity

Rita Paqvalén



Therese Quinn. 2020. *School: Questions about Museums, Culture, and Justice to Explore in Your Classroom*. School: Questions series. Teachers College Press. New York & London, 96 pages.

In her new book *About Museums, Culture, and Justice to Explore in Your Classroom* Associate Professor Therese Quinn critically analyses the role of the museums in today's world and discusses how teachers can use museums in order to teach students

critical thinking and social justice. Combining critical museology with pedagogics the book offers theoretical approaches to the museum as an institution and examples on museum interventions and *artivism* around the world, as well as hands-on tools and projects through which students can engage with the museums and their collections. As Quinn is based in the United States, most of her examples and arguments come from the North American art and culture context, but she also includes many exciting cases and museums from other parts of the world and, also, outside the Western world.

The book consists of ten chapters. In the first chapter "Introduction: Are Museums for Everyone?" Quinn claims that the mostly or partly publicly funded museums belong to us. Yet museums "are underused and undervalued" (2) and they are, in opposition to libraries, "often actually or perceptually inaccessible" and "located in special districts, charge admissions, feature monolingual programming" (3). Furthermore, museums "fail when they aren't honest about their histories and don't tell the stories of people of color, immigrants, and others who are underrepresented in cultural spaces" (5) and they are "still segregated workplaces, with whites now holding 84% of curator, conservator, and educator positions" (6).

This starting point, the notion that museums should belong to us, yet fail to do so due to their historical roots linked colonialism, social exclusion, and race segregation, is the guiding principle throughout the book. Therese Quinn shows on the one hand why museums need to redefine themselves, and on the other hand how students can make use even of the failures of the museums, in assignments related to self-definition, agency, and critical thinking. Thus, the book suggests "that museums should be seen as public resources that can offer rich extensions to classroom educational practices" (7) – even in cases when the museums fail their task to represent the community and its diverse history.

SQS
1-2/2020

127

Queer Eye
Reviews

Rita
Paqvalén

The Western amnesia

With the following chapters, “Who Made the First Museum?” and, “Why Do Museums Collect?”, the book continues to focus on the traditional role of the museums as the sites for collecting and exhibiting history. In these two chapters Quinn analyses on the other hand colonial roots of the collecting practices of Western museum institutions, and on the other hand the amnesia and ignorance of the same institution, when it comes to attributing inventions or ideas to marginalized groups or social movements – even regarding its own history. Despite the desire of the Western museum historians to find museum’s roots in Europe, “the world’s first public museum was started in the 6th century BCE by Bel-Shalti-Nanna, also known as Ennigaldi, a princess living in Babylonia, a state in central Mesopotamia” (11).

By using Ennigaldi and the feminist art pieces, *The Dinner Party* (1974–79) by the artist Judy Chicago and 129 collaborators and its parody, *The Box Lunch* (1979) by the artist Maria Manhattan as her examples, Quinn shows how contributions and art made by women, especially women of colour, has been undervalued, ignored and discredited in the museums, but also that we need intersectional approaches when critically engaging with museums. The history of the museum collections is not only linked to colonial expansion and the exclusion of women, but also to class, ethnicity, and other kinds of privileges and exclusions.

Museums as a starting point for social resistance

The colonial history of the collections is further addressed in chapter “What Have We Learned from the Past and About the Present That Can Help Us Shape the Future?” from the viewpoint of the recent calls by

activists, artists, and museum workers to decolonize the museums. The decolonization of the institutions starts by the recognition of Native communities as the original inhabitants of the land, but decolonizing is also about sharing power, unsettling, and rethinking the processes of the museum practices. The decolonialization of the museums involves in many cases repatriating the stolen goods to the indigenous communities and/or former colonies. This movement can also be seen in Finland, where the National museum has during the past years started two repatriation processes, one concerning the Sámi cultural heritage, and another one about excavated bones and skulls from the graves of Pueblo people in Masa Verde, Colorado.

Quinn notes that decolonization is a verb and “requires action, making it a rich concept and process to explore with students” (32). The chapter regarding decolonizing processes marks a turning point in the dramaturgy of the book. Whereas the first three chapters can be seen as laying the ground and describing the traditional role of the museum, this fourth chapter and the following ones are more focussed on giving tools for museums to become more inclusive. Likewise, they suggest practices for students (and anyone else for that matter) for rethinking museums in questions regarding decolonialization, accessibility and equity. It is about becoming an active and critical visitor and a potential worker of the museums. Through this becoming they challenge the museum to become more open and an active participant in the work for an equal and democratic society.

The question of the role of museums in social struggles is raised in the chapter “How and When Should Museums Respond to Everyday Events?”, where Therese Quinn discusses two concrete cases in which museums have responded to police violence and killings of African American men. Quinn notes that museums are by no means neutral places, and that they should

be prepared to take stance and publicly address injustice. Yet, as one of her museum cases shows, museums can be unprepared for the consequences of such actions. In her classroom exercises she suggests activities through which students can try out different methods through which museums could respond to urgent social issues.

From a museum for the few to a museum for the many

Becoming a museum for all and not only for the few, demands conscious work in order to make it accessible, inclusive, and relevant. These issues are addressed from a visitor's perspective especially in chapter "How Can Museums Welcome All Bodies?", "How Can Museums Celebrate LGBTQ People's Lives and Contributions?" and "Why Do We Pay to Visit Museums?". In these chapters Quinn analyses questions regarding accessibility and inclusion in the museums from an intersectional perspective, and quotes the disability scholar and artist Sunaura Taylor (2017), who claims that access is always intersectional and "isn't only about physical space, [but] also about the economic and social systems that structure society" (41). In these chapters Quinn combines perspectives on accessibility with questions related to queer and ethnicity, and she introduces creative exercises through which students, for example, are encouraged try out different accessibility tools and to explore the limitations and possibilities of museums from a crip/queer perspective when it comes to representation and social inclusion.

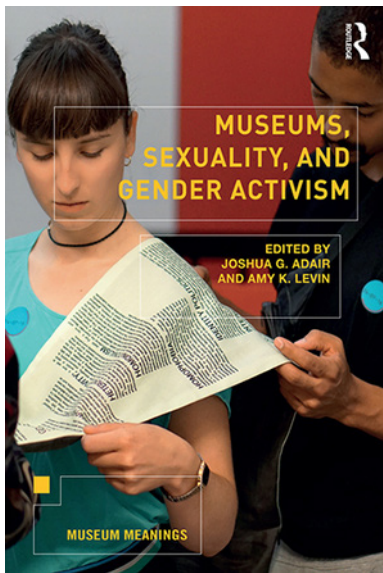
In order, for museums to become more relevant for the underrepresented groups, it is not enough to focus on the visitors, we also need to focus on the museum institution in itself. One of the most important chapters, in my view, are chapters "What Is It Like to Work in a Museum?" and "What Can Museum Practices Teach Us About Collaborating and Sharing

Authority?" that focus on who is working and who tells the stories in the museum. As long, as the museum workers and curators continue to be mainly white, able-bodied and cis-gendered, and the national narrative heteronormative, the museums continue to tell the story of the privileged few. Therese Quinn notes that in order for a real change to occur, it is not only enough that teachers encourage students from various backgrounds to pursue a museum career, we also need to talk about job conditions. She reminds us, that "[b]eing able to do jobs we love is a luxury, something that is not possible for everyone—maybe only those who can afford to do unpaid internships" (60).

Associate Professor Therese Quinn's book *About Museums, Culture, and Justice to Explore in Your Classroom* is a rich source of inspiration, not only for rethinking the role of museums and how to make them more inclusive, but especially for seeing museums as a potential source for teaching about social justice and for encouraging students to become critical and resisting readers of the knowledge and narratives the museums offer. She notes that "[w]hile museums lag in centering the stories of queer people and movements, they still offer many entry points for teaching to and about social justice, while linking the past and present to a shared and queered future" (69).

How Activism on Gender and Sexuality is Changing Museums

Nina Nyman



Joshua G. Adair and Amy K. Levin (eds). 2020. *Museums, Sexuality, and Gender Activism*. London: Routledge, 306 pages.

Museums, Sexuality, and Gender Activism is a collaboration between artists, activists, curators and scholars, and these roles are often overlapping, challenging easy distinctions and categories. In all, the volume has 32 different authors.

As I myself have recently changed my main working situation from activism to academia I find it especially interesting to read practical examples of how others make these changes work in a productive way. The anthology offers many great examples of the necessity of activism, in the sense of action, to make changes in old structures possible. The locations and contexts of the book is a collage spanning over a vast number of

countries and times, even though most exhibitions and actions take place within the last ten years. This offers a myriad of openings to the book and makes it a relevant tool for understanding museums engagement with questions of gender more broadly than in the examples described in the book itself.

Joshua G. Adair and Amy K. Levin's (ed.) anthology *Museums, Sexuality, and Gender Activism* is a continuation of *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums: A Routledge Reader* (Levin, ed. 2010). This new volume, in Levin's words, fills gaps by presenting newer content. Still this anthology stands strongly by itself and does not need to be read as a supplement to the former book. The book is built by five different parts: Frameworks, Dismantling the Master's House?, Bodies in the Museum?, Acts of Resistance and Thinking Outside the Binary Box. In some cases these have in turn two separate subgenres; overall there are 24 texts that build a multilayered but cohesive totality. Reviewing the book as a whole is a challenge since it is often in the details that it contributes most. The book's extensive index is a sign that the reader is invited to also use the text as an encyclopedia – with the warning that you might end up with more questions than answers. As it should be when you are dealing with gender activism and museums.

SQS
1–2/2020

130

Queer Eye
Reviews

Nina
Nyman

A highly enjoyable part of reading, that should not be underestimated, was all the rich description of works of art and spaces where they have been created or displayed. Reading the collection in the spring of Covid-19 gave me a sense of visiting new places.

Engaging with museums through activism

At the heart of the book is a question of what the responsibilities of museums are and who is working with fulfilling these responsibilities. The common theme in the book is about engaging with harmful practices, through a critique that is an act of care. Critique takes place on many layers, and the editors of the anthology are involving themselves in it not only in their book, but also of the book, by “acknowledge[ing] exclusion rather than to pretend that completeness is possible” (Levin, 13). Stating failures is here seen not as an endpoint, but rather as a starting point for new possibilities. The actions described in the book, but also writing the book itself, becomes a positive response to a negativity of lack.

Amanda K. Figueroa in her chapter “Chicana Feminism, Anzaldúan Borderland Practices, and Critiques of Museology” sums up one side of the problem very well when she writes, “It is only when power structures are completely visible that the processes of knowledge and culture production at work in museums can be discussed and altered” (26). Still, it is important to highlight the ways in which museums’ power structures are made visible in many of the books chapters, namely through cultural production and alteration. These processes are not necessarily separate from each other, and most certainly never finished.

Categorization, classification and mislabeling

In his “Bodies in the Museum?”, an introduction to Part III of the book, “Adair highlights that museums traditionally have “held ‘Enlightenment’ values of categorization and classification” (127). At times I find that the book struggles somewhat with the same dilemma. By presenting what is missing, you risk simply adding new categories. Still, many chapters brilliantly depart from this logic by engaging disruptively, or even queerly, with the categorization and classification process.

One of the best examples of this is the chapter “Nonbinary Difference: Dionysus, *Arianna*, and the Fictive Arts of Museum Photography” by Åsa Johannesson and Clair Le Couteur. In the text we encounter photographs of the same object taken in different times, angles and lights, and attached with different labels, or even (at least once) mislabeled. The authors use the mislabeling as an invitation to a reading evoking for me Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of *becoming*, where the object of the photograph and the photograph as object keep traveling between Dionysus, *Arianna*, and, maybe, Arianna.

Johannesson and Le Couteur write that “Mislabeling has material consequences and leaves traces; myths, too, many have tangible effects” (167). In their case mislabeling becomes queering, but in other cases, mislabeling is identified as a means to write away racist histories or keep queer pasts hidden. The common thread in the book is that mislabeling might shift responsibility and power of interpreting the art and the museum space to the viewer, exposing that art and museums are not always what they claim to be, and reminding us of how different temporalities will shift circumstances for interpretation. That the viewer has the power and possibility of interpretation may sound like a given, but what the anthology skillfully demonstrates are the invisible (and sometimes visible) frames of

interpretations a museum or gallery creates when building an exhibition. The book offers positive examples of how challenging these frames creates a more inclusive environment.

Categorization and classification has at least as strong of a hold to academic writing as it has on museum exhibitions. Communicating gender activism first as a piece of art, then having that curated in a museum exhibition, then analyzed and expressed in an academic settings, such as in this book, and then further being read and analyzed as a text by me, and finally being read as review by you offers many potential traps of convenient categorizations. It also makes me ask, how this anthology would have looked and felt as an exhibition rather than a book?

The Labor of Art

An underlying current in the book is the labor of art. Whose job is it and who should pay for it? What is the role of money in museums? The question is posed in the beginning of the anthology, and it also frames whose voice is heard in it. Some people could not participate in the book since the project could not offer necessary funds, as it often is in the case in both academia and arts. The same pattern runs through many of the projects described in the chapters of the book. Since the need for compensation for time spent is not equal, it can create a tension in the concept of activism that (often) by definition is not paid.

The anthology offers many ways of understanding the role of paid labor and activism when it comes to making art and working with museums. In Tuan Nguyen's chapter "Pop-up or Permanent? The Case of the Mardi Gras Museum" he brings forth positive sides of pop-up museums that are explicitly tied to the lack of formal responsibilities that are an inevitable part of financial contracts. In contrast to this, one can read

Catherine O'Donnell's chapter "Never Going Underground: Community Coproduction and the Story of LGBTQ+ Rights". She describes amongst other financial issues a situation where the project she was involved with did have some money, but where the financers allowed the train tickets of participants only to be reimbursed afterward. This created a situation that made it difficult for asylum seekers to participate since they in the UK receive only £37.75 a week and are prohibited from earning money (225).

Another interesting question that the anthology raises about labor is about the role of emotional labor in museums and how it should be compensated. This is of course a question that should not be given an universal answer, but one that needs to be discussed continuously, especially when museums work with groups that are often only heard with the prerequisite that they give the public access to their own personal stories. Still, the anthology offers many examples of when the emotional labor has been respected. Such entries can be used to give ideas on how new projects can work.

Going forward

Zorian Clayton and Dawn Hoskin in their chapter "Activists on the Inside: The Victoria and Albert Museum LGBTQ Working Group" offer a brief look back at what has happened in museums in regards to sexuality and gender activism in the last ten years. They write:

"Since the publication of Levin's 2010 collection, there has been a seismic shift toward greater inclusion of minority and underrepresented histories in museums. Key motivators for change include audible public demands, heightened governmental scrutiny, and the field's increasingly diverse and outward-looking workforce." (57.)

Such a change is powerfully echoed also in this volume, and it is what we

as readers can expect to see taking place also in the future, I hope. The anthology places itself firmly in this tradition of “audible public demands, heightened governmental scrutiny, an increasingly diverse and outward-looking workforce” (57) in museums. As such it offers rich possibilities for the reader to engage with museums and gender activism, preferably in combination. Since the book is so rich in details it is easy to see how it can be used as a hands-on guide when working in/with museums and in building exhibitions. The fact that this book is a follow-up for its predecessor is also a reminder of the importance of learning from and building on previous experiences.

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SQS
1-2/2020

133

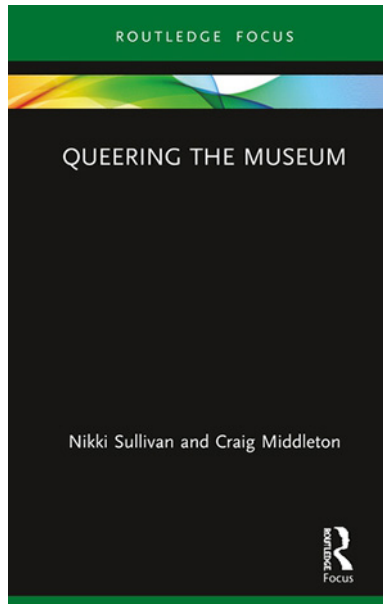
Queer Eye
Reviews

Nina
Nyman

IRIDESCENT FUTURES

Imagining Alternatives with *Queering the Museum*

Sarita Hernández



Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton. 2019. *Queering the Museum*. London: Routledge, 122 pages.

“Radically different ways of knowing and doing are unlikely to occur to us, or, if they do, to feel ‘wrong’, ‘unprofessional’, or too risky” (Sullivan and Middleton, 26).

As I’m preparing for a day of museum meetings, I wonder if my young femme-domme-gender-queer-of-color aesthetics leaking through my fishnets, tattoos, and leather choker reveal “too much” about the queer I am - whether or not I’m appropriate or belong in this space. This began when I moved up in positions. I was hired initially as a contract laborer in the education department in an off-site after-school art program, moved

into temporary curatorial and installation, then temporary collections management, back to temporary curatorial and installation, and finally landed a full-time, then thought, permanent position in education as the teacher and student program coordinator at the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago. Unapologetically queer throughout all those cycles of uncertain employment within the same institution driven on the concept of “*la familia*” (or the family), I remained hopeful that I could contribute to queering this institution. I insisted, but quickly realized that the lure of a “stable” position was actually not going to consider my holistic well-being even though “we are familia” and I would have to perform labor for whatever stakeholders in addition to the work I saw as necessary. Madeleine Schwartz describes “Work is not, as the internship setting would suggest, an exchange of gifts. Work is an exchange of time for money.” (Schwartz, 2013). I would not get compensated for that “extra” work, but they would most definitely show it off and lay me off; I was just another disposable queer artist, curator, temporary contractor of color.

My temporary positions lasted longer than my “permanent” position did. It would eventually be terminated during the COVID-19 pandemic because teacher and student programs were considered “not essential” to the museum. As many museum education staffs would be annihilated

SQS
1–2/2020

134

Queer Eye
Reviews

Sarita
Hernández

across the United States, I wondered about the multiple queer approaches the museum could have taken to not remove people's livelihoods and health insurance during a global pandemic. What would it have meant if programming funds were reallocated? If off-site arts education was reimagined? Or if the president and the directors' salaries were redistributed more equitably? How could this moment benefit from queer methodologies like that of Amy Levin's call for "us to question every aspect of the institution" (Sullivan and Middleton, 30) versus the predictable colonialist approach it eventually took?

In Nikki Sullivan's and Craig Middleton's *Queering the Museum*, we witness alternative offerings that question, deconstruct, and reimagine what museums can be doing. They critique the institution of museums by exploring queer methodologies within and outside of the museum and addressing this institution as much as an entity as an action. Delving into critical race theory, indigenous studies, queer studies, feminist methodologies, cultural studies, the authors position museums as being shaped by the world around them, aspiring for inclusion yet continuing to hide and exclude the other-ed, and needing to advocate for museums' participation in critical reflections and approaches to this work. While this book can serve as a helpful toolkit for pushing, reimagining, and queering museums, Sullivan and Middleton resist the notion that there is a prescribed remedy or formula to queering the museum. And rather, "the queering of museums is, as we understand it, a process without end, and, perhaps more importantly, without a definitive goal (for example, social inclusion) that is presumed to be universally beneficial and achievable by following a particular path" (5). Both begin by acknowledging their positionalities in the work, Nikki Sullivan as a curator at the Migration Museum, coming from Gender and Cultural Studies, and Craig Middleton as the manager and curator at the Centre for Democracy in Adelaide, South Australia, coming from Museum Studies and Art History. They

both approach this text from small institutions where they navigated working across departments, not simply isolated in curatorial. Illustrating their experiences as queer practitioners in the field, they focus on three major areas of queer methodologies in museums: display and exhibition practices, cataloguing and collections management, and education and community engagement.

Beginning with the construct of heteronormativity, "Chapter 1: From LGBTIQ+ Inclusion to Queer Ethics" addresses its maintenance in museums that so easily becomes what Lisa Duggan calls "homonormativity" via basic assimilationist tactics including supposed gay inclusion in museums. They offer the brilliant example of "London's Natural History Museum's decision to open *Sexual Nature*, a temporary exhibition about sex in the so-called natural world, 'just in time for Valentine's Day' (Millard, 2011), thereby reinforcing the association of sex with love..." (29). They could have taken an alternative, queer, anti-capitalist approach to that day and address issues of domestic and sexual violence affecting communities and deconstruct the notion that violence is natural. Instead, they opted to cater to hetero/homo-normativity.

Even if it's not as explicit as saying "gay is bad" or "sex equals love," these insidious museum practices literally work as what S. Nikki Ahmed calls a "straightening device" (92) and perpetuate white, rich heteronormativity. Sullivan and Middleton state, "While monogamous, middle-class, respectable, primarily white, cisgendered, able-bodied, gay and lesbian couples, and even monogamous same-sex animal couples, may be appearing in museums, polyamory, kink, gender queerness, communal living, sex work, intergenerational relations, queer bodies, lives, and relations remain conspicuous in their absence" (29). This illustrates clearly why the politics of LGBTIQ+ inclusion can be unproductive to queering the museum, there remains a perpetuation of colonial hierarchies,

especially in an institution that still benefits from and is founded on such structures. Sullivan and Middleton continue on to introduce Joshua Adair's engagement with Elisa Giaccardi's notion of iridescence in museum work by questioning the ownership of knowledge and factual, single truths (31). Iridescence is queer possibility, offering infinite approaches and interpretations to an object or story without creating a hierarchy of one truth being more valid than another. Instead it embraces the vastness of difference and ongoing process of seeing, questioning, and knowing. This shift from inclusion to queer ethics and movement toward vastness and expansiveness takes us deeper into queering display and exhibition practices in the following chapter.

In "Chapter 2: Queer/ing Display," Sullivan and Middleton offer inspiration and examples of queering exhibition practices. They draw critiques of inclusion and exclusion from examples such as Fred Wilson's "Truth Trophy" installation in *Mining the Museum* and Ashkan Sepahvand's "Welcome Address" in *Odarodle: an imaginary their_story of naturepeoples, 1535–2017*, both addressing the silences and erasures of racist histories while creating what Sara Ahmed calls "disorientation" or productive discomfort and institutional critique on inclusion. A normative practice for LGBTQI+ inclusion in exhibitions is by way of objects, however what would it mean to highlight the lack of access to such objects because of hetero white supremacy?

Sullivan and Middleton offer their *Queering the Museum* exhibition inspired by Jo Darbyshire's *The Gay Museum* in the Western Australia Museum and Matt Smith's *Queering the Museum* at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in the UK. They highlight Darbyshire's queer approach to objects by reimagining insignificant objects to narrate a story in the exhibition. "Rather than offering a linear account of a shift from the bad old days of homosexual oppression to the enlightened present, the display at once

showcases historic abuses and the knowledges that inform them, draws attention to the problematics of the repetition of habituated, taken-for-granted practices (including display practices), and performatively opens up sexual pasts, presents, and futures to alternative configurations" (50). Inspired by these approaches, Sullivan and Middleton's pop-up exhibition utilized objects that would be considered "non-queer" to mainstream audiences to re-define or help define moments in these queer histories such as Richard Boyle's "Lavender Marriage" which was a mannequin with a lavender dress, a hat from WWII and a beard. These were essentially found objects assembled together to create a literal image for the gay slang and metaphor of a Lavender Marriage which was a "marriage of convenience" to hide one of the partner's queer identity (55). They addressed the institutional limits of budget and staff resistance to this different approach to displaying queer history, but ultimately this playful and risky exhibition demonstrated a potential for queering display, in part, through its resistance to the norm of what is and isn't a queer object.

Continuing to "Chapter 3: Queer/ing Meaning-Making," Sullivan and Middleton take on queering cataloging practices and collections development by questioning authority and the notion of the expert. They bring forward an example that is not queer by gender or sexuality, which is an important note for addressing queerness in collections since often times there is a misconception that an action or object has to be LGBTQI+ to engage in queering the museum. However, Sullivan and Middleton are offering more of an ethics and a methodology in their analysis of the *Lindow Man: A Bog Body Mystery* exhibition at the Manchester Museum in 2008-2009. The museum engaged in community consultation in which excerpts from seven interviews were included in the exhibition didactics. Many visitors and staff were disappointed with the information because they did not know what was "fact" from an expert versus "story" from community. Many of the critiques were around a desire to receive facts

versus engaging in dialogue and interpretation about history. Sullivan and Middleton mention, “Drawing on the work of Bruno Latour, we suggest a move away from the question of what things *mean* and towards an analysis of what things *do*, how and why” (64). *The Lindow Man* essentially unveiled the preconceived notions their publics had with the institution and a resistance to change, difference, and multiple interpretations. In facilitating an exhibition like this, there seems to be more of an undoing and unveiling of the way things are, ie heteronormative, patriarchal, hierarchical and in turn offering a glimpses of what alternatives could be in mean-making.

The ways in which unveiling and imagining alternatives can occur, could be by way of queering engagements with collections similar to that of *Lindow Man*. In “Chapter 4: Queer/ing Engagement,” Sullivan and Middleton call for community engagement that is not engagement, but rather a centering collaboration on exhibitions and collections within communities. One of the examples offered of queering collaboration is the Adelaide’s Feast Queer Youth Drop-In. The young queers would mount an exhibition at the Migration Museum in the museum’s Forum Gallery, which is intended to be an inclusive space, where the community has full agency over the narratives shared on the walls. After meeting the participating youth, Sullivan and Middleton realized they were reproducing problematic practices. They were operating in what Bernadette Lynch addresses as a “rhetoric of service” versus being within or collaborating with the community (91). They ultimately ended up participating with the youth and hired an artist to lead “drop-in” workshops in which they would not direct or have a preset notion or agenda for what the youth should be doing based on their shared identity. They ended up making badges together, which would lead participants to get to know each other a little better than a more formal verbal back and forth conversation about what the exhibition would be in the Forum Gallery. While this is a valuable lesson learned around facilitation and community collaboration in the creation

of *OUT in the Museum* exhibition, I wonder about the artist that was hired to lead the workshops that would connect the museum to the youth in a meaningful way. It is often the job of artists to remedy connections between communities and museums, yet they more often than not do not have the stable income that museum administrators do. How can we reimagine this paradigm and think about how pay equity could be illustrated in queering the museum?

While I appreciate the movement toward *queering the museum* in exhibition practices, collections management, and community collaboration, I remain wondering about the power some museum professionals have and how hierarchies within these different positions operate and facilitate queering. Someone like me who is an emerging museum professional, constantly bouncing between contract work, navigating museums as an artist and a historian aspiring to make a difference by constantly pushing projects with queer agendas, in contrast to a collections management director that has been in the same position for 30 years and who is resistant to new ways of knowing or change within a stagnant institution. I wonder about how much harm these institutions produce and how to navigate a sustainable queering for the queers like me who still don’t have health insurance, and often have enormous amounts of academic debt, solely to be considered for time-limited fellowships, and those constantly on the chopping block when it comes to staff cuts. I am left wondering about sustainable practices for those who are in vulnerable contract temporary positions navigating a more sensitive uncertainty around employment and equitable museum pay. As Cathy J. Cohen writes, “I’m talking about a politics where the non normative and marginal position of punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens, for example, is the basis for progressive transformative coalition work” (438). I’m interested in a queering of the museum where these precarious and marginal positions are at the center of radical museum organizing, but who are also not left alone to advocate for themselves by themselves.

A queering of the museum should acknowledge the power structures that have geared the trajectories of museums such as white supremacy, heteronormativity, and capitalism, and work toward deconstructing and reimagining those power structures with those at the margins at the core. *Queering the Museum* leaves me hopeful for more perspectives and conversation around how queering the museum plays out for contract laborers such as contract researchers, teaching artists, and temporary museum educators. There are many more iridescent patterns to witness, illustrate, and process, but *Queering the Museum* definitely unveils resilient and reimagined museum futures.

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Om museernas historiebruk och förändringsarbetets utmaningar

Rita Paqvalén



Pia Laskar. 2019. *Den utställda sexualiteten. Liten praktika för museernas förändringsarbete*. National Historical Museums, FoU Rapport nr 18, 125 sidor.

Under de senaste drygt tio åren har jag med stort intresse följt med den museipolitiska diskussionen i Sverige i frågor gällande demokrati, normer och representation. Det svenska museifältet har på många sätt varit en föregångare i Norden och har under 2000-talet genom ett flertal olika projekt och utställningar uppmärksammat och sökt korrigera en snedvriden representation på museer. Under de senaste åren har dessvärre de queera och normkritiska perspektiven inom kulturarvssektorn i Sverige mött på stort motstånd och misstänkliggjorts.

Ett uttryck för detta är den så kallade "kulturarvsdebatten"¹ som pågick under åren 2016–2018. Den kan ses som en backlash-reaktion mot de forskningstraditioner och metoder som problematiserar normer, ideal, marginaliseringar och privilegier på kulturarvsfältet.

Under 2010-talets första hälft granskade och utvecklade Statens historiska museer sin verksamhet ur ett feministiskt, normkritiskt och queert perspektiv genom två större forskningsbaserade projekt (*JÄMUS* 2011–2012 och *Polysemantiskt digitalt museisamlade* 2012–2014). Speciellt viktiga för utvecklandet av det svenska museifältet i frågor gällande HBTIQ har varit det nätbaserade aktivistmuseet The Unstraight Museum och under senare år, projektet *Unstraight Research i museer* (2016–2018) som två av Statens historiska museer – Livrustkammaren och Historiska museet – deltog i.

Syftet med projektet *Unstraight Research i museer* var att "hitta metoder för att problematisera förgivettagna föreställningar om sexualitet och kön och för att granska idéer som slentrianmässigt upprepar dagens identiteter

¹ För den som är intresserad av Kulturarvsdebatten rekommenderas länklistan som Riksantikvarieämbetet sammanställt över debatten: <http://www.genusarv.se/kulturarvsdebatten-2017-raas-lanklista/> (länken kopierad 10.7.2020)

och förståelser av det förflutna” (11). Idéhistorikern och docenten Pia Laskar var anställd som forskare i projektet och hennes bok *Den utställda sexualiteten. Liten praktika för museernas förändringsarbete* (2019) är ett av resultaten av projektet. Boken baserar sig på det samarbete och de diskussioner med museianställda samt workshoppas och dialoger som arrangerades inom projektet samt på de evenemang som arrangerades inom ramen för det av projektet etablerade nätverket Kulturarv och den tvärvetenskapliga genusforskningen.

I det inledande kapitlet ”Varför en liten praktika för museernas förändringsarbete?” diskuterar Pia Laskar museernas roll som kunskapsproducerande och normerande institutioner. Museerna är i dag viktiga platser för lärande och den information som de producerar uppfattas ofta som sann. Genom museernas samlingar, beskrivningar, rekryteringar samt urvals- och kurateringsprocesser skapar de en bild av samhället, av nuet och dået, och av vem som ingår i den föreställda gemenskapen. För att motarbeta en missvisande representation av samhället och en exkluderande museipraktik krävs ett medvetande om vilket slags historiebruk och vilka slags normer som styr det egna museets verksamhet.

Den utställda sexualiteten är Pia Laskars bidrag till detta förändringsarbete. Bokens syfte är ”att bistå med erfarenheter och kunskap för att undvika att (åter)skapa missvisande och partiska utställningar och berättelser på museer” såsom exempelvis ”museers tidigare marginalisering av sexualiteter och kön, speciellt sådana [...] som inte svarat mot samhällets normer” (11). Boken är en praktisk handledning i hur museerna kan genomföra ett förändringsarbete som inte enbart förstärker status quo och de normer som museerna historiskt byggt på, utan som svarar både mot dagens komplexa behov och framtidens frågor.

Den utställda sexualiteten består av fem kapitel. Varje kapitel innehåller en reflekterande del och en del med konkreta tips för förändring och tips för

vidare läsning. I fokus för bokens första kapitel står museernas historiebruk samt det historiemedvetande som de genom sitt historiebruk och sina samlingar ger upphov till. Genom att granska museernas historiebruk kan vi, menar Laskar, ”få syn på vilka ideal eller normer som museerna eller samhället de representerat främjat över tid” (20). Genom att synliggöra museets historiebruk blir vi också medvetna om de perspektiv och grupper som blivit exkluderade genom att ensidiga normativa ideal skapats.

När Laskar talar om att problematisera museers historiebruk gällande kön och sexualitet avser hon inte ett identitetspolitiskt projekt – ”istället för att överföra en nutida förståelse av sexuella identiteter” borde museer våga sig på ”att beskriva hur den nutida uppfattningen uppstått” (22). Genom att studera museernas tidigare historiebruk kan man synliggöra de normer, uteslutningsprocesser och maktperspektiv som skapat dagens förståelser av sexuella ideal. Intressant i detta sammanhang är även att undersöka hur nationens identitetsbyggande projekt har reglerat sexualitet och tillåtna könsuttryck.

Modeller för förändring

I bokens andra kapitel ”Modeller för inkludering” beskrivs fyra olika modeller för hur museerna genom sina utställningar kan jobba mer inkluderande till exempel gällande sexuella och könsminoriteter. Modellerna, som inspirerats av skolvärlden och pedagogen Kevin Kumashiros pedagogik för att inkludera tidigare marginaliserade grupper, kallar Laskar för: 1) utställningar *för* de marginaliserade, 2) utställningar *om* de marginaliserade, 3) utställningar som är kritiska till privilegiering och marginalisering, och 4) utställningar som förändrar/rubbar verksamheten och besökaren. Laskar påpekar att innan någon av modellerna tas i bruk borde museerna först kartlägga hur de marginaliserade framställts eller exkluderats i det egna museet.

Modellerna handlar å ena sidan om verksamheter som uppmärksammar och välkomnar de tidigare marginaliserade grupperna genom separata och tillfälliga utställningar eller specialvisningar, och som förmedlar kunskap till alla besökare om de marginaliserade gruppernas situation och historia, å andra sidan om praktiker som fokuserar de privilegierade och de normer, processer, slentrianmässiga språkbruk eller upprepningar som bidragit till exkludering och marginalisering i samhället och i dess följd även på museerna. I de två sistnämnda modellerna diskuteras museernas eget arbete, en möjlig omlärningsprocess och ett synliggörande av olika historiebruk på museerna.

I sin presentation av modellerna analyserar Laskar även de risker användandet av modellerna kan medföra. En adderingsstrategi kan till exempel reproducera en stereotyp bild av sexuella och könsminoriteter, osynliggöra intersektionella variationer inom gruppen och lämna den normativa historieskrivningen oproblematiserad. I synliggörandet av sexuella och könsminoriteternas historia finns det även en risk att man även applicerar dagens syn på kön och sexualitet eller samlevnadsformer på historiskt material. Riskerna med de två sistnämnda modellerna handlar om den utmaning som ett ifrågasättande av etablerade strukturer, normer och historiebruk kan medföra internt och externt.

Förändringsarbetets utmaningar

Att förändra sätten att närma sig historien, att problematisera normativa historiebruk och att leda sin personal in i ett förändringsarbete gällande arbetsrutiner inom museet och dess samlingspolitiska program kräver mod och framför allt mycket förberedelse. Även om många museer är villiga att lyfta fram tidigare marginaliserade grupper genom olika additiva metoder eller specialvisningar, är steget mot ett ifrågasättande av museets tidigare historiebruk mycket svårare att ta, eftersom det kräver ett ibland

tungt omlärningsarbete. Det innebär ofta även ett synliggörande av de privilegier man själv åtnjuter och av de maktrelationer och exkluderande praktiker som format museerna historiskt. I bokens tre sista kapitel "Utmaningar, möjligheter – samarbeten över professionsgränser", "Nästa steg i förändringsarbetet" och "Att synliggöra museernas inställning" fokuserar Pia Laskar därför på hur museerna kan samarbeta med aktörer utanför museet i sitt förändringsarbete, hur förändringsarbetet kan förankras inom organisationen och hur museer genom krisberedskap kan förbereda sig på reaktioner som förändringsprocessen eventuellt innebär.

Den utställda sexualiteten är ett välkommet redskap för museer som vill förändra sin verksamhet för att bära sitt ansvar som dokumenterande och kunskapsförmedlande institution och för att svara mot de behov som dagens komplexa värld ställer. Liksom Therese Quinn i boken *School: Questions about Museums, Culture, and Justice to Explore in Your Classroom* (2020), som också recenseras i detta nummer, fokuserar även Laskar på museet som institution och på behovet av en strukturomvandling. För att museerna ska vara samhällsrelevanta och inkluderande krävs mer än en adderande jämställdhetsstrategi. Museerna måste också bli medvetna om och synliggöra sitt historiebruk, hur normer skapas samt hur olika kategorier och identiteter har uppstått i ett samspel mellan makt och motstånd.

Styrkan i Pia Laskars bok är just det analytiska och kritiska greppet, ett förhållningssätt som nästan förutsätter en forskningsmässig distans till det vardagliga arbetet inom museerna. Just genom detta professionella utanförskap möjliggörs ett tänkande utanför boxen, något som vi alla – oberoende av verksamhetsområde – skulle vara betjänta av. *Den utställda sexualiteten* kan således även fungera som inspiration för förändringsarbetet inom andra sektorer på konst- och kulturfältet eller exempelvis inom utbildningssektorn.

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Kuvakorttien queer-fantasiaa

Asta Kihlman



Harri Kalha. 2019. *Sukupuolen sotkijat*. Queer-kuvasto sadan vuoden takaa. Parvs, 192 sivua.

Stailattu, pinkillä, vihreällä, violetilla ja oranssilla väritetty mies poseeraa estoitta, katsoo alta kulmien ja tarjoaa munaa. 1920-luvun ranskalaisessa art deco -henkisessä pääsiäispostikortissa *fantasies* tuntuu läikehtivän yli äyräiden. Palkitun tietokirjailijan ja visuaalisen kulttuurin tutkijan Harri Kalhan teoksessa *Sukupuolen sotkijat*. *Queer-kuvasto sadan vuoden takaa* (Parvs 2019) sukelletaan moderniteetin salattuihin sopukoihin. 1900-luvun alkuvuosien Belle Époque – ”kaunis aikakausi” – tarjoaa kosolti kutkuttavia näkökulmia queer-katseelle.

Sadan vuoden takaisten litografiakorttien sadunomainen estetiikka kuvaa ihmiset iättöminä fantasiaolentoina, joiden sukupuolen määrittää lähinnä

vaatetus. Pikkukorteissa voi kohdata hyvinkin feminiinisiä miesoletettuja, mutta myös etiäisiä butch- ja femme-olevaisista sekä muunsukupuolisuudesta. Tämä tuntuisi viittaavan siihen, ettei ainakaan populaarikuvissa kiteytyvä sukupuolijärjestelmä ollut tuolloin kärjistynyt äärimmäiseen kaksinapaisuuteensa. Siten sabluunavärein ”meikattu”, munakorin kanssa keimaileva miesoletettu saattoi ihastuttaa paitsi romantiikan nälkäisiä heteronaisia myös pinnallista camp-estetiikkaa arvostavia homoseksuaaleja ja transihmisiä, joita railakas koodien sekoittelu puhutteli.

Kalha on jo vuosia kerännyt 1800-luvun lopun ja 1900-luvun alkupuolen postikortteja ja yksityisiä studiovalokuvia. Nyt tämä satojen kuvien laajuinen, valtaosaltaan ranskalainen ja saksalainen aineisto on julkaistu kirjana. Teos poiki myös Kalhan kuratoiman *Sukupuolen sotkijat* -näyttelyn (1.11.2019–25.10.2020) Helsingin HAM-taidemuseoon. Kalha on esitellyt hanketta aiemmin muun muassa katsauksessaan ”Sukupuolen sotkijat: Queer-kuvasto anno 1900”, joka ilmestyi *SQS*-lehden numerossa 1–2/2015.

Postikortti mielikuvituksen sfääreissä

Kuvapostikortti oli 1900-luvun alun uutuusmediaa. Se edusti modernia kommunikaatiota, mutta viihtyi myös mielikuvituksen sfääreissä. Postikorttien kuvamaailmassa oli Kalhan mukaan paljon proosallista ja ta-

SQS
1–2/2020

143

Pervosilmäys
Arvostelut

Asta
Kihlman



28

Tuntematon esiintyjä, valokuva ensimmäisen maailmansodan ranskalaisten sotavankien teatteriesityksestä Saksassa 1914–1918 © Yksityiskokoelma.



Valokuvaaja Stebbing: "Intohimoisesti...", julkaisija F. K., Ranska. Kulkenut Ranskassa huhtikuussa 1905.



"Muistattehan lupauksenne kuunnella hehkuvan haluni rukousta", julkaisija P.C., Ranska. Päiväty Ranskassa 1927 © Yksityiskokoelma.

vanomaista mutta myös kosolti kutkuttavaa, kiehtovaa ja kummallista. Mahdottoman ja mahdollisen rajapinnoilla liikkuva visuaalinen viestintä säteili arvaamatonta tajunnanvirtaa.

Postikortteihin ovat päättyneet niin parrakas perheenäiti, muuntautumistaiteilija kuin ristiinpukeutujakin. Kuvateksti määrittää Ranskassa vuonna 1905 postitetun kortin sävelläjiksi intohimoisen (passionément...). Tar-

kempi katse Belle Époquen romanttisen pariskunnan pastellisävyiseen pukufantasiaan paljastaa, että kuvan miespuolisko onkin nainen – tai ainakin naisoletettu. Korttien välittämät viestit ovat usein vaivihkaisia, rivien väliin kätkeytyjä, kahdenvälisiä tai jopa tiedostamattomia. Ranskassa vuonna 1927 päivätyssä kortissa miesoletettu kuiskuttaa smokkiin pukeutuneen poikatukkaisen La Garçonnen korvaan: "Muistattehan lupauksenne kuunnella hehkuvan haluni rukousta".

Veistotaide nousi ennennäkemättömään suosioon 1900-luvun alun valokuvapostikorteissa. Pronssin ja marmorin taiteeksi vaatettama alaston tarjosi mahdollisuuden katsella, ihailta ja jakaa paljasta pintaa. Mystiset taktiiliobjektit kutsuivat katseen lisäksi käden kosketusta. Veistosten panseksuaali aistillisuus edusti salatieta, kiellettyä unelmaa sellaisesta maailmasta, jossa eläviin ihmisiin kohdistuva halu ei ollut laitonta.

Kuvapostikorteissa materialisoituu strategioita, joilla ei sata vuotta sitten vielä ollut nimeä. Ne tarjoavat heijastuspinnan myös monille myöhemmin syntyneille käsitteille kuten butch, femme, performatiivi, maskeraadi, subversio ja camp.

Visuaalinen queer, viestintää ja itseilmaisua

Kirjan ja näyttelyn kuvakavalkadit käsitteellistävät sukupuolta visuaalisin keinoin. Kyse on kuvallisesta viestinnästä ja itseilmaisusta, joissa leikitellään sukupuolen ja seksuaalisuuden näkyvillä koodeilla – habituksilla, eleillä ja asennoilla. Kuvien ilmentämä sukupuoli häilyy oletuksenomaisesti. Se tuntuu väistävän otettamme.

Valokuvissa ja postikorteissa yllättävät kuitenkin myös historian ja nykypäivän moninaiset yhteydet, kuten nykyisten muotikuvien arkipäiväistämät lesbian chic -henkiset kaksoiskuvat tai androgyynit mallit. Huomiota herättää myös se, miten nykypäivän näkökulmasta ajankohtaisia tai jopa radikaaleja teoksia tehtiin 120 vuotta sitten.

Kuvien sukupuolisotku taipui moneen. Se teki poliittista satiiria, kommentoi naisten emansipaatiopyrkimyksiä, toimi salaisten viestien välittäjänä ja voimautti vähemmistöjä, jotka yllättäen näkivät ”oman kuvansa” kulutus-kulttuurin keskiössä. Teos ja näyttely osoittavat, että sukupuoliesitys on aina tyyllitelty performanssi, yksi taiteen muoto.

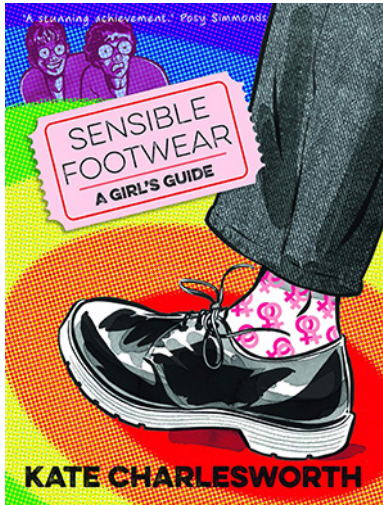
Sukupuolen sotkijat -teoksen runsas ja kiehtova visuaalisuus houkuttelee selailuun. Syntynyt teos, kaleidoskooppimainen queer-kansan kuva-Kalevala tarjoaa herkullisen kattauksen protopervoon ja protoqueeriin estetiikkaan. Kalhan tekstit avaavat ja syventävät kuvaston moninaisia teemoja asiantuntevasti opastaen ja nyrjähdyksiä osoittaen. Kokeneella kirjoittajalla on kyky pitää lukija hyppysissään. Kalhan taitoa lukea historiallista kuvaa ja sen teemojen asettamista nykypäivän kontekstiin ei voi kuin ihailta. Huolella toteutettu taitto ja korkealuokkainen väripaino viimeistelevät kokonaisuuden.

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Järkevin jalkinein henkilökohtaiseen ja yhteisölliseen queer-historiaan

Riikka Taavetti



Kate Charlesworth. 2019. *Sensible Footwear: A Girl's Guide*. Myriad, 320 sivua.

Lesbon, feministin ja taiteilijan Kate Charlesworthin omaelämäkerrallinen sarjakuvateos *Sensible Footwear: A Girl's Guide* yhdistää henkilökohtaisen

kasvutarinan yhteisölliseen queer-historian kertomukseen. Yli kolmesataisivuinen teos lähtee liikkeelle lomamatkalla esitetystä viattomasta kysymyksestä siitä, miten kauan kolme naista ovat tunteneet toisensa. Kertomus alkaa Katen lapsuudesta 1950-luvun Barnsleystä Pohjois-Englannissa ja kertoo tarinan, joka etenee enimmäkseen kronologisesti poikatyön lapsuusmuistoista taideopintoaikaan Manchesterissa ja aikuisen sarjakuvataiteilijan elämään Lontoossa ja myöhemmin Edinburghissa.

Sensible Footwear on mukaansatempaava ja vaikuttava kuvaus, joka yhdistää sarjakuvapiirroksiin lehtileikkeitä, lentolehtisiä sekä kuvia rintanapeista ja muista esineistä. Kuvat vaihtelevat lähes mustavalkoisista, vain korostevärillä väritetyistä, hyvin värikkäisiin ja kollaasimaisiin. Henkilökohtaiseen elämänselityksensä lomittaen Charlesworth kuvaa, arvioi ja kommentoi teoksessaan sitä massiivista muutosta, joka on tapahtunut yhden ihmisiän aikana suhtautumisessa seksuaalisuuden ja sukupuolen moninaisuuteen. Se ei ole kuitenkaan pelkkä edistyskertomus vaan muistuttaa myös muutoksen hauraudesta ja yhä uudelleen nousevasta vihasta.

Charlesworthin oman elämän ja hänen oman historiansa omaelämäkerrallisena kuvauksena kirja on koskettava ja samastuttava. Se kertoo kiinnostavasti oman lesbouden vähittäisestä rakentamisesta aikana, jolloin julkiset esikuvat ovat olemattomia tai vähäisiä. Lesboutta ei tarinassa havaita yhtäkkisen rakastumisen kautta, vaan se on hitaasti ja alkujaan melko teoreettisesti lukemisen ja tutkimisen kautta syntyvä ymmärrys. Samalla lesbous näyttyy tekemisenä ja jopa työnä, ei itsestään selvänä ja pysyvänä identiteettinä. Henkilökohtaisessa kasvukertomuksessa ovat läsnä perheessä ylisukupolvisesti välittyvät vaikenemiset ja toisten ohittamiset. Kirja kuvaa koskettavasti kipua siitä, kun kaikkein läheisimmissä suhteissa

SQS
1-2/2020

146

Pervosilmäys
Arvostelut

Riikka
Taavetti

ei löydy riittävää ymmärrystä rakkauden ja elämän moninaisuudelle, mutta osoittaa samalla, ettei suhteiden säilyminen välttämättä edellytä toisten täyttä ymmärtämistä.

Populaarikulttuuri ja sen tulkitseminen kummastelevalla katseella nousee tarinassa alusta alkaen merkittävään asemaan, vaikka päähenkilön lapsuudessa positiivisia queereja esikuvia ei ollut tarjolla. Eri sukupolveen kuuluvalla suomalaislukijalle vain murto-osa lukuisista kulttuurisista viitteistä on tuttuja, mutta se ei haittaa kertomuksen seuraamista. Epäilemättä esimerkiksi brittiläistä Music Hall -teatteria tuntevalle viittaukset tiettyihin esityksiin ja myös tyyliin hyödyntäminen sarjakuvan kerronnan keinona ovat vieläkin herkullisempia, mutta myös ilman tätä tietämystä musiikkikappaleiden tahdissa etenevät sarjakuvajaksot ovat vaikuttavia.

Henkilökohtaisen elämäntarinan lisäksi kirja on kuvaus kasvavasta ja monipuolistuvasta queer-yhteisöstä. Jo alkusivuilla Charlesworth esittää teoksen tavoitteeksi kertoa historia, joka olisi tärkeää tuntea edes oman yhteisön sisällä ja jonka avulla voisi taistella nousevaa suvaitsemattomuutta vastaan. Charlesworth tiedostaa kaikkien tarinoiden kertomisen mahdottomuuden ja paitsi pyytää anteeksi tarinasta puuttuvia näkökulmia myös huomauttaa, että se mikä on jäänyt nyt kertomatta, toimii lähtökohtana uusille tarinoille. Charlesworthin mukaan moninaisuudestaan huolimatta LHBTIQ-yhteisö jakaa paljon yhteistä historiaa. Kirjan loppuviiteissä selitetään, että sarjakuvissa käytetään LGBT-kirjainyhdistelmää, vaikkei se olekaan aina täsmälleen ajanmukainen, myös siitä syystä, että se mahtuu hyvin puhekupliin.

Charlesworth kuvaa osuvasti, miten eri yhteiskuntaluokista ja eri elämänhistorioista tulevien lesbojen oli toisinaan täysin mahdotonta löytää yhteistä kieltä tai tavoittaa toistensa kokemuksia. Vaikka kirja kertoo nimenomaan lesboksi kasvamisesta ja lesboyhteisön osaksi tulemisesta, myös

homomiesten kokemukset ovat siinä läsnä. Esimerkiksi AIDS-epidemia, jonka vaikutus homomiehiin oli erityisen murskaava, näkyy kertomuksessa yhtäältä kauhuna kuoleman ja lisääntyvän syrjinnän edessä mutta toisaalta myös yhteisöä vahvistava ja yhteenhitaavana koettelemuksena. Charlesworth kuvaa Britannian oman kehotuskiellon, vuonna 1988 voimaan astuneen ja homoseksuaalisuudesta puhumista rajoittaneen lain, vaikutusta niin kaappeihin palauttamisessa kuin ennakkoluulojen ja suoranaisten vihan lisääntymisessä. Tältä osin Charlesworthin teos muistuttaa Matt Cookin (2017) kuvausta ”sallivuuden käänteen” päättymisestä AIDS-epidemian seurauksena 1980-luvun lopulla. Yhteisten kamppailujen ohella Charlesworth valottaa myös yhteisöjen sisäisiä konflikteja. Hän onnistuu hyvin kuvatessaan homomiesten ja lesbonaisten välisiä jännitteitä, mutta esimerkiksi transihmisten kokemukset tai liikkeiden sisäinen rasismi eivät nouse kertomuksessa erityisen vahvasti esiin. Edistysaskeleet transihmisten asemassa samoin kuin rodullistettujen queer-ihmisten näkyvyys ovat kirjassa enemmänkin merkkejä muutoksesta, eivät osa yhteisöjen kamppailuja.

Charlesworthin kuvaama muutos muistuttaa seksuaalisuuden historian tutkija Jeffrey Weeksin – muutamaa vuotta Charlesworthia vanhemman britin – teoksessaan *World We Have Won: Remaking of the Erotic and Intimate Life* (2007) tarjoamaa analyysia ”keskeneneräisestä, mutta perustavasta” vallankumouksesta, joka on muuttanut suhtautumista seksuaalisuuteen toisen maailmansodan jälkeen. Weeksin tavoin myös Charlesworthin viesti on positiivinen: vaikka takaiskuja tapahtuu ja vaikka on selvää, että monet oikeudet edelleen puuttuvat, tapahtunut perustava mullistus on lisännyt ihmisten vapautta elää omaa elämäänsä haluamallaan tavalla. Kuten Weeks, myös Charlesworth keskittyy kuvauksessaan brittiläisiin ja laajemmin angloamerikkalaisiin kokemuksiin ja muu maailma tulee kertomukseen mukaan vasta sen loppupuolella, esimerkkinä siitä, miten voitettujen oikeudet ovat paitsi hauraita myös edelleen puuttuvat monissa osin maailmaa.

Kate Charlesworthin sarjakuvateos on antoisaa luettavaa niin queer-historiasta kuin sarjakuvan kerronnallisista mahdollisuuksista kiinnostuneille. Kirjaa voi suositella aivan erityisesti heille, jotka saattaisivat innostua vastaavan historiallis-omaelämäkerrallisen teoksen toteuttamisesta jossain toisessa maassa tai toisessa queer-yhteisössä – Charlesworthin mukaan hänen teokselleen kun ei ole luvassa jatko-osia (Hokkanen 2020).

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SQS
1–2/2020

148

Pervosilmäys
Arvostelut

Riikka
Taavetti

Failing Together in Solidarity

Alexandra Novitskaya



Wiedlack, Katharina, Saltanat Shoshanova, and Masha Godovannaya, eds. 2020. *Queering Paradigms VIII: Queer-Feminist Solidarity and The East/West Divide*. Peter Lang UK. 382 pages. <https://doi.org/10.3726/b14797>.

Queer-Feminist Solidarity and the East/West Divide, edited by Katharina Wiedlack, Saltanat Shoshanova, and Masha Godovannaya, is a timely anthology that addresses transnational solidarity between Western queer and

feminist communities and their counterparts in postsocialist Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia (CEE & E). Solidarity is a foundational concept in the scholarship on social movements; and the volume's contributors put it under an analytical microscope as they investigate the complexity, legitimacy, and value of "West-East" solidarity efforts which, due to such intertwined processes as the continuing EU expansion eastward, the rise of right-wing "antigender" movements, and the geopolitical instrumentalization of homophobia in CEE & E, have been a prominent feature of the past decade.

The volume's fourteen engaging, if uneven chapters, written by twenty academics and activists, cover impressively diverse topics. They include studies of Russian LGBTQ refugees; artistic responses to sexism, homo- and transphobia; contestations of pride parades; new interpretations of Orthodox Christianity's views on homosexuality; and challenges to Western representations of queer CEE & E. Some chapters are didactic in tone and evoke images of righteous in-fighting endemic to scholar-activist communities at the vanguard of cutting-edge queer critique. Others present state-of-research reports – unsurprisingly so, given the novelty of their topics. All fourteen chapters do an excellent job diversifying the "East" and illuminating the heterogeneity of its queer and feminist activist communities. Also unsurprisingly, the anthology's collective critique leaves some important issues unaddressed.

In the opening chapter "Fucking Solidarity: 'Working Together' Through (Un)pleasant Feelings," one of the editors Katharina Wiedlack offers up her vision of international queer solidarity. Careful to distinguish her project from empathy-based moral solidarity or identity politics, she suggests that successful solidarity work emerges out of shared affective labor ("working together") grounded in sharing resources and privileges (44). Unlike charity, this avoids the pitfalls of treating the subjects of solidarity as victims while still recognizing their oppression. Owing to a personal history of affective, romantic, and intimate connections to post-Soviet

SQS
1-2/2020

149

Queer Eye
Reviews

Alexandra
Novitskaya

LGBTQ subjects and spaces, Wiedlack has been involved in queer-feminist activism and solidarity-building work for several years. This chapter, part critical auto-ethnographic reflection and part theoretical conceptualization of effective solidarity efforts, is the result of this experience. Explicitly critical and deeply suspicious of Western visibility-centered solidarity acts such as public protests or online campaigns, which to her only reproduce “East-West divides,” Wiedlack discusses her own involvement in solidarity activism which resulted in a series of activist-academic events she had helped organize in Austria in 2013–2017. Addressing the difficulties with these events, such as irreparable disagreements between some participants, Wiedlack argues that failure is not only an inevitable part of any solidarity project; it should be a welcome and expected outcome.

As someone who attended one of the events discussed in the chapter and even witnessed first-hand some of the incidents Wiedlack uses to theorize failure as a necessary part of solidarity effort, I agree with her on the importance of sharing material resources and promoting equality in solidarity work. However, the events in question were not examples of “solidarities of everyday” (22): like all other conferences or festivals, they were singular events with specific aims and audiences; they demanded careful planning and significant resources, and operated within a closed temporality, having had a fixed beginning and a fixed end. Like all cultural or educational events, they may or may not have a lasting impact on participants, let alone a wide outreach. Which leads to the following questions: how do you practice queer solidarity with people you have not met, and may never meet in person? People you are not attracted to? People whose lifestyles and social location are on the opposite end of your own? This is where wide online and offline solidarity activism, labeled by Wiedlack and other contributors as “Western,” might be productive. Still, Wiedlack’s interrogation of solidarity should be recommended to anyone who considers themselves an ally.

Overall, *Queer-Feminist Solidarity* reads as a spiritual successor to Joanna Mizielińska and Roberto Kulpa’s 2011 collection *De-Centering Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives* which approaches Central and Eastern European LGBTQ politics through the prism of the postcolonial critique, thus challenging Eurocentrism. Seven out of fourteen essays reference Mizielińska and Kulpa’s anthology, and even the very wording of the book’s subtitle – the “East/West Divide” – appears to be an homage to the former. While an important intervention, Mizielińska and Kulpa’s critique, and the resulting scholarship it has inspired have been questioned as perpetuating the discursive binaries they had aimed to deconstruct (Navickaitė 2014). Likewise, the critical approach signaled by *Queer-Feminist Solidarity*’s editorial perspective might inadvertently—even paradoxically—reinforce the very discursive structures it seeks to challenge. In its analysis of the Western framing of the “East” as always victimized and the “West” as always self-serving, it risks producing monolithic, essentializing portrayals of both “East” and “West,” rather than problematizing the very binary or capturing the complexity of feminist and LGBTQ activism in both locations. Although most essays in the volume mitigate this risk, presenting the queer “East” as a heterogeneous space full of conflicting perspectives and contested ideologies, this perspective does not come clear in the volume editorial, rather reinforcing the “East/West divide.”

Besides, left unaddressed is the Russia hegemony within post-Soviet and postsocialist feminist and queer studies. Post-Soviet, rather than postsocialist subjects and localities dominate the volume: eleven chapters are dedicated to post-Soviet queer politics with eight being about Russia. The only two postsocialist (not post-Soviet) subjects are addressed by Veda Popovici and Joanna Chojnicka in chapters about Romanian pride politics, and Polish trans blogs, respectively. Also left unexplored is solidarity within the postsocialist and post-Soviet spaces/the “East”:

how can solidarity be practiced across the borders and boundaries within CEE & E? Are visibility-based solidarity campaigns, even if practiced by “local” activists, *always already* “Western”? What about multiple in-group tensions experienced by post-Soviet and postsocialist feminists and LGBTQ communities, such as transphobia in feminist circles or the (absence) of anti-war and anti-militarist solidarity between Ukrainian and Russian feminist and queer activists?

Finally, the volume could have incorporated more theoretical literature on transnational queer and feminist solidarity such as works by Atshan (2020), Dean (1997), Gunkel (2013), and others; and historic examples of other successful solidarity work between Western and Eastern feminists and/or LGBTQ communities, such as the well-documented Network of East-West Women (NEWW), which was founded in the early 1990s by Central and Eastern European and American feminists and, fueled by solidarity, has sustained productive collaborations between its American and Eastern-European members for over twenty-five years (Snitow 2020).

As such, *Queer-Feminist Solidarity* is an important addition to the growing area of postsocialist and post-Soviet queer and feminist studies. The volume’s contributions to post-Soviet queer migration studies are especially promising: the three chapters about queer post-Soviet migration and refugees in Germany, France, and transnationally, expand and enrich both geographic and analytical dimensions of this scholarship. This, combined with the diversity of perspectives and subjects introduced by the volume contributors, makes *Queer-Feminist Solidarity* a necessary read for anyone interested in contemporary post-Soviet queer politics and transnational solidarity activism.

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Kirjoittajat / Contributors

SQS
1–2/2020

152

Kirjoittajat
Contributors

VARPU ALASUUTARI

varpu.alasuutari@utu.fi

PhD Varpu Alasuutari from University of Turku defended her dissertation in June 2020. The dissertation centered on LGBTQ people's experiences of bereavement in Finland. Alasuutari's research interests include e.g. queer death studies, queer kinship studies, non-normative and affective intimacies and the history of queer activism. She has published on death, bereavement, queer families and queer friendship.

TOM FURBER

tom.furber@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Tom Furber BA (Hons) History and Politics. MA International Conflict Studies is an Engagement and Learning Officer at London Metropolitan Archives (LMA). Tom is responsible for a broad portfolio of work that connects people with the history of London and Londoners. Part of this is community work designed to complement and challenge more formal historical records and approaches at LMA and other institutions.

MORGAN GIERINGER

Morgan.Gieringer@unt.edu

Morgan Davis Gieringer is the Head of Special Collections at the University of North Texas Libraries and the Director of the Graduate Academic Certificate in Archival Management in the UNT College of Information. As Head of Special Collections, she

oversees major archival initiatives, which include the LGBTQ Archive, the NBC5/KXAS Television News Collection and The Black Academy of Arts and Letters Archive. Gieringer's professional interests include the theory and practice of acquisition; new methods of acquisition; and the application of project management techniques to archival processes such as digitization and processing.

CLINTON GLENN

clinton.glenn@mail.mcgill.ca

Clinton Glenn is currently a PhD candidate in Communication Studies with a Graduate Option in Gender and Women's Studies at McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. His dissertation research examines the material fabric of the three Baltic capitals, Tallinn (Estonia), Riga (Latvia), and Vilnius (Lithuania) through an exploration of LGBT pride marches under the banner of Baltic Pride. This research is informed by theoretical frameworks from post-colonial and post-socialist studies, urban history, queer theory, and LGBT studies. Glenn's work has been published in *Synoptique: An Online Journal of Film and Moving Image Studies*, *Unmediated*, and *esse: Arts + Opinions*. His recent book chapter entitled "Мы не ошибка (We Are Not An Error): Documentary Film and LGBT Activism Against the Russian Anti-'Gay Propaganda' Campaign" was published in winter 2020 in *LGBTQ+ Activism in Central and Eastern Europe* (eds. Radzhana Buyantueva and Maryna Shevtsova). Glenn's forthcoming article "We are the

new Lithuania': Murderous Queers and Destructive Nationalism in *You Can't Escape Lithuania* (*Nuo Lietuvos nepabėgsi*) and *Porno Melodrama*" examining the films of Lithuanian director Romas Zabarauskas will be published in *Lambda Nordica* (Fall 2020). His monograph on the controversial West German film *Taxi zum Klo* (dir. Frank Ripploh, 1980) will be released by McGill-Queen's University Press in 2021/2022.

SARITA HERNÁNDEZ

smaritzah@gmail.com

Sarita Hernández is an arts educator, oral hystorian, and print/zinemaker from salvadoréxican California based in Chicago, Illinois. Sarita is co-founder of *marimacha monarca press*, a queer and trans* people of color zine familia based in Chicago's South Side since 2017, and *Fwd: Museums*, an interdisciplinary journal produced by University of Illinois at Chicago graduate students since 2015. She is interested in artistic interventions with the historical archive and imagining alternative forms of social documentation, preservation, and activation of everyday hystories, survivals, and resistances. They recently curated *40 años a la esperanza* exhibition at the National Museum of Mexican Art to honor the 40th anniversary of the local Benito Juárez high school's *A la esperanza* mural, while rerighting artist Malú Ortega into the herstory of this mural's creation.

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1796-5551

TUULA JUVONEN

tuula.juvonen@tuni.fi

Tuula Juvonen, DSocSci, works since August 2020 as a senior lecturer of Gender Studies at Tampere University. Her previous studies have focused on emerging lesbian and gay communities, the changing position of homosexuality in Finnish society, and the sexualities and genders in flux, and she has published ground-breaking monographs about Finnish LGBT history. Currently she is compiling an online Dictionary of Queer History. Juvonen has been awarded for her ongoing collaboration with memory institutions to preserve Finnish LGBTQ histories, and she is a cofounder of the registered association Friends of Queer History.

ASTA KIHLMAN

asta.kihlman@utu.fi

PhD Asta Kihlman is an art historian specialized in studies on visual culture and queer theory. Kihlman is interested in gender producing social power relations and the individual places of resistance wherefrom it's possible to challenge prevalent gender conceptions. Currently she is examining questions concerning the dialogue of gender and colour also as an Amos Anderson fellow in Rome. Kihlman also works as an art critic and collaborates with artists in different projects. She teaches at the Turku Art Academy and has functioned as teacher at the University of Turku.

JEMINA LINDHOLM

lindholm.jemina@gmail.com

MA, BA Jemina Inkeri Lindholm (she/her/they/them) is a visual artist, an art and community pedagogue and a cultural producer living and working in Helsinki, Finland. In her/their works, she/they deal with intimacy, sickness and health,

as well as the processes of togetherness that often take the form of a video, a photographic series, or a slightly choreographed encounter. Lindholm loves working collectively as togetherness provides effectiveness, radical safety and immediate feedback. Currently her/their main field of interest is the intersection of contemporary art, sickness and crip theory as well as accessible event production. At the moment she/they are working on a new project on accessibility with her/their colleague and friend Jessie Bullivant.

Together with Kaura Raudaskoski, they form a pedagogical duo dedicated to feminist (un)learning, pedagogy and research. At the moment their work concentrates on themed guided tours and discussion workshops in public (art) institutions that ponder on gender, ability, agency and identity from queer, crip and posthuman perspectives. Lindholm and Raudaskoski are both hosts of the Queer+Crip guided tours at the Finnish Museum of Photography and the Architecture After Human guided tours at the Museum of Finnish Architecture. Their most recent joint publication is *Zine about Feminist Pedagogies: Discussing Intersectionality, Accessibility and Feminist Labour* that was launched in 2020 as a part of #StopHatredNow platform initiated by UrbanApa.

ALEXANDRA NOVITSKAYA

alexandra.novitskaya@stonybrook.edu

Alexandra Novitskaya is a PhD student at the Stony Brook University (USA). Her research focuses on queer migration and asylum, post-Soviet sexualities, transnational LGBTQ and feminist activism. Recent publications are: "Sexual Citizens in Exile: State-Sponsored Homophobia and Post-Soviet LGBTQ Migration LGBTQ Migration" forthcoming in *The Russian Review*, and "Patriotism, Sentiment, and

Male Hysteria: Putin's Masculinity Politics and the Persecution of Non-heterosexual Russians" in *NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies*.

NINA NYMAN

nina.c.nyman@abo.fi

Pol.mag. Nina Nyman currently works as a PhD candidate at Åbo akademi Univeristy, her thesis deals with what is left behind after (online) grassroots activism and how the material can travel to archives in an ethical way, the practical example being the #metoo movement #dammenbrister that she was one of the creators and administrators of. Before starting her Ph.D. she worked as the editor in chief of the feminist magazine *Astra*.

RITA PAQVALÉN

rita.paqvalen@cultureforall.fi

PhD Rita Paqvalén has since 2012 been the Executive Director of Culture for All, where she has been addressing queer issues through for example the projects *Queering the Museums* (2012–2014), *Finland 100 – In Rainbow Colours* (Suomi 100 – Sateenkaaren väreissä 2016–2018), and *Queer History Month* (Sateenkaarihistoriakuukausi 2018–). Currently she is on writer's leave for her book project on queer memories and queering the field of cultural heritage. Paqvalén wrote her doctoral thesis in the field of Scandinavian literature and has earlier worked as university lecturer and researcher. She was also one of the main organizers of the LGBTQ culture festival *The Nights and the Days of the Tribades* (Tribadien yön ja päivät 2000–2009). She has published several books, publications and articles on queering cultural heritage, queer culture, Nordic literature, theatre, cultural history, multilingualism, and feminism.

SQS
1–2/2020

153

Kirjoittajat
Contributors

ISSN
1796-5551

JAIMI PARKER

Jaimi.Parker@unt.edu

Jaimi Parker is the Exhibits Coordinator for Special Collections at the University of North Texas Libraries. She graduated with her Master's in Museum Studies from Johns Hopkins University, in 2016. As the Exhibits Coordinator, she curates multiple exhibits each year utilizing Special Collections materials, collaborates with outside partners to share local history, and assists with outreach programs for UNT Special Collections. Recently she has focused on sharing knowledge of exhibit creation techniques with other archives, and working with other exhibit professionals to advocate for this type of work in the field of libraries and archives.

THERESE QUINN

thereseq@uic.edu

PhD Therese Quinn (she/they) is an Associate Professor and Director of Museum and Exhibition Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Therese writes about the arts, education, and cultural institutions as sites of democratic engagement and justice work, and has published widely, including a monthly column for the University of Helsinki, articles in the *Monthly Review*, *Journal of Museum Education*, *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education*, and *Rethinking Schools*, among others, and co-authored and edited several books. In addition to *School: Questions About Museums, Culture and Justice* (2020), the most recent of these are, *Teaching Toward Democracy 2e* (2016), *Art and Social Justice Education: Culture as Commons* (2012), and *Sexualities in Education: A Reader* (2012).

KAURA RAUDASKOSKI

kaura.raudaskoski@gmail.com

MA, BA Kaura Raudaskoski (they/them) is an art pedagogue, artist and philosopher from Helsinki, Finland. They are interested in combining art education with moral philosophy, gender studies, feminist practices, and posthumanism. Raudaskoski deals extensively with various themes in both their artistic and pedagogical work, such as social justice, different ways of being together and performativity, using art, discussion and philosophical thinking as tools to create more sustainable futures. Currently Raudaskoski is working on a voluntary basis as the organization secretary of Friends of Queer History, and in various local social justice communities.

Together with Jemina Lindholm, they form a pedagogical duo dedicated to feminist (un)learning, pedagogy and research. At the moment their work concentrates on themed guided tours and discussion workshops in public (art) institutions that ponder on gender, ability, agency and identity from queer, crip and posthuman perspectives. Lindholm and Raudaskoski are both hosts of the Queer+Crip guided tours at the Finnish Museum of Photography and the Architecture After Human guided tours at the Museum of Finnish Architecture. Their most recent joint publication is *Zine about Feminist Pedagogies: Discussing Intersectionality, Accessibility and Feminist Labour* that was launched in 2020 as a part of #StopHatredNow platform initiated by UrbanApa.

JOHANNA ROJOLA aka ROJU

roju@kaapeli.fi

Roju has a degree in making comics from Ecole des Beaux Arts d'Angoulême. For the last three years they have participated in two projects combining research and art: Population, sexuality and history at the University of Helsinki and Comics and migration at

the University of Turku. Both were funded by Kone Foundation. In 2021 they start studying in the Praxis programme at the Academy of Fine Arts of Helsinki. Earlier in their career they have been a pioneer in the field of comic studies in Finland and as a founding member of Kuti art comics collective and Femicomix Finland network.

SUE SANDERS

salsanders2003@gmail.com

Sue Sanders, Professor Emeritus of the Harvey Milk Institute, an "out and proud" lesbian, is chair of Schools OUT UK. In 2004 she instituted the UK's LGBT History Month, an annual event which happens every February. In 2007 she was responsible for The Classroom which has lesson plans that 'usualise' LGBT people in all their diversity for all ages across the curriculum. She co-runs OUTing the Past, an annual international festival of LGBT+ history. As an educator and activist, Sanders is a proponent of an inclusive and relevant curriculum in education and works to 'educate out' all forms of prejudice. She has worked extensively in the criminal justice system attempting to challenge hate crime in all its forms.

RIIKKA TAAVETTI

riikka.taavetti@helsinki.fi

PhD Riikka Taavetti is a postdoctoral researcher in political history at the University of Helsinki. Her current research addresses the history of Finnish sex research in a transnational context. Her research interests include history of sexuality, queer history, politics of memory, oral history, and the history of feminism. Her recent publications include articles "Writing on the Limits of the Estonian diaspora: Belonging, Gender, and Sexuality in Heljo Liitoja's Autobiographies" (*Journal of Baltic Studies*, in press) and "Discovered Queer Desires: Rereading Same-Sex

SQS
1-2/2020

154

Kirjoittajat
Contributors

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Sexuality from Finnish and Estonian Life Stories of the 1990s” (*Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2019).

DAN VO

d.vo@vam.ac.uk

FRSA is the project manager for the Queer Heritage and Collections Network in the UK. He was the inaugural winner of the Museums Association Museums Change Lives ‘Radical Changemaker’ award in 2018, presenter of Museum From Home for BBC Arts: Culture in Quarantine in 2020, and sits on several museum and heritage steering groups. An LGBT History Month patron, Dan is also a freelance museum consultant in inclusive programming, queer history and decolonisation. He founded the award-winning volunteer-led LGBTQ+ Tours at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2015 and developed similar tours for five University of Cambridge Museums in 2018 and Amgueddfa Genedlaethol Caerdydd National Museum Cardiff in 2020.

LESLIE WOODEN

lwoode2@uic.edu

Leslie Wooden is a third year PhD student in the art history department, and a Gender and Women’s studies concentrator at the University of Illinois, Chicago. Her research areas include global contemporary art, queer art, and social practice. She is currently researching a dissertation topic focused on African contemporary artists (specifically from West Africa) who explore themes related to gender and sexual politics. She is particularly examining photography produced after the independence period (since 1960 through the present), and the use of social media, websites, and video-sharing as alternatives to traditional archival and exhibition practices.

SQS
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155

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