

https://dspace.org/

Out of the closet and into the archive: imagining modes of futurity for queer archival practices

Prior, Emma

2023
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/36868

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Out of the Closet and Into the Archive:
Imagining Modes of Futurity for Queer Archival Practices

Emma Prior

Student Number: 1621302

Research Report in partial fulfilment of the Degree
Master of Arts in Contemporary Curatorial Practice by Coursework and Research Report

at the

University of Witwatersrand
Supervisor: Dr Nicola Cloete
2022

Ethical Clearance Number: WSOA20210801

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this research report is my own original work and that I have not previously, in its entirety or in part, submitted it at any university for a degree.



EMMA PRIOR 28 JUNE 2022

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements 6

Chapter One: Introduction 7
- Aim 7
- Rationalisation of the Project 7
- Research Questions 9
- Theoretical Framework and Methodology 9
- Literature Review Summary 11
- Case Studies 13

Chapter Two: Literature Review 14
- What (and where) is an Archive? 14
- Whose History? 18
- Non-neutrality, Control, Memory and Power 22
- The Act of Queering 25

Chapter Three: Case Studies and Interrogating Issues of the Archive 29
- Case Studies Background 29
- Importance of Existing Queer Archives 30
- Bias and the Issue of the Archivist Bring Stretched Too Thin 32

Chapter Four: Out of the Closet and Into the Archive Exhibition 40
- Overview of the Exhibition 40
- Contributions and the Curatorial 41
- Outcomes 49

Chapter Five: Concluding Thoughts 55

Bibliography 58

Appendix One: Documentation of the Exhibition 64

Appendix Two: Interview Transcriptions 96
Genevieve Louw 96
Lucie Handley-Girard 117
Doctor Schem Bader 135

ABSTRACT

Out of the Closet and Into the Archive: Imagining Modes of Futurity for Queer Archival Practices investigates the limitations of queer archival practices and offers alternative strategies of archiving queer histories, lived experiences and stories in such a way that is inherently collaborative by making use of curatorial practice. The project answers the main question: what is the configuration of a queer archive that utilises collaborative archival strategies by prioritizing the voices of living queer bodies? The exhibition sets up a temporal archival space which demonstrates these alternative possibilities for queer archival practices by creating a space that is inclusive of diverse voices and creates a platform where queer individuals can be part of the queer narrative that is recorded and shared, creating and demonstrating collaborative archival strategies. This project examines two existing queer archives in order to find areas for improvement while informing the exhibition in order to offer modes of futurity. Semi-structured interviews and items contributed to the exhibition form part of the data collection, presenting an opportunity to think through and address the research in a practical way. Collectively, these aspects engaged in a practical embodiment of modes of futurity, demonstrating the possibilities of collaborative archival practice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my supervisor, Doctor Nicola Cloete. I cannot begin to express how truly grateful I am to have worked under your supervision for this project. Your support and dedication made this entire process exciting and pleasurable. Thank you for your patience, kindness and advice. I will take the knowledge and advice you left me with into all future projects.

To the curator of The Point of Order, Reshma Chhiba. Thank you for your wisdom, curiosity and spirited attitude. I am grateful to have worked with you in the exhibition-making process of this project. Thank you for expanding my curatorial knowledge and pushing me outside of my comfort zone.

To my parents, Jonathan and Beryl Prior. Thank you for your unwavering support in everything I do. Thank you for your emotional support through this very unpredictable journey. I am appreciative of all the hours you've put into helping me succeed. I would not be here without you.

To my partner, Alexia Phirippides. I'm sure the words "how does this sound?" and "does this make sense?" will ring in your ears long after this project is completed. Thank you for convincing me to see this project through in the moments I felt like giving up. I am eternally grateful for our debates about queer archives and curatorial practice.

The interviewees: Genevieve Louw, Lucie Handley-Girard, Doctor Schem Bader - you are all truly incredible at what you do. Thank you for expanding my knowledge and opinions about queer archives. The work you do for the queer community is invaluable.

Special thanks must also be given to Daniella Webster. Thank you for being a fantastic proofreader and an even better friend. A special thanks to all my friends and family who came along for the journey.

To all the people who donated to or attended the exhibition. Your contributions showed me what queer life truly is. This project would not exist without you. Thank you for sharing your lives and stories with me. Your committment to creating collaborative queer histories is truly extraordinary.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Aim

The aim of this project is to find the limitations of current queer archival practices and offer alternative strategies of archiving queer histories, lived experiences and stories in such a way that is inherently collaborative by making use of curatorial practice and the research report. The project sets up a temporal archival space in the form of an exhibition which demonstrates these alternative possibilities for queer archival practices by creating a space that is inclusive of diverse voices and creates a platform where queer individuals can be part of the queer narrrative that is recorded and shared. The exhibition aims to create and demonstrate collaborative archival strategies, allowing queer people to record their own histories on their terms in order to create an unbiased, more inclusive understanding of the contemporary queer experience. The research report aims to address the ideas and information that was collected during the exhibition while making use of interviews to uncover the challenges that queer archives face. Together, both the curatorial aspect and written aspect work concurrently to theorise strategies around how best queer bodies can archive their own histories in an inherently collaborative way.

Rationalisation of the project

During the Covid-19 lockdown, I has become interested in collections of various queer archives internationally. I had begun researching *Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archive*, *The Arquives*, *Lesbian Herstory Archives*, *Australian Gay and Lesbian Archives* as well as *Skeivt Arkiv*, amongst various other archives and archival projects. I observed their online catalogues, sifting through different items that were of particular interest to me. I became frustrated by the functionings of queer archives at large, specifically with regards to accessibility. Particularly, I was frustrated by relying on hefty and confusing catalogues to pick out items of interest. I felt as though there was very little space to simply browse or explore the queer archive without a specific intention in mind. In addition, this project was initiated by the frustration of feeling as though I could not identify representations of myself and other contemporary queer individuals in the archival spaces that I had been researching. In doing further research and exploring the

catalogues in depth, I came to realise that contemporary bodies *do* in fact live in these queer archives and are widely represented.

My frustration then manifested into feeling as though I had not been included in the authorship of my own history. I wondered if other queer individuals had similar feelings around the authorship of their histories in queer archives. I initiated conversations with queer peers to better understand how they felt about not being actively included in the telling of their stories. I wondered how truthfully a history or story could be told without the inclusion of the original donor's voice, and the influence of the singular archivist. I was inquisitive about the details, nuances and discourses that were lost in the archiving of an object. There was a moment of imagining what it would look like, sound life and feel like for queer bodies to archive their own lives, on their own terms without the influence of the archivist. I considered how queer individuals could assume a collaborative archival strategy. I questioned if queer individuals had been misrepresented or omitted from the archive due to bias - or other factors which will be discussed in greater detail.

I felt excluded from the telling of my history and a larger collective history. I was particularly interested in the more mundane moments of the queer experience - the moments that have come to define queerness in everyday life. I found that queer archives exist in limited ways and there seems to be an inherent problem in the act of archiving which perpetuates a singular narrative. I found that the problem with the singular narrative is that is tends to perpetuate a one-sided perspective and history of queerness. It does not account for, nor does it acknowledge other perspectives or alternative accounts of histories. The project aims to break down the limitations of queer archival practices by shifting the lens and making archiving a collaborative endeavour. I was interested in investigating the discourses surrounding these ideas which are associated with questions of archival authority. I was interested in exploring the ways in which self-determined accounts of queerness manifest, and how this shifts our perspective of queer archives. In addition, I was particularly interested in investigating the relationship between the queer body and the queer archive when one sees representations of their community in the archive without being part of the authorship. There may be a gap between what an individual sees represented and how they think of themselves. Historically, queer bodies have not been able to determine their own accounts of queer sensibility or narration. The project aims to break down the conventions of archiving in a constructive manner through the form of a curated exhibition. Although it may be impossible to create an archival

project that is accessible to all individuals and accounts for all queer histories, it is worthwhile to explore this space in order to reveal how best contemporary queer bodies can document themselves.

Queer archives are a valuable alternative to conventional institutional archives, demonstrating the transformations that may occur when the communities represented in the archives are prioritised. The strategy of this project is to see a shift from archival silence to archival production and transformative discourse. Through the use of collaborative archival methods, the project offers queer bodies a platform to claim their existence, their histories and their lived experiences on their own terms. These considerations have led the way for a detachment from the traditional queer archive where archivists are no longer gatekeepers of producing collections that record queer life, but rather the archive becomes a self-determined account of the contemporary queer experience.

There may be many different kinds of imaginings of what a queer archive should look like, sound like and act like. This project interrogates one kind of articulation in order to imagine a mode of futurity for the queer archive that actively includes the voices of those being archived. In any articulation of the queer archive, we should not divide mainstream or institutional archives from community-based archives. Queer archives should be concieved as a conversation between those archiving and those being archived. We should regard archivists as well as community members as having equal importance in the creation of queer archives. This project positions the creation and maintenance of the queer archive as part of an ongoing conversation, which resulted in incredibly diverse and interesting archival strategies for communities to document their histories.

Research Questions

Current modes of queer archiving are often not inherently collaborative and do not actively include the voices of those being archived. Through a curatorial aspect and a written aspect, the project aims to answer the main question: what is the configuration of a queer archive that utilises collaborative archival strategies by prioritising the voices of living queer bodies? This question will initially be explored in the exhibition where I explore different manifestations of how the queer archive comes together when queer bodies are collaboratively archiving their histories and lived experiences. In this sense, the exhibition is primarily concerned with the physical

renderings of the collaborative queer archive. In the research paper, I explore the different manifestations of the collaborative queer archive within a literary framework, theorising why, how and where the collaborative queer archive manifests using information collected from the exhibition. The research report includes interviews with experts in queer archival practice to better understand the challenges they face. Further, the written aspect of the project asks: how does the archive shift when those being documented are in charge of their histories? How best can we actively include the voices of living queer people into the archive? The project also calls into question notions of absence and presence, and what we consider to be 'archive-able'.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In order to examine concerns of queer archives, the creation of an inclusive narrative and collaborative archival practices, the theoretical framework employed in this paper primarily draws on archival theory, while making reference to queer archives, queer theory as well as decolonial theory. The goal is to lay out a wider theoretical framework on which to build an interdisciplinary analysis, and make a contribution to academic discussions. Some of the key themes that are discussed in this paper include *performance of the queer archive* (Disemelo 2019), *decolonial curatorial strategies in contemporary spaces* (Muniz Reed 2015), along with *queering the archive* (Kumbier 2014) and *issues of (non)neutrality* (Minott 2019). The notion of *queering* (Arondekar 2015) and *queerness as an ideal* (Ndikung 2018) are also important to further discussions about collaborative queer archival practice in general. Furthermore, *disidentifications* (Munoz 1999) as well as *archives as a trustworthy source of information* (Stoler) and finally *the archive's power and limitations* (Mbembe 2002) are interrogated. These key themes, concepts and theories are discussed in greater detail in the literature review where they are communicated and thought about in relation to the research material.

Following this research, I picked out two queer archives to study in greater detail - *Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archive* as well as *The Arquives*. I contacted some individuals - who had either worked at the archive or had some sort of relationship with the archive- about the possibility of an interview in order to further my research. This included Lucie Handley-Girard, who is the archivist at *The Arquives*, along with Doctor Schem Rodgerson Bader, who was a postdoctoral researcher at *The Arquives*, as well as Genevieve Louw, who is the programs co-ordinator at *Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives*. They accepted my interview requests and agreed to have a conversation about queer archival practice. These interviews

allowed me to meet the members of these archives and gain a greater insight into the practices of the archives and their activities. In terms of collecting information from the archival examples, these semi-structured interviews presented an opportunity to think through and address my research questions in a much more practical way - which I had not engaged in until the interviews. I gained a greater understanding and recognition of the practical and political matters of the archives; while learning about the experiences and perspectives of those who interact with the queer archive everyday.

In conjunction with the information collected from the interviews, my other modes of collecting information stemmed from the items that were contributed to the curated exhibition. I invited individuals who wanted to be part of the narration of their histories in queer archives to contribute an item or items to a temporary exhibition which I curated in order to further interrogate my research questions. With these objects in mind, I participated in *meaning interpretation.* This is a methodology, illustrated by Steinar Kvale (1996) as an examination and investigation of the contributed materials. This includes a development of the original material which allows the researcher to conduct an in depth and contextualised interpretation of the information. This method allows the researcher to extend their investigation beyond that which is immediately evident and communicate meanings which may not be explicit in order to draw contextualised conclusions (Kvale 1996: 201). The collection of this information and the exhibition allowed me to engage in a practical embodiment of the modes of futurity that are outlined in this paper; demonstrating the possibilities of collaborative archival practice. An interesting characteristic of the contributions was their ability to be read in different ways through different lenses in conversation with the narration of the individuals contributing to the project. This left me excited to interpret the material with the lens through which I had been working on this project. These contributions stimulated critical thoughts about my own perspectives, sentiments, notions and positionalities communicated through the curatorial process, as well as the interviewing process.

I engaged in an ethical training course through the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Online Training Module for the Social Sciences and Humanities, which was completed in October of 2021. All ethical considerations were put in place with the intention of minimizing the exposure to harm and protect those participating in the project. Participation was voluntary where experts and community members were invited to participate in interviews and contributions in the exhibition respectively. When approaching the experts for interviews, they

were sent a Participant Information Sheet which outlined the purpose of the project, the request for the interview and the ways in which the interviews would be utilised. Upon agreeing, the interviewees were sent a consent form in which they agreed that their interviews would be used to inform the research report, agreed that they understood that their participation was voluntary and could withdraw from the project at any time without any consequence of any kind, et cetera. The clear outlining of the project and explanations in the consent form allowed the interviewees to give formal signed and informed consent. The interview recordings, which the interviewees had previously agreed to, were stored on a password protected computer, were transcribed by the researcher, and were not posted or used in any other way than originally agreed upon. Those who contributed to the exhibition, too, participated voluntarily. Similarly, upon contributing their items to the archive, I explained the purpose of the project and how their contributions would be used. The consent form explained that they were entitled to withdraw participation at any time; however, once the research report had been submitted, their contributions could not be removed from the paper. Both interviewees and participating community members had the option to remain anonymous or choose a pseudonym in order to protect their identities. In the case of those who chose not to reveal their identities, I - the researcher - did not disclose their names or personal information to any other person. The consent forms of all interviewees and community participants were stored in a file in a locked cupboard in the personal home of the researcher. Participants who wished to remain anonymous were encouraged to contribute their items prior to the exhibition as complete anonymity could not be guaranteed at the exhibition, since there were other individuals who could potentially witness the anonymous participant contributing their donation. The protection of the physical objects was, too, an ethical consideration. The objects were stored in a locked cabinet, away from moisture and sunlight to avoid damage during the time that they were not on display. Protocols were put in place to minimise the risk of infection against Covid-19. The temperatures were taken of all individuls entering the exhibition, and were not permitted entry if their temperature was above 37 degrees celsius. The gallery was sufficiently ventilated, masks were mandatory and social distancing was encouraged.

My aim is to foster a conversation between my main research concern - collaborative queer archival strategies - and the curatorial, as well as the information collected - from interviews and contributions - and the theoretical framework. Thus, this project moves back and forth between literature and collected information, allowing me to examine, complicate and advocate for

collaborative archival practices using the theoretical sources, interviews and contributions, while determining my own theoretical reflections which are integrated into display practices.

With regards to its structure, this paper is divided into five chapters. The first - which the reader is currently reading - outlines the conception of this project, the aim and rationale, theoretical framework and methodology, case studies, et cetera. The second part holds the literature review on archival practice, queer archival strategies, queer theory and decolonial theory. The third part elaborates on the two chosen case studies, expanding on the limitations of current queer archives and imagining modes of futurity. The fourth part of this paper reflects on the strengths and limitations of the curated exhibition, which demonstrates these imaginings in a practical way, illustrating the transformations that can occur when looking at queer archival practice through a different lens. Lastly, the final part draws conclusions, offers final thoughts on the project and sums up the findings, reflecting on the successes and limitations of this research project.

Literature Review Summary

Studying the strategies of queer archival practice is a broad and comprehensive task which requires engaging in an interdisciplinary manner. I take part in an assortment of different conversions across disciplines throughout this project. The connections between them may not be immediately explicit upon first glance. However, throughout this paper, the links will become more obvious.

This research paper lays out a wide theoretical framework to build an interdisciplinary analysis while making a contribution to academic discussions. The selected literature lays a solid foundation that will be explored in the exhibition. In the beginning, Mbembe's work aids me in defining the archive and its limitations. Most notably, I explore archives as evidence that someone or something existed in the past, while problematising these kinds of narratives with conversations around omission and misrepresentation. In relation to Disemelo's text, I develop ideas around fluidity and self-representation as well as destabilising heteronormative ideals and behaviours in the archive. Muñiz Reed's text allows me to investigate the implications for contemporary archivists who are responsible for interpreting contested histories. I explore representing history 'as it were' and the consequences of representing historical narratives without commenting on the contemporary queer community. Kumbier's writing allows me to

explore my own ideas around authorship and being a part of the archival process. Kumbier's methodology proves to be similar to my own in this project which challenges the expansion of my own ideas. Minott's text explores ideas of neutrality, non-neutrality and bias in order to locate taxonomies that exist in archival practices. Minott's theories encourage me to question my own neutrality or non-neutrality in the exhibition where I acknowledge my own biased positioning in an effort to be more inclusive of diverse representations. Arondekar's notion of queering allows me to explore the tumultuous and personal nature of queer archives. The centralisation of queer methodologies and frameworks allows the archivist to rethink the purpose of the archive and its accessibility for all wanting to engage. Ndikung's text allows me to explore the ways in which queer archives can separate themselves from normative archival practices by decentralising the histories that exclude marginalised groups of people. This line of thinking articulates that the queer archive must be re-conceived and re-articulated in order to remain fluid and acknowledge archival items as possessing agency. In reference to Munoz's literature, I explore how queering the archive can displace conventional binaries while acknowleding the uncertainty of practices of historicising and memorialising queer individuals. These queered methodologies are percieved as a framework for analysing, reimagining and reforming the queer archive so that diverse communities and individuals are represented in such a way where they are part of the writing of a narrative that is recorded and shared. Stoler's text outlines how archival collections may be linked to issues around collective memory, control and power. This text encourages critical thinking in relation to the kinds of power structures living in archival practices, and how those practices create a sense of community and shared history.

Examples of queer archives

This research paper looks at two examples queer archives in order to break down their limitations and imagine modes of futurity. These two archives include *Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA)*, formerly known as *Gay and Lesbian Archive* as well as *The Arquives*, formerly known as *Canada's LGBTQ2 Archive*. In this paper, I explore these two archives in order to demonstrate two main areas of improvement within queer archival practices on a larger scale. These two issues include: the problem of the singular narrative and the problem of the archivist having too much on their plate. The information from the case studies informs the exhibition which actively employs strategies that counter the problems outlined in the archives. The

exhibition addresses the problems outlined, imagining and practically demonstrating different strategies that are more inclusive than those already existing.

The Arquives and GALA, for the purposes of this paper, act as examples of the ways in which queer archives exist and function within local communities, the ways in which queer people can access and interact with these spaces and the challenges that queer archives may face. In order to uncover the challenges that queer archives face, I engage in interviews with individuals who work with the archives on a daily basis. The information provided in the interviews helps me better understand the daily workings of queer archives and the ways in which community members are engaged, allowing me to think of new strategies and possibilities for collaborative practices within queer archives as a site of mapping and recording queer memory. The interview questions were set out with the intention of gathering information to answer my research questions - to understand how best queer bodies can be included in the recording of their histories as well as how the collaborative archive manifests physically.

When selecting two examples of queer archives to engage with, I researched many archives and archival projects globally. I was interested in investigating a queer archive that operates within the South African context, as well as an example of an international archive in order to reveal the ways in which archives function as well as the challenges they are faced with. I was particularly interested in exploring archives that are well established and widely known within their respective communities. During my research into queer archives and archival projects within the South African context, I found that GALA stood out as the most established and well recognised archive locally. While other queer archival projects exist within the South African context, I was interested in exploring the ways in which GALA came to be well respected and widely acknowledged within our local community. The Arquives is the largest independent queer archive globally, and is the only LGBTQ2+ archive in Canada, which I found to be particilarly intriguing with regards to the ways in which a large archive is managed. In addition, both archives run public programming, engaging and involving their communities in interesting ways. Regarding this public engagement element, I was interested in exploring ways in which their communities could be engaged differently by making use of collaborative archival strategies. When choosing these queer archives as examples to research in further detail, I was particularly aware of their role in engaging queer people of colour in archival spaces. In both examples, I found spaces for collaborative modes of archiving which could positively benefit the organisation as well as the larger queer community, and I was interested in exploring how these possibilities

could be implemented within these specific examples as well as other archives globally.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout the texts interrogated in this paper, there is a theme that is concerned with archives, queer bodies and empowerment. Archives may offer an individual a space to reflect on the lives of their friends and families, while introspecting on their own lives, being appreciated by history, and carving out their own space in the world. Archival records are more than legal documents, they are spaces that are inherently intertwined with emotions that confront our thoughts and assumptions about past events, people and happenings. In this chapter, I focus on bringing together a working definition for queer archives while focusing on self-representation and notions of 'history'. Queer theory allows me to interrogate ideas around transformations, collaborations, (non)neutrality, control, memory and power (Arondekar 2015). For some, not being included in the archive may seem like not existing at all (Mbembe 2002). These texts offer an opportunity to reclaim queer archival space and our queer existence as a whole in order to create more inclusive spaces where all voices are acknowledged, included and accounted for. The texts interrogated in this paper form a foundation to look critically at archives and archival strategies in order to break down the limitations, while imagining modes of futurity.

In his text titled *Crusing Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity,* José Esteban Muñoz frames the ways in which he theorises queerness and communities by begining with the statement "Queerness is also a performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future" (Muñoz 2009: 1). In this statement, Muñoz calls into question the need for queerness to be orientated in relation to the future, while locating the past, through performative acts of being and doing. Futurity centalises transformative ways of being queer in our environments, while decentralising hegemonic readings of queerness (Twomey 2020). The way in which 'futurity' is utilised in this report is not dissimilar to the ways in which Muñoz imagines queer futurity. Futurity imagines and strives for more inclusive modes of expressing queerness in archival spaces particularly, while acknowledging the need to disrupt current modes of being and acting that omit, marginalise and misrepresent queer individuals from their histories. In this project, 'futurity' is concerned with conceiving consequential and unconventional ways in which communities can build upon their histories without experiencing feelings of exclusion or marginalisation. 'Futurity' takes into account our complex and intersectional identities while acknowledging that our identities are performed - in this case, in spaces such as queer archives. Futurity is concerned with the creation of tangible structures, rethinking and reorientating the ways in which queer identtities can be performed rather than the theorisation

around the topic. It is important to note here that while futurity encompasses ephemeral projects, such as this one, it is largely about defying uneven power structures that omit, misrepresent and ostricise queer people from their histories in a way that is community-orientated.

What (and where) is an archive?

In most simple terms, we can think of an archive as a collection of items that someone perceived as significant enough to keep and preserve for future generations to interact with a specific intention in mind. Archives serve as evidence that something - or someone - happened or existed at some point in time. Mbembe illustrates this point by stating: “Because of its being there, the archive… is proof that life truly existed, that something actually happened, an account of which can be put together” (Mbembe 2002: 21). Queer archives make it attainable to learn about and engage with our histories. Edenheim furthers this idea, stating that an archive guarantees that in the future, those looking at the archive will understand the present since current existing bodies will be represented (Edenheim 2014: 49). Archives are able to deconstruct or perpetuate unequal power structures, allowing queer people, researchers and archivists to understand stories and experiences of the past. However, some queer bodies may be deliberately or inadvertently omitted from the archive. Archives affect what we think of as ‘history’. Archivists have a great deal of power in the inclusion and exclusion of certain people and narratives in the archive which may perpetuate a bias that defines how we understand certain stories. In some cases, omission is not the only problem. Misrepresentation can be equally, and in some cases, more harmful than omission. Achille Mbembe illustrates this point stating that:

> “The archive is primarily the product of judgment, the result of the exercise of specific power and authority, which involves placing certain documents in an archive at the same time others are discarded. The archive, therefore, is fundamentally a matter of discrimination and of selection, which, in the end, results in the granting of a privileged status to certain written documents, and the refusal of the same status to others, thereby judged ‘unarchiveable’. The archive is, therefore, not a piece of data, but a status” (Mbembe 2002: 20).

The consequence of this kind of omission or misrepresentation may lead to conceptions that if a story does not explicitly exist in the archive, then it may not have existed at all. The omission of queer bodies in mainstream institutional archives birthed the queer archive which was a resistance against systems that only accepted heteronormative ideals. Queer archives have protected queer histories that were often omitted, while resisting exclusion of queer bodies in archives through the reclamation of queer narratives (Hosfeld 2018). Queer archives are an important possibility that differ from traditional institutional archives, revealing the kinds of nuances that may occur from focusing on those whose stories are told in the archive. Queer archival strategies encourage us to consider the ways in which we archive people. They encourage us to think through what it means to be omitted or misrepresented in the archive, and how one begins to repair those omissions and misrepresentations. They encourage us to think about what narratives may emerge from the missing pieces of history. We should take these considerations seriously if we want to understand the manifestation of queer forms of memory and archival practice.

It must be said that while queer archival practices made significant advancements in the ways in which we understand and document queer bodies, they are not perfect. Omission and misrepresentation exists clearly in queer archives (Orr 2017). There are problems around singular narratives and exclusion from storytelling. This is not to say that we should be too judgemental towards queer archives. After all, their work is incredibly important. Rather, we should engage with queer archives to reveal the problems. The re-imagining of queer archival strategies in this project allows queer bodies to claim their existence in the archive, their histories and experiences while carving out a space that is more inclusive than those existing queer archives. In order for these strategies of queer archival practice to exist in harmony with the queer community, we must interrogate what we understand queer archival practice to be. We must interrogate why the queer archive exists, how it exists and what we can do in order to improve it.

Archivists may act as gatekeepers of archival collections. This relationship manifests because they are the primary decider of what - and who - goes into the archive, and how these things are recorded (Watts 2018: 104). This may be intentional or unintentional. In this way, the archivist influences and frames the stories in the archive, having power over what and who is commemorated or neglected. Items in the archive may be contributed by queer bodies but the archivist does the final recording. If the archivist doing the recording has biases - whether

intentional or unintentional - they may omit important details or misrepresent the item or person (Watts 2018: 105). History in queer archives is never certain, nor singular, since archives bear so many different stories and bodies. In order to represent what queerness means across different temporal and spatial contexts, different socio-economic and cultural contexts; queer archives must be careful not to construct singular narratives. This is why collaborating with communities should be a vital part of archival practice. A fuller understanding of queerness can only take place when those being represented are actively involved in the telling of their stories. Collaborative archival strategies set out a flexible foundation, allowing for nuanced conversations and recommendations to take place. The purpose of the archive may become clearer and truer when the community is prioritised.

Queer bodies may have opportunities to claim their stories, their histories and their identities in queer archives through the development of queer memory (Doan 2017). This illustrates the ways in which queer archives are different from conventional archives. The most notable difference between conventional archives and queer archives is that queer archives interrogate and dismantle hierarchical knowledge (Lee 2017). What this implies is that conventional archival institutions have not been intelligible to queer individuals and those interested in the historical establishment of sexuality. Often, conventional or 'traditional' archives are associated with academic institutions or governments. Conventional archives often make use of jargon that does not accurately represent or include queer individuals and their communities. Thus, queer archives offer a space for queer people to have the authority with regards to deciding what kind of language is used to describe their histories while protecting materials and histories that may be unappreciated in heteronormative institutional archives (Baucom 2018). The way in which we think about the queer archive is never fixed. We may have different ideas of what we consider the queer archive to be and its purpose. On one hand, the queer archive may be concerned with collecting and preserving materials that have been contributed by queer people. On the other hand, the purpose of the queer archive may be to interrogate and disrupt traditional archival practices. Often, or for this project at least, the queer archive is concerned with both of these understandings. We must begin to perceive queer archives as tangled, multiplex and nonlinear. Those being archived must find these spaces significant and consequential (Baucom 2018). Archives should be challenged to take into account the opinions and perspectives of those who are concerned about omission of their stories or the stories of their community. It is necessary that both the members of the archive and the community are involved in this mutual

conversation. In order for this kind of collaboration to work, those involved must be willing to listen to and engage with the histories of others.

In relation to more recent research in the South African context, in his text, *Performing the Queer Archive: Strategies of Self-Styling on Instagram (2019)*, Katlego Disemelo confronts how one archives live moments with many intersecting aspects and which platforms one can use to ensure that the fluidity of these moments are not lost. Disemelo makes a strong point here - we must never view the archive as stagnant. Disemelo's point was taken into consideration in the imagining of collaborative archival strategies while remaining in flux. In order for a collaborative archive to be interacted with through different perspectives, lenses and experiences, it must remain fluid. I took into consideration how becoming stagnant would reinforce a singular narrative that this project aimed to deviate from rather than growing and changing as the queer community grows and changes. Queer archives are filled with lively representations of what queer life is like. While the original owners of these queer representations may have been deceased, their histories continue to live, informing future generations of their lives and struggles. For Disemelo, the queer archive is more than just historical records and photographs that are stored in physical buildings. Rather, the queer archive is one that is living, dynamic and exists in real, mediated time (Disemelo 2019). While Disemelo's argument is centered around the ways in which the queer archive exists on various social media platforms, his ideas can easily be thought of in relation to permanent, housed queer archives since he focuses on the self-styling and self-curating of queer bodies in order to problematise mainstream media and constitute the performance of the queer archive. He points out that social media allows individuals to represent themselves within part of a larger queer archive. In addition, his research lays a foundation to begin archiving in alternative ways as seen in this project. Disemelo's research was particularly interesting to me since it views the queer archive as more than a repository of historical documentation. This sentiment lay the foundation of the temporal and collaborative archival space as a place of doing and undoing, of becoming and unbecoming. This idea rings true in terms of self-representation. Disemelo's ideas regarding self representation have guided the ways in which I have thought abuot self-representation in this project. Both Disemelo's research and this project act as catalysts to reassign the authority of writing histories to those whose histories are being written. The act of self-representation in queer archives is one that is profoundly empowering; while allowing the archive to keep pace with the continuous shifting and changing of queer lives. In this way, through the acknowledgement of archives as more than physical buildings full of old musty documents, and

the space for bodies to document themselves, queer documentation can be given a sort of permanence, which, according to Disemelo, allows queer bodies to reject and destabilise heteronormative behaviours, queer heteronormative ideals and undo gender.

Whose history?

Ivan Muñiz Reed's text *Thoughts on Curatorial Practice in the Decolonial Turn (2015)* examines decolonial approaches of contemporary museums. In this text, he offers the reader two main questions. I found it a particularly interesting exercise to replace some of his words with the words 'archives' and 'archivist' where appropriate. While Muñiz Reed's ideas focus specifically on contemporary museums, his decolonial strategies may offer us some interesting insight into the queer archive. In doing this exercise, I am left with these two loaded questions: (1) What are the implications for contemporary archivists and archives who are responsible for interpreting contested histories and whose prime matter is knowledge? (2) How are archives and archivists positioned within the colonial matrix and is it possible for them to restructure knowledge and power and to return agency to those who have lost it? (Muñiz Reed 2015). To offer a thought towards these questions, one of the main problems with archives and archivists is representing history 'as it were'. In this sense, archivists are often not given the space to critically comment on those at the forefront of queer histories, but rather represent them as such, fixing their status in time. I think there may be a missed opportunity here to critically comment on queer histories and the ways in which we learn about the 'pioneers' of change for queer bodies. In a general sense in archives at large, there does not seem to be a disruption of perceived queer histories, no re-presenting or dismantling what we already know. Archivists and archives lack an attempt to deconstruct ideological positions that are so prominent in our society today, which manifest in our archives. Muñiz Reed highlights the ways in which the narrative in queer archives is often narrow which becomes problematic in failing to account for various perspectives of other queer bodies. To further Muñiz Reed's point, if queer people do not see these representations of themselves in queer archives, they may begin to feel misrepresented, ostricised or alienated from the archive. Indeed, all queer bodies must have a space to safely record their histories. However, with new input from queer bodies in archival spaces, it begs the question: who should be responsible for this restructuring of knowledge and returning agency to those who have lost it? On one hand, I would argue that the archivist is the primary source for interpreting histories and thus, they must be the ones who contest and question these histories. However, on the other hand, I would also argue that it may be an unfair and unsustainable expectation to put on

the archivist singularly to contest these histories. As I will discuss in depth later, the archivist is often stretched far too thin and may need to prioritise the archiving of certain documents. They may not intentionally support a one-sided narrative of the queer experience, but by archiving documents ‘as they are’, this could potentially perpetuate the queer narratives that we are too familiar with. The work of decolonial theory as laid out by Muñiz Reed holds ground in how we think about alternative strategies of archiving in that the aim of decolonial theories to reformulate various historical accounts and perspectives that were discredited and undervalued through new considerations in order to map out foundational thoughts around philosophy and critical thinking. Muñiz Reed theorises that the responsibility falls on the institutions - and in this case, the archive’s team - to harbour procedures that disassemble normative models. To add to Muñiz Reed’s thought, if the institution governing the archive actively works with the archivist, we may begin to see narratives that are no longer created by archivists who privilege a certain way of knowing, seeing and curating over others (Muñiz Reed 2015). It is here, then, that archivists are positioned to restructure knowledge and power, returning agency to those who have lost it by offering a space for queer individuals to archive themselves, as is explored in this project.

Achille Mbembe’s *The Power of the Archive and Its Limits, Refiguring the Archive (2002)* understands and expands on the archive as both an assemblage of records as well as a notion that interrogates what we understand and perceive ‘history’ to be. The links between archives, queer memory and percieved history have become increasingly complicated as archival strategies continue to evolve. The archive offers a space to collect items where various taxonomies may form and information is disseminated. Mbembe says we should understand archives as both places of remembrance and historicisation, but also as places of omission and neglect. Mbembe makes the point that archives are imperfect, unfinished and unsteady. This project acknowledges that archives keep items in order to inform future generations of our lives, our stories and our experiences. Further, this project is built on the foundational premise that interrogating queer archives and their omissions is not only centered around creating a fuller, more inclusive queer history, but also acknowledging, admitting and appreciating that archives will never be complete or finished. Archives will always leave us with questions of who is missing or misrepresented, and what their omission or misrepresentation means in light of our understandings of queer pasts, presents and futures.

Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archive (2014) written by Alana Kumbier focuses on the nuances of archivists, queer scholars and communities who want to be involved in archiving

their histories, experiences and lives. Kumbier probes films that speak to archives and archival projects. Through an interdisciplinary approach, Kumbier engages with memory studies and cultural histories. She argues that in the archive, we can find material histories. While Kumbier is precise in her explanation that archives portray material histories, there must be a move toward including non-material histories in archives. Ephemeral materials may prove to be a notable aspect of the archive, often providing us with equally as much information as tangible, non-ephemeral materials. I think ephemeral materials offer an interesting perspective in archives since they may imply certain histories and experiences that may not be explicitly evident. They may offer us an opportunity to interpret various histories. Ephemeral materials are equally as important, and hold just as much knowledge as their tangible counterparts.

Further, Kumbier argues that we may locate their families, or those whose lives are inseparable from ours in the archive (Kumbier 2014). However, Kumbier's comment that the archive may be a place for people to find their families may be untrue for too many people. Throughout the history of queer archives, people have been left out of the writing of history. As a response to Kumbier's writing, this project puts forth a mode of including those who have historically been excluded from queer archives, although this may be very difficult since they were not recorded in the first place and we may not know how much of their history is left to record. This is the danger of not actively including queer people in the narration of their histories - once information is lost, it can be almost impossible to retrieve years later. Unfortunately, it may seem that those who have been omitted from the archive may never find a space in queer archival practices. In order to prevent this from happening in the future, we must ensure that more diverse communities are recorded in queer archives so that their stories are not lost, and so we can have a fuller understanding of the queer experience. By rewriting this space, queer bodies are given a chance to recover and make their histories permanent, while creating a space that is more inclusive. Kumbier states that this is difficult and complicated; and asks us to set aside our existing understandings of archival practices (Kumber 2014).

Kumbier makes some interesting and important points around queer archival practices. She sets out queer archiving as a participatory framework, while contributing to archival research by incorporating new resources, strategies and understandings. Kumbier's work also serves as a mode for understanding nuances that are specific to queer cultures and histories. She states that we are able to participate and engage with traditional archival practices while imagining new strategies by thinking through queer histories, cultures and theories. Kumbier advances a

shared and collaborative archival strategy which she coins “archiving from the ground up” (Kumbier 2014: 117). Using case studies to demonstrate her point, she explains that the objective is to confront archival exclusions. In speaking to archival exclusions, Kumbier is talking about continuous disempowerment and alienation of queer people and communities through their omission, misrepresentation and lack of documentation in archives.

This kind of thinking deviates from other frameworks since it foregrounds the value of involvement from the community being documented, rather than the archivist creating records as a representative of the community being documented (Kumbier 2014: 125). Furthermore, Kumbier makes a point of how important it is for archives to engage in conversations with the community in order for the decentralisation of the role of the archivist to begin taking place (Kumbier 2014: 146). This kind of methodology allows those being documented to be part of the authorship of their histories in the archive - allowing queer people to be part of a written and recorded narrative, deciding what is recorded and how it is recorded rather than the traditional role of the archivist. With these kinds of approaches, the power dynamic between the queer community and the archivist begins to equalise (Kumbier 2014: 151). This project coincidentally does the very thing Kumbier proposes - imagines a way in which queer bodies can be part of the archival process to eliminate biases that persist in the archive, ensuring diverse voices are accounted for where queer bodies can be documented on their own terms.

In her writing, Kumbier confronts the archive from the perspectives of both queer researchers and archivists, as well as the from the perspective of the community being archived. Kumbier’s text performs “from the particular - at the level of individuals or relatively small collectives doing archival and cultural work - to suggest what a broader queer archival practice could entail” (Kumber 2014: 2). An assortment of factors may influence the kind of content in queer archives, rendering different queer archives dissimilar. These factors include the purpose of the archive, the time in which the archive exists as well as the place in which the archive exists. Archives may be categorised by social, political and economic contexts. These factors all influence the kinds of objects collected by an archive and the larger narrative that the archive holds. As I explored in the exhibition, the queer archive serves as a space to offer conflicting histories and narratives to dominant understandings of queer life, allowing queer people to pay homage to queer pasts while nurturing queer presents and futures. By shifting the lens to a broad range of material, the exhibition strived to include heterogeneous expressions of queerness both in the curatorial gesture as well as the contributions displayed. With the literature of Kumbier in mind,

the exhibition aimed to elicit alternative histories in order to engage in contemporary and historical conversations in order to reimagine knowledge systems in archival spaces. In this way, the exhibition, amongst other collaborative archival projects, is able to shape an archive that is intuitive and compassionate to those in the archive.

When the queer community is actively involved in documenting their personal histories and the histories of their communities, they may have a greater consciousness and sensitivity to the items being archived since they are able to understand and express the subtleties of their archived narratives in a way that an archivist may not be able to understand. This mode of recording histories allows both the people and the objects being recorded to remain fluid and dynamic in culture rather than becoming fixed in history. In this way, Kumbier and Disemelo share the same sentiment as the exhibition set up in relation to this project - the queer archive should not and cannot only be thought of as historical records that are stored in musty rooms. Rather, the queer archive is living and dynamic, existing in real, mediated time. We must continuously question modes of archiving in order for the queer archive to keep pace with the continous shifting and growing of the queer community (Kumbier 2014) (Disemelo 2019).

Non-Neutrality, Control, Memory and Power

In *The Past is Now: Confronting Museums' Complicity in Imperial Celebration* (2019), Rachel Minott confronts notions of neutrality and non-neutrality in museum contexts. Minott postulates that we must call into question the notion of neutrality in order to decolonise spaces by investigating past representations of history and non-neutrality (Minott 2019). While Minott explicitly explores the museum space, when investigating how queer bodies are represented in queer archives, we must pay attention to how our identities affect intuitive decisions relating to the collection and dissemination of information, and vice versa, how the collection and dissemination of information affects our identities. Minott theorises that when we consider the notion of neutrality in these spaces, we must be aware of different biases that persist when collecting documents and ephemeral materials pertaining to the lives of queer individuals. I further Minott's line of reasoning by considering the myth of neutrality. When doing this, I am faced with loaded questions such as: Who is included and excluded in this version of history? What does an inclusive archival strategy look like? Who facilitates this conversation without leaving out diverse voices? Is the queer community as a whole willing to discuss the limitations of the archive and reimagine solutions?

The queer archive may offer a space in order to destabilise widespread heteronormative practices that still exist in many archives today. While imagining modes of taxonomy and classifications may present complications, they put forward a way to access the archive in a different way and allow us a deeper understanding of archival collections. In this way, we may be able to discern some stories living in the archive that have been misunderstood or unmoved. Minott makes an excellent point that neutrality is sustained by those looking at the archive, and what the archive assumes the audience has knowledge on (Minott 2019). In exploring Minott's point further, she theorises that in order to move forward, we must investigate false neutral perspectives and the ramifications of these perspectives on queer bodies (Minott 2019). During my research, I found that gaps in knowledge may be brought to light since different communities may have different sources of education and access to the archive. These gaps can lead to a singular narrative of nuanced histories where important details and knowledge is lost. As Minott outlines, this is often excused as being 'neutral' since many histories are not included; and those that are included may be misrepresented or important nuances are left out. With Minott's theories in mind, *Out of the Closet and Into the Archive* exhibition challenges notions of neutrality in queer archival spaces, opening up uncensored dialogues and forms of archiving. While the curatorial aspect of this project remains open to different interpretations and engagements, it is not neutral. In the end, there was a curator that framed the objects in a particular light. Minott's theories guided me in acknowledging my own biased positioning, and in an effort to be more inclusive of diverse representations, the exhibition offered a space to record one's own histories. The differentiation of the exhibition and other widespread strategies of archival practice that Minott refers to as above is that the exhibition does not claim neutrality. The findings from the exhibition supported Minott's points completely - neutrality is a myth. In this, I questioned my own positions of neutrality and non-neutrality in my exhibition. I questioned whether being neutral meant that I had to maintain narratives that actively exclude minorities and diverse voices, tolerating these overpowering representations of history. I found that in order to create more diverse accounts of history in archives and avoid false accounts of neutrality, we must embrace a space that educates and empowers queer bodies in the narration of their histories. This way, we can create meaningful accounts of diversity by honouring the experiences, stories and histories of queer people.

We must question the ways in which archives frame the stories that they tell and what kinds of histories are being created by this framing, emphasising the trust we have in these spaces to

give us accurate and reliable information on queer bodies. These kinds of perspectives allow for a deeper engagement with questions around the context of the archive. Making use of this approach, *Out of the Closet and Into the Archive* can serve as a space for deconstructing power relationships, exposing the kinds of bias that have historically misrepresented and omitted people from the archive. In her text *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (2009), Anne Stoler believes we need to call attention to "the procedures and activities on which certain kinds of knowing rely" (Stoler 2009: 42). Stoler is concerned with the relationship between archives and what we perceive to be history, and how this affects what we believe to be true (Stoler 2009). Sociologist Thomas Osborne is concerned with similar issues within the archive, stating, "whether as notion, impression, concept or anticoncept the image of the archive is a useful focal point for bringing together issues of representation, interpretation and reason with questions of identity, evidence and authenticity" (Osborne 1999: 51). This writing from Osborne is dated, but illustrates that the questions we may have about archives and archival practice have been debated for years.

Stoler is clear about her intentions from the start of her text, stating that "[t]his book is about the force of writing and the feel of documents, about lettered governance and written traces [of] colonial lives. It is about commitments to paper, and the political and personal work that such inscriptions perform. No least, it is about the colonial archives as sites of the expectancy and conjured - about dreams of comforting futures and forebodings of future failures" (Stoler 2009: 1). Stoler's positioning in this text is particularly interesting, since she speaks from the point of view of an anthropologist focusing on colonial archives, which has given rise to questions and frameworks about other archives more widely. Stoler theorises that archivists may not always understand the implications of the collections they preserve, reminding us that archival collections are often linked to issues around collective memory, control and power (Stoler 2009). Stoler says that "archives are not simply accounts of actions or records of what people thought happened. They are records of uncertainty and doubt in how people imagined they could and might make the rubrics of rule correspond to a changing imperial world" (Stoler 2009: 4). In this, Stoler implies that documents in the archive are never neutral sources of knowledge that are saved in order to memorialise the lives of those in the archive, and some details may be fiction. This makes us think and look critically at the kinds of power structures living in archival practices, and how those practices create a sense of community and shared history, memorialising the past. Stoler's text provides a framework for us to think about archives as more than neutral spaces reminding us of the lives recorded, but rather that archives are

nuanced spaces for histories to be re-engaged, re-remembered, questioned, interpreted and problematised. Stoler encourages the viewer to consider a counter-hegemonic reading of the purpose of the archive in order for us to gain a better understanding of the value of archives. Stoler's text allows us to begin thinking about the role of archives as recording documents and as sites of memory, suggesting that we should question the power of archives in how we remember, memorialise and historicise people.

Stoler stimulates thoughts around how we think about archives, their functionings at large and the roles they take on. In my own research in this project, I have considered notions of documentation and responsibility to the community, as well as thinking through the links between archives and collective histories, memories and identities. I was particularly aware of my own role in my conceptions about archives and the responsibility I had to the community in this project. I found that this responsibility takes the form of ensuring queer people have a space to record their own history, rather than becoming focused on the logistics of archiving itself. In the end, we need to hold institutions and archives accountable for their roles in the creation of queer histories and memories. As a result, we can see how the creation of documents in queer archives influences the ways in which queer communities interact with their pasts and presents, navigating individual and collective identities and memories.

The Act of Queering

At its core, *Out of the Closet and Into the Archive* is a form of 'queering'. Queering is a methodology of retaliating against hegemonic textual readings and cultural authority, and critiquing heteronormative systems. Queering presents a way to challenge, deconstruct and problematise dominant and unequal power structures (Arondekar 2015). Many scholars make use of Queer Theory in the contexts of performances of gender and sexuality by pushing back against heteronormative representations. Queering should be understood in two ways. Firstly, it requires an opposition to the sociolinguistic grain, while opposing the linguistic core of the archive in a way that engages with the aspects of experience and reality that do not present themselves in propositional or even verbal form. Secondly, queering the archive requires questioning the anti-normative mantra encoded in the very notion of 'queer'.

Queering has offered a space to challenge the histories and narratives created by institutions that have misrepresented or omitted histories that do not fit into heteronormative practices.

Queering allows a space for communities to creatively and innovatively reimagine what the queer archive can achieve. In *Queering Archives: A Roundtable Discussion* (2015), Anjali Arondekar explores how queer archives are tumultuous, ingenious and deeply personal, stating that “[q]ueer archives are all about the soiled and untidy - about leaving your dirty cronies on the kitchen table” (Arondekar 2015: 213).

A queer approach to collecting and documenting bodies may prove to be more fluid and fluxional than traditional archival practices. By centralising queer frameworks in archives, archivists in conversation with the community may be able to rethink what accessibility to the archive means for individuals wanting to engage. How does the community access archived collections while actively having access to archiving their own communities? The archive, and in this case particularly, the queer archive, is a space where intimate and fragile histories and experiences are being recorded. Because of this vulnerability, archivists must be especially empathetic and understanding of the significance of the objects being documented, taking special care in the preservation of objects and the stories created around those items in the archive (Caswell & Cifor 2016). It is not enough to document the queer community - the community must be documented equitably and meaningfully, which is to say that archiving items neutrally without the collaboration of the community does not promote a diverse or empowered archive where histories are challenged. The archivist must be able to understand how their roles have historically omitted and misrepresented individuals, where archivists involved in queer archives must take on the responsibility of archiving the community appropriately, and addressing issues of omission and misrepresentation. Not addressing these problems in the archive is an act of repeating these unfair narratives.

In *Those Who are Dead are Never Gone* (2018), Bonventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung furthers the notion of ‘queering’ by making use of Muñoz’s idea of queerness as an ideal (Ndikung 2018). Ndikung imagines ways in which institutional spaces can be queered by enacting futurities in the space and imagining other ways of being in the world (Ndikung 2018). Queering archives means that they must separate themselves from normative archival practices, decentralising the histories that exclude marginalised groups of people. The notion of the archive must become more fluid and remain in flux in order to withstand strict understandings of what archives are. The queer archive must be reconcieved and re-articulated, much like the other institutions Ndikung highlights in his twelve act essay. Throughout this essay, he theorises how institutional spaces must be able to understand and arrange histories that may pose problems,

acknowledging the ways in which exclusion, silencing, misrepresentation and under-representation can affect the lives of those included or excluded in the archive (Ndikung 2018). Ndikung focuses on how 'objects' that museums have acquired over the course of the history of ethnological museums seem to have ended up in the wrong place. In an attempt to add to Ndikung's ideas, when we think of the queer archive, we must see all people being documented as humans with subjecthood and subjectivity rather than subjects; acknowledging that we possess agency, personhood, consciousness and realness with our communities. When we acknowledge queer people as having agency over their histories, the power no longer lies in the archive but rather in the people who wish to interact with the archive, using it as a site of mapping queer memory. We must take Ndikung's advice when re-imagining queer archival space - we must understand that the 'objects' being documented are more than objects. For some, these 'objects' may be representations of ancestors and communities, personifications of complex and entangled histories.

Queer archival practices must be aware of the ways in which narratives in the archive can be constructed and sustain larger narratives outside of the archive. This means being conscious of how societies have omitted, silenced or misrepresented minority communities - these narratives must not be repeated in the archive but must actively be dismantled by including diverse voices. Queering the archive means actively dismantling these normative practices by invalidating the exclusion of queer bodies. Queering the archive means we need to re-imagine the limitations and possibilities of archival practice. We can only begin to see more diverse representations of queer people through sustained dialogues with the community.

Jose Esteban Muñoz's rhetorical practice of 'disidentification' denotes the ways in which minority groups - such as those who do not fit into racial and sexual normative ideals - navigate and position themselves in relation to discourses associated with our identities (Muñoz 1999). *Out of the Closet and Into the Archive* is a form of disidentification where individuals can transform exclusionary practices in archives. In their text *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Judith Butler calls into question Queer Theory, posing the question "[w]hat are the possibilities of politicising disidentification, this experience of misrecognition, this uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong?" (Butler 1993: 219). Butler understands disidentification as a sort of misrecognition of identifications, but the concept was expanded on by Muñoz more than other queer theorists, offering this definition:

> “Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recruits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing and powered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture” (Muñoz 1999: 165).

Disidentification is described as a method of ‘world-making’ where individuals from minority groups are able to carve a space where their non-conforming identities are self-governed, creating new ways of engaging with a state of being - and in this case, collaborative strategies of queer archival practice does just that (Muñoz 1999: 197). Muñoz theorises that we make sense of and enact our identities relative to hegemonic ideologies that are ingrained in our society. Identification means that one assumes and voluntarily enacts what heteronormative principles dictate in terms of who the individual is and should be. Contrary to identification, disidentification is an approach that “works on and against dominant ideology” by “neither opt[ing] to assimilate within such a structure nor simply oppos[ing] it” (Muñoz 1999: 11 - 12). Disidentifiction in the context of the queer archive centralises the present and future while unsettling these heteronormative archival strategies in order to create new imaginings of queer archives where omitted or misrepresented communities can reclaim their power. Disidentification in the archive illustrates how we can move towards a queer future and modes of futurity while enacting alternative strategies in the present moment. These disidentifications in the queer archival space can lead to lasting changes in structure and power, while “valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance” (Muñoz 1999: 12).

Queering the archive proves to be difficult to directly define since the archive is complex and diverse. The queering of the archive transcends sexualities and gender identifications, but also centralises issues of socio-economic contexts while calling into question the power relationships in the archive. Queering aims to displace conventional binaries, acknowledging the uncertainty of practices of historicising and memorialising queer individuals. These world-making practices acknowledge the performativity and fluidity of the archive. Jamie Ann Lee argues that queered methodology in archival practice can be accepted as “expanding and (un)becoming in order to hold multiple, even competing truths” (Lee 2017: 18). Thus, queered methodologies can be

used as a framework for analysing, re-imagining, reforming and reshaping the queer archive so that diverse communities and individuals are represented in a way that they can be part of the creation of the narrative.

CHAPTER THREE: CASE STUDIES AND INTERROGATING ISSUES OF THE ARCHIVE

This chapter makes use of *The Arquives* (formerly *Canada's LGBTQ2 Archives*) as well as *Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action* (formerly the *Gay and Lesbian Archive*, also known as *GALA*) in order to interrogate the successes and areas of improvement within queer archives. The information laid out in this chapter serves to inform the curatorial practices of the exhibition in order to offer different ways of thinking and alternative strategies for queer archival practices.

Case Studies Background

As a form of retaliation to the extended omission and erasure of queer histories from established museums and archives in South Africa, *Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA)* was founded in 1997. Formerly, *GALA* was known as *Gay and Lesbian Archives* until they changed to their new name in 2007. Their new name reflected the diverse scope of projects that *GALA* had been embraced in their practice, while creating dialogues around sexual orientations and gender identities (Sizemore-Barber 2017). *GALA* has played an important role in the production, protection, maintenance and dissemination of information about queer histories, cultures and contemporary experiences in South Africa. Their scope of work extends beyond the archival, employing community projects and conversations. Through this, they have made significant developments in human rights pertaining to queer people in South Africa, and social justice more generally (Sizemore-Barber 2017).

The Arquives were founded in 1973 from the records of *The Body Politic* - Canada's most significant gay liberation newspaper at the time. During the time of its publication, *The Body Politic* largely represented cisgender white gay men. The records that initially came to the archive were those of friends, and collecting was quite narrow in some regards. Now, *The Arquives* is one of the largest independent queer archives in the world. The institution does not receive any sort of consistent institutional funding and relies heavily on volunteers (Handley-Girard Interview 2022). They collect materials that are created by queer people in Canada or relating to Canada; while holding much international material. They collect a wide range of materials - from personal and organisational collections of art, photographs, posters, library books, textiles, et cetera. They collect and preserve these materials, making them accessible for research as well as for future generations to enjoy. "We take the stance that everything that any queer person creates is of enduring research value… [i]t doesn't have to be

someone who is famous or made some sort of significant activist impact or something like that" (Handley-Girard Interview 2022). *The Arquives* concerns themselves with deconstructing the concept of 'historical' and what is defined as history. As one of their archivists, Lucy-Handley-Girard expresses, they do not only concern themselves with a larger narrative of history, but acknowledge that these histories may be inherently problematic. In order to include a more diverse community in their archive and be as equitable as they can, they strive to include representations that are inclusive of under-represented histories (Handley-Girard Interview 2022).

GALA and *The Arquives* both reveal overarching themes of the relationship between queer communities and the archives that strive to represent and memorialise them. In addition to providing structural insights about queer archives, both *GALA* and *The Arquives* have served as useful reference sources for theoretical writings. Most notably, April Sizemore-Barber wrote a throught-provoking paper in 2017 titled *Archival Movements: South Africa's Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action,* where she investigated the daily practices of *GALA* through the lens of postcolonial and queer studies. Sizemore-Barber makes some interesting arguments around *GALA* needing to fulfil many different roles since they are the only established queer archive on the African continent, which she points out, is unusual for an archive. The author illustrates how their practices challenge our notions of what purpose archives should serve, as well as the archive's relationship to history, queer memory and political movements (Sizemore-Barber 2017).

The Importance of Existing Queer Archives

Queer archives like *GALA* and *The Arquives* offer a safe space for queer bodies to find and explore their histories, appreciate their ancestors and privilege their own lives. Queer archives also reveal complicated relationships between queer communities, archives and larger societal views and politics. In the early days of most queer archives, those involved in the archives were thinking in an extensive way about queer people and the larger societal issues, which paved the way for us to begin thinking of our identities in an intersectional manner. This is what sets queer archives apart from other traditional archives - they provide a space for queer people to reject heteronormative ideals and continue to exist outside of societal expectations. The queer archive has proven to be a constructive location to explore and theorise about the queer experience. Thus, queer archives such as *GALA* and *The Arquives* create a space where researchers or

anyone interested in the queer experience can gain a deeper understanding of what queer life was like in certain moments, illustrating how the narrative of the queer community grows and shifts as the community continues to grow and shift.

In a Queer Time and Place by Judith Halberstam (2005) relates specifically to transgender archives. Halberstam writes that:

> "The archive is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory and a complex record of queer activity. In order for an archive to function, it requires users, interpreters, and cultural historians to wade through the material and piece together the jigsaw puzzle of queer history in the making" (Halberstam 2005: 169-170).

In this work, Halberstam writes about the importance of the queer archive in history, but does not ignore the problems that may arise from these practices. The existence of queer archives deconstructs narratives that reduce queerness to criminality (Halberstam 2005). Collections of queer archives are always growing, hopefully including stories that are relevant to the queer community, allowing queer people to reclaim their power over their shared memories. Queer communities may resist being represented in mainstream archives in fear of misrepresentation or complete omission. By forging collaborative strategies such as those seen in this project, queer individuals have a space to regain power over their representations and their collective history, creating the framing for how they want to be documented. While it is important that queer bodies have access to their histories that live in queer archives, it is more important to be recorded and memorialised on their own terms. This kind of archiving can be achieved through collaborative strategies, where archivists relinquish their power and become actively involved in conversations with community members in order to create histories that are inclusive of different sources of knowledge, including ephemeral material. These collaborative strategies that are concerned with honouring diverse identities in archives give evidence of queer cultures and values. Mbembe's point illustrates this kind of thinking excellently; "because of its being there, the archive… is proof that a life truly existed, that something actually happened, an account of which can be put together" (Mbembe 2002: 21). This kind of queer presence in historical sites becomes deeply personal and accessible to all queer people interested in exploring shared histories. These collaborative archives may prove to be more distinctive, and queer bodies may be able to identify more with these kinds of strategies and histories.

Ann Cvetkovich, in *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003) addresses how queer archives allow us to remember, understand and rewrite traumatic histories that the community has faced (Cvetkovich 2003: 9). However, since some people did not want to be identified in the queer archive, archivists used ephemera to record and remember these histories (Cvetkovich 2003: 243). These ephemeral materials allow us in the contemporary moment to understand the queer narrative and experiences without explicitly naming those who may have not been open about their sexualities. I chose to open the exhibition to ephemeral material since historically, it has been excluded from archival practices broadly. This ephemeral material often contains important documentation that may not be easily found elsewhere. Ephemeral material gives us an understanding of the queer experience that we may not be able to engage with in with other more traditional kinds of materials.

In her dissertation titled *The Aging of the Archives: Community, Conflict, and Queer Potential at the Lesbian Herstory Archives* (2010), Rebekah Orr delineates the distinctions between traditional and non-traditional (or queer) archives. She articulates that while queer people have been omitted from traditional institutional archives, the queer archive positions themselves in relation to recover, celebration and memorialization of queer people. She emphasises how institutional archives have not been accountable to queer people while queer archives emerged as a resistance to traditional archives omitting queer people from their documentation. In addition, queer archives are set apart from traditional archives in their inclusion of ephemeral material, performative aspects and the focus on the human subject.

Bias and the issue of the archivist being stretched too thin

One problem I've found in archives at large during my research is the problem of the archivist having too much on their plate. Archives are often underfunded spaces and the archivist must take on huge amounts of work to ensure all donations are archived and found for future research or use. When the archivist is in control over the materials housed in the archive, the community has to surrender the power they have over the materials. The interviewees expressed some uneasiness in regards to sufficient resources that they are encountering at the moment. Issues around funding, shortage of labour and spatial restrictions seem to be the most prominent obstacles archivists are facing which may effect the long-term stability of queer archives. The interviewees are working with and against various social, financial and political considerations. While they work with and against these obstacles, they find different strategies

that are most appropriate for their specific contexts. Handley-Girard highlights how important it is to balance labour and the level of description. She poses an example, if she has one hundred boxes of material to go through, and each folder has ten documents, she may not necessarily itemise each piece of paper in the file, but try to give a broader description. Therefore, in this sense, the relationship needs to be symbiotic (Handley-Girard Interview 2022). She says that it is a compromise that she does not like to do - but in a space with archivists stretched thin and materials that must be archived - it is inevitable. Archivists learn what materials hold a higher 'historical significance' and may prioritise or highlight these items by describing them in greater detail. Archivists may choose to prioritise one kind of donation over another if they feel that the archive lacks a certain kind of representation. The problem, though, lies in the bias of the archivist.

When items enter the archive, their contexts may be lost or conveyed in a way that was not originally intended. Issues around labour in queer archives may be responsible for these misrepresentations or omissions of context clues that help the viewer understand the archival item better. In order to sort through and archive large amounts of contributions, the archivist must sometimes make sacrifices. These sacrifices may include the prioritisation of 'historical' documents where the archivist spends more time archiving these items to include more detail in the descriptions. In contrast, the archivist may choose to spend equal time allocations documenting a broader range of subject matter; but there could be a loss of important details and contextual clues in the process since time is restricted. Lucie Handley-Girard says "if I have 100 boxes of materials to go through, I'm not necessarily going to itemise each piece of paper in the file. It has to be kind of symbiotic - it has to be this kind of compromise that I don't always feel good about between the archivist and the researcher. So inevitably, there are going to be things that aren't documented in the way that I'd like them to be but we do learn… I will highlight something in a collection through describing it in greater detail at a file or item level if it is significant to highlight because it's lacking from the archive's collection overall" (Handley-Girard Interview 2022). The loss of important information may also be attributed to bias. It is possible that the archivist may interpret the context as well as the identity of the donor in a way that was not originally intended. For instance, if an archivist uses the term 'lesbian' in describing the identity of the owner and their donation when the donor may have identified as something else, like 'sapphic', then some important context and history is lost, which ultimately influences how future researchers, archivists and communities understand their histories.

In an interview with Dr Schem Rodgerson Bader, they highlight that biases are not always violent and extreme, but as humans, we are inseparable from these biases. Dr Bader offers a charming analogy to demonstrate how our biases affect the way in which we record things:

> “I was digitising this particular film that had been undigitised and had been donated a long time ago and no one had had a chance to get to it. But basically, the whole film was about the sort of Black Afro Cuban experience in Toronto. They were really interested in like indigeneity here as well, and filmed a lot of pride events. Their bias with every single videotape that they took - and I digitised a lot of their material - was really cute Black Cuban men dancing. They were very focused on that. This is hundreds of hours of tape. They had one that was *Dyke March 1994.* And I thought, "Oh, great. I really want to see their perspective on the *Dyke March*". So they're on the *Dyke March*, and then looking at the dykes. The big fat dykes, skinny little dykes, the big tits, the little tits - all the dykes. Then a Black Cuban man is way in the distance. You can see the camera zoom in and just follow the guy. That moment encapsulated it for me - how we just get swept away with what we're interested in. It doesn't matter what we're trying to accomplish at the time. We're interested in what we're interested in.” (Bader Interview 2022).

Dr Bader demonstrates that our biases are not always conscious, and are not always violent. However, this analogy shows us that although we may try to remain impartial, we will always be more attracted to the things that we are interested in. For the archivist, this could mean giving more description to materials they find particularly interesting and less to ones they do not find to be stimulating enough. Biases, of course, also have the potential to be contemptible. In this sense, certain racial or cultural groups may be given less representations or even be omitted from the archive entirely due to the bias of the archivist. This is evident in the early years of both *GALA* and *The Arquives*. Both archives primarily documented cis-gendered white gay men. The archivists in their early years had biases around who was going to be documented and how they were being documented. While both archives have made huge strides to have far more inclusive representations of queerness; it leaves one wondering - who is still being omitted or erased from the archive - and how can we include them? Is there still a singular kind of narrative disseminating itself in queer archives?

The Arquives in particular is distinctly careful in creating archival descriptions and writing content like finding aids. They take the stance that they do not put anything in the finding aids

that is not evident in the collection or is not mass known public fact. In this sense, they would not label someone as ‘gay’ when they may have identified as something else. While these labels have been contested in the past, they say now that someone’s identity needs to be evident in order to be written out. If not evident or mass public knowledge, the information is left out. It then becomes the job of the researcher to interpret these missing pieces. This does, however, cause problems with finding items. In addition, some important context may be erased. I wonder if the donor were more involved in the archival process, if this would be as much of a problem as it is now? To pose an example, let’s say an archivist needs to archive an item sent in. The person is not ‘out’ and does not want to disclose their sexual orientation with anyone else. The archivist needs to make a decision to assume a sexual orientation - which may be harmul - or leave it out all together - which poses another kind of threat. However, if the ‘closeted’ person, in conversation with the archivist, writes the finding aid, they may be more willing to disclose important information that the archivist could not have otherwise known.

Both *GALA* and *The Arquives* try to work closely with the donor to prevent this from happening. They try to remain in dialogue with the person or the community about how they want to be represented or how they identify. In this sense, they try not to erase the context, while making donations as accurate and unbiased as possible. Archivists can do their best to frame their work in an anti-colonial and anti-oppressive way. However, often when one archivist does the job of documenting a community, that representation can become flattened, simplified, or worse - not accounted for at all. One singular archivist cannot understand the discourses and nuances of every culture, language, gender or sexual identification, social and political contexts. It seems impossible to separate ourselves from our biases and our sometimes problematic natures. In this sense, biases will always exist in archives. Some biases exist more than others in certain archives. This may depend on who is archiving, where they are archiving and what particular moment in time they are archiving. Archives mimic society (Handley-Girard Interview 2022). In the same way archives mimic the lives of queer people; they mimic the societal oppressions that have existed. One simply needs to go back to the original records of both *GALA* and *The Arquives* to find proof of this. As mentioned earlier, both archives in their early years recorded predominantly white bodies - more specifically cis-gender gay men. It becomes the archivist’s task to engage the community, more specifically underrepresented groups in order to put right this erasure and ensure that the community feels safe to donate their records.

I am not completely convinced that queer archives on a larger scale do enough to prevent biases from living in these spaces. We must begin to include the voices of those being documented in the archival process to ensure an unbiased, truthful and accurate representation of the community. Dr Bader explains that archives function at an ethnographic approach. They explain that the methodology of archiving is to take a story, object or history and reduce it to a succession number. When the archivist has completed this, their job is complete. Dr Bader explains that archivists exist to preserve materials and not to critique. They say that archivists are interested in the materiality of objects and their preservation, while queer people are interested in an ever-evolving political discussion of itself - and that these two things are incongruent (Bader Interview 2022). I am not convinced that the archivist exists only to preserve materials since archivists do, in many ways, have power over collections. Archivists are the primary decision makers of what gets recorded and how it gets recorded. This is an unequal power distribution amongst archivists and the queer community. In this sense, it may be naïve to assume that the role of the archivist exists only to preserve materials.

Another issue is the lack of diversity in some archives. Dr Bader highlights that we may shy away from these kinds of questions because of our anxieties around equality of different groups (Bader Interview 2022). In this sense, we may be anxious to point out that there are is not enough representation of Black queer individuals represented, or not enough transgender individuals being represented. This may be because admitting these issues means we need to confront and accept these painful omissions. In reality, both *The Arquives* and *GALA* were born in a time where inequalities existed. *GALA* was born in early post-apartheid years. Although South Africa had seen the end of apartheid, it had not seen the end of racial violence, inequalities and oppression. *The Arquives* was born in a time where Toronto was a much smaller city and did not have the diversity it has in the present day (Bader Interview 2022). Both archives were founded in a time where the founders may not have been concerned with the same politics that we are concerned with now. It seems to me that in the beginning, these archives were concerned with documenting queer life ‘as it were’ and creating a space for queer people to be documented, even if it meant omitting some people. During this time, we did not have the same kinds of visibility of transgender people, pansexual people, people identifying as non-binary, et cetera. However, in order to ensure that we do not re-create harmful representations of a growing queer community, we must scrutinise these spaces for their lack of diversity. It becomes the responsibility of the archive to engage the community in order to create a diverse environment. Dr Bader points out that it may be worthwhile to create a space within

the archive for these kinds of politics since queer archives themelves are formed on queer histories and bodies. However, in a space that is severely underfunded and where staff is stretched thin; how does one begin to address these politics? How does one (or maybe two) archivists juggle the practical archival work with community-based initiatives with having conversations around politics? In the words of Dr Bader, “There’s no one to fucking do it” (Bader Interview 2022).

It must be noted here that both *GALA* and *The Arquives* have mobilised various projects to engage the community in various ways. One of *GALA’s* mobilisations included the *Meanwhile* publication which is a graphic novel produced by activists in collaboration with artists. This publication engaged in workshops with queer individuals from Southern and Eastern Africa where they shared their experiences with one another. These shared stories were interpreted into a graphic novel form. Genevieve Louw explains that the stories are diverse in their nature - some stories address queer joy and pleasure while others interrogate relationships with parents. They point out that this graphic novel project is a great illustration that documenting the queer community does not always take the form of photographs and videos, but rather that there are collaborative endeavours happening in order to record queer lives. These kinds of projects allow a space for more creativity and complexity within the queer archive (Louw Interview 2022). With this in mind, the collaborative strategy may allow for more interaction with the community in a meaningful way. Speaking from my own experience, archives can be intimidating spaces. Looking through a catalogue and contacting members of the archive in order to explore the collections can be an unnerving task. Archives are often protected by gates and doors in order to safeguard their collections. This can be daunting to face. By employing the strategies seen in this project, such as temporal spaces for collaboration, individuals may be more willing to engage with the archive, contributing their own histories and exploring the histories of others in a way that is more accessible and less intimidating.

While these kinds of projects have been mobilised and are incredibly important and significant in the community; collaboration should not be on a project-to-project basis. Collaborative archival practices should be embedded in the purpose of queer archives. It should be a continuous and ongoing strategy where the community is not only included in projects, but in the day-to-day practices and functioning of the archive. Genevieve Louw explains that archiving contemporary queer bodies is “sporadic” and “organic” rather than a structured site of engagement. The exhibition illustrated that collaborative archival practices may offer a more structured

environment to archive contemporary queer bodies in a way that is still flexible and fluid. This is to say that structured displays such as *Out of the Closet and Into the Archive Exhibition* may offer a platform to easily engage the community in archiving their histories in a collaborative way on a regular basis. The exhibition demonstrated how archives can manifest the projects that they are already engaging in into a more regular, more structured and more inclusive way.

In my interview with Genevieve Louw, they told me many stories that live in the archive. They spoke of their experiences and learning about the things that exist in the *GALA* archive. At a particular point in the interview, it dawned on me - Louw possesses a plethora of invaluable knowledge about the archive and its contents. I wondered what would happen to this kind of unwritten knowledge and experience when someone who knows so much about the archive no longer actively works there. How does this knowledge get passed on? Is it possible to teach new staff about this vast history? Does the knowledge die when they leave the archive? Perhaps one of the limitations of my exhibition was that it did not include any sort of public programming that taught the people who wanted to be involved in queer archival practice about the history of queer archives. However, I imagine that if *GALA*, for example, were to take on this collaborative archival strategy which includes exhibitions as sites of mobilsations of the community, public programming would be appropriate to weave into the methodology. This way, there is a space formed where queer people can be part of the archival process while learning about the rich histories and experiences of the archive. Using this method, these distinctive knowledges can become part of a collective knowledge, so that knowledge becomes more circular and fluid rather than linear and hierarchical, and not only for the people who work in the institution on a daily basis.

Most notably, queer individuals must have a space to be part of the authorship of their histories and narratives that exist in queer archives. Divya Tolia-Kelly explores the importance of affective politics in museum spaces through a postcolonial, post-imperial lens in her text *Race and Affect at the Museum - The Museum as a Theatre of Pain (2016).* While she primarily investigates the museum space, her exploration of taxonomies proves to be useful when thinking about queer archives and considering the way in which classifications have an effect on how we think through our histories and the dictation of value of certain objects, stories and experiences. Tolia-Kelly engages the ways in which particular languages and materialities are embedded within a hierarchical system and how the experiences of the people who have relationships with these collections are part of a curatorial re-imagining (Tolia-Kelly 2016). From the lens of

recording queer histories, what happens when one sees themselves in an archive when they have not been part of the authorship or representation of their community? There may be a gap in how an archivist represents a community and how a member from the community thinks of themselves and their community more widely. Allowing the community to be part of the authorship means that the community may understand archival objects as vocabularies and metaphors for the community, where the archivist may not be able to see these kinds of relationships and connections.

CHAPTER FOUR: OUT OF THE CLOSET AND INTO THE ARCHIVE EXHIBITION

Overview of the Exhibition

The *Out of the Closet and into the Archive Exhibition* went up on 17 January 2022 and was seen for five days at The Point of Order, Braamfontein. The aim of *Out of the Closet and into the Archive Exhibition* was to experiment with a different mode of archiving queer histories, lived experiences and stories in a way that is inherently collaborative in a temporal space. The exhibition did not act as a new archive - but rather experimented with different modes of archival practice in order to reveal the issues with mainstream queer archives, as well as experimenting with how best we can include different voices without bias or censorship. One should not read the exhibition as the same as the archive; but rather acknowledge that the exhibition raises some questions around queer archival practices, while offering different strategies for these problems. The exhibition acts as a mobilisation of items with archival potential and archival strategies, but does not stand in place of the archive. The form of an exhibition here proved useful in that it can be re-created over time, allowing for more voices to be included and represented in queer archival practices. The exhibition was able to continuously grow and shift in the putting up of various objects, stories and experiences. In this way, the form of the exhibition proved to be fluid and moving rather than repeating the static nature of some archives. The form of the exhibition allowed viewers to engage with items that have an archival potential in a way that is not conventional. Usually, the viewer must search through a catalogue to pick out items of interest that they want to engage with. In this case, the exhibition allowed the viewers to be exposed to all different objects without boundaries, allowing the viewer to pick out objects they were more attracted to and further investigate that particular item. The exhibition was a temporal display for experimentation with different strategies of archiving queer bodies, stories and experiences in such a way that the bodies being archived have the power to decide how they want to be represented. The contributors were able to write their own narratives by choosing to engage in the project and contribute items of significance. The contributors were given an opportunity to frame their contributions through a piece of writing that accompanied their contribution in the exhibition. Some individuals chose to write a history of their contribution, explain its significance or omit the description all together. As the curator, I needed to curate the exhibition. In this sense, there was an intervention. I aimed to display their contributions in a way where the items were in conversation with one another, whether by relationship, materiality or cultural significance. The project does not propose that we should

entirely dismiss the archivist. The role of the archivist is incredibly important. Rather, the archivist (or in this case, curator) should be in constant conversation with the community, forming collaborative relationships.

Contributions and the curatorial

The exhibition was positioned in such a way that builds a queer archive that is inclusive of different voices, histories and stories, creating a platform where queer individuals can document and be part of a queer narrative that is recorded and shared. ‘Calls for contributions’ were put out on the *Out of the Closet and Into the Archive* Facebook and Instagram pages informing individuals about the project and inviting individuals to contribute to the project. The contributions were not limited in terms of materiality and individuals were invited to contribute stories, memories, clothing, abstract objects, et cetera. The calls for contributions were accompanied with a ‘FAQ’ insert, things like ‘What if I want to remain anonymous?’, ‘How can I contribute?’ et cetera. Calls for contributions were also sent directly to members of the queer community, and these people were encouraged to circulate the call for contribution if they wished to. The invitation to the exhibition as well as calls for contributions were digitally marketed. An interest-based approach was used for digital marketing where people interested in queer related things would recieve these invitations and calls for contribution. For example, people interested in Ru Paul’s Drag Race or Johannesburg Pride, amongst many other interests. Location targeting was set to Johannesburg since the project took place in the area. People of all genders in the greater Johannesburg area meeting the criteria may have seen the invitation and calls for contributions. Digital marketing proved useful in receiving contributions as well as people attending the exhibition who may not have otherwise known about the project. The project engaged with platforms who are compliant with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA or POPI Act) such as Instagram and Facebook. The POPI Act, which came into effect in July 2020 to protect personal information, particulary against the unlawful “collection, retention, dissemination and use of personal information” (Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013). The personal information of individuals who voluntarily participated in the project was collected through the POPIA-compliant platforms as mentioned above. In addition, the collected information was not sold by the researcher, nor collected under false pretenses. The participants’ information was collectd and used solely within the limitations of this project and will not be used for any future projects. Upon contributing their items, the participants signed consent forms which informed them that their contributions could be

withdrawn from the project at any time without any consequence of any kind. In signing the consent forms, the participants also agreed that they understood that their items would be contributed to the temporal archival space and would be addressed in the research report. Time was taken in carefully explaining each point in the consent form to each participant to ensure that formal, signed and informed consent was given. In the event that the participant chose not to be identified by their name, I - the researcher - made every effort to project their anonymity. Their identities were not shared with any other person or in any other capacity. It must be noted that the aforementioned platforms are POPIA-compliant at the time of the project, and as such, the researcher cannot be held responsible if the platforms become non-compliant after the completion of the project. While I continue to make every effort to protect the research from misuse, the researcher cannot be held responsible for any third parties abusing these platforms to use the research in a manner that was not originally intended.

Once people began sending in their contributions, the curatorial gesture began. I began looking for relationships between people and materialities. The curatorial aspect became fluid and unfixed. Contributions were collected and included in the display up until the morning of the opening of the show. The exhibition saw 28 total contributions. As more items were collected, they would find a place in the exhibition and be put up, continuously creating new conversations and discourses between items. Contributions were shifted in light of new contributions, new relationships formed and as the curator, I found that deeper conversations were engaged with each addition. In this sense, it was unclear exactly how the final exhibition would look until it opened; which spoke directly to the constant curating and re-curating of objects, the need to continually reconfigure the archive to include different voices. This instability of knowing the final project showed how the collaborative archival practice is never stationary or static but is rather ever-changing and ever-shifting in order to include a variety of diverse voices in a community.

The contributions began with my friends - or at least with people whom I knew. In the beginning of this project, I became fixated on this aspect of contributions. I wondered what kinds of conversations were developing between the contributions of my friends, and mostly, I was concerned that it created a one-sided narrative of queerness which did not account for the voices of a diverse queer community. In some ways, the early contributions mirrored a privileged queer narrative. In this sense, many of the people who had contributed at that point in time were openly queer and had safe spaces to express their queerness - whether in a family circle or a friendship group. But as time went on, details of the exhibition began to circulate between

various people, groups and organisations. Queer people and organisations who I did not know or had no mutual friends with began contributing their stories, experiences and objects. When more individuals began contributing, I started to see a shift from a silence of diverse queer voices in archival practice to an archival production of these diverse voices. In a walkabout with the *GALA* team, we discussed my concerns around the contributions of my friends in this archival project. It was in this discussion that I realised that starting with friends was not necessarily a bad or harmful aspect of the project. In some ways, it was quite innocent. And in other ways, it mirrored the foundational aspects of many queer archives around the world.

The contributions, in a general sense, showed identity in a very vulnerable way, expressed queer love and the everyday experiences of what makes queerness what it is. A substantial amount of clothing was contributed; which became interesting in the exhibition since many individuals often use clothing as an expression of self-identity. One contribution specifically spoke strongly of this self-expression. In particular, I am referencing the contribution of Larissa Pienaar. They contributed a white knee-length dress which depicts the silhouettes of butterflies in black. The dress has been altered. Strokes of dirt fill the dress, accompanied by purple and yellow ribbons sewn into the straps and front of the dress, draping down to the floor. The colour of the ribbons represent the non-binary flag. An A4 white piece of paper is stapled to the side of the dress. The paper is crumpled and has been dragged through the dirt, much like the dress. The paper holds a poem titled *Last Will and Testament*, an emotional work that speaks to the search for Pienaar's self-identity and self-discovery. In their framing statement, Pienaar speaks about their conflict with their femininity and non-binaryness. They speak about their experiences of purchasing dresses where they felt "just a little too sweaty or a little too tall or a little too large in [their] own skin". Collaborative queer archival practices allow queer people to revisit their personal items and archives to consider, redefine and reimagine how these items can exist as part of a larger narrative in the archive.

The contributions ranged from more general experiences of queerness to deeply personal and intimate experiences. Some of the more general experiences included R20, the price of a shot at Anonymous's favourite gay bar, while some more personal experiences included hand written poetry and personal journals given to one another during a relationship. There was a moment in the exhibition where the curation of these objects imitated 'real life'. During the curatorial process, I was particularly interested in the dynamics of displaying the contributed items as art objects versus displaying them as the things they represent. In this sense, I was interested in

the discourse around hanging a t-shirt as an art object versus hanging it as the very thing it is - a t-shirt. During the installation of the exhibition, I was particularly aware that these objects are not art objects but rather the personal items of the contributors, and I wanted to frame them as such. The curation of the contributions imitated how the objects are used in 'real life' as not to remove them completely from their functions and contexts. Clothing items were displayed on hangers as opposed to being hung with clips like an artwork would be hung. Shoes were kept on the floor as opposed to being put on a plinth. These curatorial decisions allowed objects to exist in an archival space without removing their contexts and functions, remaining part of dynamic culture and life. These items were personal objects, and I focused on representing their connection to their owners in the exhibition. The contributed objects were returned to the contributors after the exhibition. Since the exhibition was not framed as creating a permanent queer archive but rather as a temporal space for experimentation of queer archival practices, it made no sense to keep the objects in an archival-like space. I was also particularly interested in the relationship between objects living both inside and outside the archive simultaneously. I was interested in experimenting whether objects could form an integral part of the archive while still being in the possession of their owners. I was interested in playing around with ideas of what that duality would look like, how an archivist could archive something that does not exist in the archive and what sorts of nuances would be created.

The invitation to contribute allows audiences to revisit their personal archives with a particular focus on re-presenting their lived queer experiences, while considering the ways in which they wish to be documented in an archival space. Individuals are invited to establish these dialogues as a tool for revisiting and consulting various lenses in order to consider hidden or abandoned expressions of tangled histories, challenging often simplified representations of queerness. Since collaboration and affective encounters are an important aspect of this project, it aims to deviate from a conventional monographic reading of the archive by positioning different forms of archival strategy in relation to dynamic, living queer bodies. The exhibition is ordered in such a way that it provides space for mediation, interpretation and encounters with the archive. Although the project was a temporal space to experiment with these ideas, it illustrated how the collaborative archive must be in a state of flux and never stationary or static in order to include a variety of voices in an ever-changing community.

The role of the archivist and the curator in this project are not the same, but they share some similarities. Both the curator and the archivist need to do some sort of activation to get the

community involved in their respective spaces. As the curator, I needed to activate the queer community to donate to the project as well as come to the exhibition. The archivist has a similar role in engaging the community to donate to the archive and interact with the archive more frequently. Both the curator and the archivist have a sort of intervention in the archival material. The archivist decides what goes into the archive, which box it goes into, what shelf it lives on and how it is described. The curator decides where in the gallery the item goes and how it will be framed for the viewer. Although these two similarities are surface-level; they demonstrate that the role of the archivist should not be done away with completely. To dismiss the role of the archivist here would be naïve - the archive needs the archivist to ensure that we can enjoy the archival items in the future, to ensure that the archive runs properly. Rather, this comparison between the curator and the archivist demonstrates how the relationship can become collaborative.

The relationship between the curatorial and the archival becomes particularly interesting when we begin to think of the archive as a symbol or resource for curatorial strategies where new collaborations are birthed. Curatorial practice - for this project at least - is viewed as a broader spectrum of cultural and artistic endeavours that encompass far more than conventional exhibition contexts. The outcomes of this project demonstrate that the curator is able to perform interventions and interpretations when dealing with archival materials in order to re-imagine structures and strategies of archival practice and develop the possibilities of the archive. Thus, the curatorial gives a solid foundation in order to imagine, theorise and develop on ideas surrounding queer archival practices (Carrier 2007).

As discussed in earlier chapters, queer archives hold complete and incomplete histories of queer lives and communities. This notion of the archive holding histories, facts and discoveries allowed me, as the curator, to create a spirited and compelling reading of what archival practice means, how it functions and what strategies can be implemented to create fuller and more inclusive understandings of queer lives. During this project, I have been acutely aware of the continuing partnership between research and the exhibiting of materials. These two aspects have created an exciting experience where I found myself serving as both the researcher and curator. As a researcher, I was able to engage with and encounter archival materials in a way that allowed me to imagine modes of futurity which were on some occasions unfeasible. I concerned myself with finding the problems in queer archival practice and imagining ways to fix them. As a curator, I was more concerned with politics of display and my responsibility in the

feasibility of creating collaborative archival strategies. Although these roles had clear characteristics, they shared some important connections. The combination of these roles gave me the grounding to understand queer archival practices and the extent of their archives, while giving me the grounding to be critical of archival strategies. The challenge was navigating the separation and unification of these roles, performing different positions in order to interpret the issues I was concerned with. While it was difficult to navigate these two roles, I was aware of the nuanced engagement and reflection it gave me on the project.

The curatorial builds an interpretational aspect to the purpose of creation and preservation of the archive. The curatorial aspect of the project allowed me to interpret and represent contributions made by the queer community through juxtapositions and cultivating relationships with these items. The curatorial brought out different interpretations of singular contributions as well as a larger narrative being formed. The curatorial allowed me to re-look, re-think and re-imagine what archival practice means from a new perspective, while revealing and opening up spaces for critical engagement of my ideas through encounters with diverse archival materials. The curatorial in this project offered meaningful production. While the curatorial is not going to reach every archive and influence all archival practices to be collaborative, this space is still worthwhile to investigate what different modes of archiving look like and how it can begin to change on a local level, offering alternate readings of the archive.

The role of the curator in this project was to become an interpreter of modes of futurity and the instigator of demonstrating these critical ideas. The curation in this project required me to look at and learn from the past archival strategies in order to construct lasting conversations for the future. Although the archive may not have been initially imagined as the subject of exhibitionary displays, it still offers a suitable ground for exploration through displays. Any item has the potential to be interpreted by a curator in an exhibition form. Similarly, any object that enters the archive is curated in some way. The difference between curating inside the archive and outside the archive is site-specific. The curatorial aspect of this project was characterised by both absence and presence in the archive, which draws on narratives that were further investigated in the exhibition. The exhibition was built on conceptual foundations since it lacked any art objects but rather focused on ‘real-life’ items which allowed me as the curator to interpret each item while leaving a space for the viewer to come to their own conclusions. In the end, while I remained as impartial as I could during the curatorial process, I made choices that influenced how the objects would be interpreted. Some of these choices were conscious - such as painting

a pink wall, as well as framing the objects as real life items rather than art objects. My process as a researcher allowed me to think and theorise about these modes of futurity for queer archival practices, while the curatorial allowed me to interrogate these strategies in a practical sense.

The exhibition documented the mundane moments, the moments that define queerness in everyday life. In addition, the exhibition documented important cultural material that the queer community contributing thought represented them and what it means to be queer in a contemporary moment. One contribution that spoke to an encompassing queer culture was *Rocky Horror Picture Show* Vinyl Record that was contributed by Anonymous. *While Rocky Horror Picture Show* may now seem outdated and slightly problematic, it served and continues to serve as an important space for people to question their sexual and gender identities. The inclusion of items that reference a broader queer culture are vital in the archive since they remind the queer community that while our individual stories, experiences and narratives are important; as a community, we share certain experiences and have collective memories and histories.

I found that queer archives and archival practices exist in limited ways as discussed in the previous chapter. While this project dissects the flaws in queer archival practices, it does not propose to fix the problems of archiving but rather break down the limitations of queer archival practice by shifting the lens and making archiving a collaborative endeavour. Queer archival projects such as this one are a valuable alternative to conventional institutional archives, demonstrating the transformations that may occur when the communities represented in the archives are prioritised. These non-traditional forms of archiving form a fuller picture of what queered forms of memory, history and experiences may look like. The practices of archives dedicated to documenting the lives of queer bodies becomes queered when it constitutes the reclamation and justice for queer pasts and presents. In this sense, when the voices of queer bodies are prioritised over a singular narrative, we may reclaim our voices and document our histories in a way that suits us. The strategy of this project then shifts from archival silence to archival production and transformative discourse through the use of collaborative archival methods. This way, queer bodies are offered a platform to claim their existence, their histories and their lived experiences. There are a number of factors in mainstream archives that may interfere with a person's ability to express their sexual and gender identity. We must recognise

that queer bodies are being left out of or are sometimes mis-represented in these narratives. Biases will always persist in the archival process.

While the exhibition had many successes, it is important to take a moment to discuss the limitations of *Out of the Closet and Into the Archive* exhibition. At the end of the exhibition, the items that were contributed were returned to their original owners. While I was interested in interrogating the relationship between living both inside and outside the archive simultaneously, there were practical factors that led me to not keeping the archival items in a way that an established queer archive would. These factors included the space needed to house these objects as well as the financial requirements to properly take care of the contributed items. In addition, I did not possess the knowledge of how to adequately maintain the archival items. Learning these preservation and archival skills were unfortunately out of the scope of the project. Perhaps in future projects, I will be able to explore these methodologies in more depth and hopefully create an archive that has a lasting physical presence. These spatial, financial and knowledge requirements were not easily available to me in my personal capacity, and thus I chose to return the objects rather than doing a disservice in keeping them and allowing them to be destroyed. I hope that through this project, queer bodies have become more comfortable with queer archival spaces and may take it upon themselves to donate these items to established archives that can properly maintain and preserve these items for future education, research and enjoyment. Consequently, while the exhibition was framed as a temporal experimentation with queer archival practice, one of the major limitations was that these things did not end up in any physical archive.

Perhaps another limitation of the exhibition was that it did not include any sort of public programming or education around existing queer archives. Earlier in chapter three, I discuss how archives adopting this collaborative strategy can include engagements with the community around the items and narratives that already exist in the archive with regards to new contributions. Public programming of some sort may have formed an interesting relationship in relation to the kinds of objects being contributed in the contemporary moment. Another disadvantage of the exhibition was its duration. The exhibition showed for five days at the Point of Order in Braamfontein. There was one formal public engagement event on the exhibition's second day of showing while the rest of the week welcomed walk-in guests and a walk-through with *GALA*. While there were calls for contributions beforehand, there was a space in the exhibition that collected some contributions during the week of showing. A longer exhibiting

period could have allowed for more contributions with the possibility of more than one public engagement event, giving individuals more time to go through their personal collections and make a contribution.

I had some concerns around issues of accessibility of contributing items. In the calls for contributions, I set some parameters around the ways in which contributions could take place. If the submission were any kind of digital file, it could be emailed to me, and I would appropriately display the contribution. If the contribution was a physical object, then I arranged with the donor to collect the item or meet in a neutral space to collect the contribution. Ultimately, I collected most of the items from the donors' homes. This proved to be very challenging since it took up a lot of time under tight deadlines. While this approach was reasonable for the scope of this particular exhibition, it may prove to be unsustainable for archives who employ this collaborative strategy in the future.

There was aggression from bystanders on the night of the public engagement event. A group of drunk passersby started fights with some of the exhibition viewers outside the gallery, throwing glass bottles at the viewers. While the fights were diffused quickly, we must remember that the queer community is traumatised by violences of the past. And while the fights were not directly homophobic, it created an uneasy feeling for many attendees where they felt that they were no longer safely expressing their queerness. The issue was contradictory - as queer people, should we hide away and only have these kinds of conversations in private? Or should we have these conversations in public spaces, regardless of the violences we may face in the process in order to carve out safe spaces? While I lean more towards having these conversations in public spaces, I acknowledge that others may opt to have these conversations in private spaces; and these kinds of violences may drive queer people away from participating in the archive out of fear. Whichever side of the contradiction one occupies, one thing was clear - these violences highlighted the need for queer archives and spaces where queer people can document themselves in a safe way now more than ever.

In terms of the curatorial aspect of the project, in hindsight, I would have experimented with different modes of display in place of the floating shelves that were utilised. While I found that shelves supported my methodology in framing the items within their particular contexts, they were extremely difficult to work with. Perhaps experimentation with other forms of display could create visually interesting conversations. *EPOC LGBTIQ+* donated a documentary titled *The*

Queer Movement which was made in 2020 and depicted queer people telling their experiences and stories to the viewer. The documentary was projected in a quiet corner of the gallery while the soundscape filled the gallery. At night, the projection looked tremendous, but the bright colours in the documentary got lost in the daylight, regardless of the window covers that were installed in order to prevent this from happening. The soundscape of the documentary was diluted by the voices of the viewers in the space. A more intimate screening with headphones may have been preferable to truly appreciate and engage with this phenomenal documentary. The process of curating and making the exhibition took five days - the same amount of time as the exhibition showed. The curatorial took up a lot of time because of its fluid nature. As more contributions came in, the space needed to be curated and recurated, accounting for the diverse voices being included in this temporal archival experimentation. The curatorial could only begin when the first few contributions were collected, and continuously shifted in light of new contributions. Items were displayed, moved around and re-imagined with each addition. Perhaps more time could be allocated to the curatorial process in order to experiment with the fluidity of the archive in more depth, creating nuances with each movement.

Outcomes

We need to see queer archives - and archives at large - as spaces for accountability. We need to hold archives accountable for the kinds of representations they hold, the inclusions and exclusions of queer bodies throughout history as well as in the contemporary moment. Archives may offer nuanced histories and contexts if the documents are not recorded in a biased way. It is not impossible to imagine that the notion of the singular archivist can be harmful in documenting an entire community since one archivist cannot be expected to understand the nuances, complexities and discourses of different cultures, historical and socio political contexts of different groups of people. When one archivist documents a diverse community, those representations may become flattened or simplified. The danger of this single story of queerness is that it may create stereotypes of what queerness looks like, acts like and sounds like both historically and in the present moment. This may lead to prejudice and discrimination. It must be made clear that this is not the fault of any singular archivist, but rather the institution. The institution must take responsibility for the inclusions and exclusions of specific queer bodies and make efforts to include diverse voices.

To add to this, the archivist is often stretched very thin. In my interview with Lucie Handley-Girard, the archivist at *The Arquives*, she expressed that the archive receives over one hundred donations per year (Handley-Girard Interview 2022). Thus, she may need to prioritise historical contributions, or even contributions that she may find more interesting than others. Archiving queer bodies should be a roundtable discussion. A variety of diverse voices should be acknowledged, considered and represented. As the queer community, we must call into question presiding modes of archiving, especially in queer archives. We should not view this confrontation as a gesture towards subversion, aggression, contempt or non-recognition. Rather, we should see institutions as responsible for the kinds of representations they include and exclude. This should be seen as a positive endeavour in order to best represent the queer community, where individuals are able to engage in conversations that concern their histories, collective memories and identities.

Archives, in a general sense, only represent a specific aspect of the community. Aspects including space restrictions as well as financial restrictions may further limit the kinds of contributions and the amount of contributions that can be collected. For the purpose of properly addressing these unequal power dynamics, collaborative archives become a necessary space for those who have not been sufficiently included in more conventional archives. Collaborative strategies have demonstrated that there are viable alternatives to conventional archives since queer members of the community have a say in what is recorded as history and the way in which it is recorded. Community members are able to decide to include the things that they find significant to our individual and collective histories, while creating a collective memory in a way that accounts for different identities. The duties of the archive must be shared between the archivist and the community in order to create lasting impacts, cultivating and preserving community knowledge to reframe archives as spaces of liberation and camaraderie. This can only happen through the centralisation of the interests of the community. These kinds of autonomous strategies can begin to heal the community from the traumas they may have experienced due to different omissions and erasures.

It is important to account for all kinds of stories. Frequently, we are accustomed to hearing a story from a singular viewpoint about a person, a happening or an event. Unconsciously, we may be influenced by these singular stories and not account for more nuanced narratives. The danger of the singular, one-sided narrative is that it may lead us to biased assumptions, conclusions, judgements and misunderstandings. This one-sidedness may hinder us from

seeing ‘truth’ in a more complex and nuanced way. The way the story is told, who it is told by and when it is told has a significant effect on how we understand histories. If we do not interrogate the singular narrative, we may end up with stories that are potentially harmful or exclusionary. Single narratives can be detrimental since some individuals have the power to characterise people and events through a certain lens which can have the potential to dehumanise queer people by emphasising our differences rather than our similarities. We can empower queer people by providing a space that accounts for a diverse range of stories. In this way, the queer archive becomes a space for archival transformation rather than archival silence through collaborative strategies. With the findings of this project in mind, widespread collaborative archival practices are uncertain and almost impossible to concretely write down since they are dependent on who is engaging with the collection, the specific temporal and spatial contexts of engagement, and how the collection is being actively engaged with. These collaborative strategies have the potential to birth new kinds of collections and new ways of understanding archives. New understandings may mobilise the community in ways that are currently not being done. Thus, the queer archive becomes a space of transformative discourse rather than archival silence. The outcomes of this project imply that communities can cultivate their knowledge and intervene in current archival strategies in order to open these spaces to conversation and commentary. Communities may re-imagine and rearrange new understandings and visions of what we consider an archive to be, and what we define as history. This way, our stories can remain uncensored while carving out safe spaces where new knowledges and histories can be formed.

When the stories, experiences and voices of individuals or communities are included in the archive, they are given a sort of immortality. This can prove to be extremely powerful in remembering the lives of queer people for future research and education. On the other hand, those who are not included in the archive are not given this same kind of immortality which may lead to their histories being unremembered and irretrievable. In this way, we can think of archivists as catalysts for remembrance and non-remembrance. Edenheim’s words emphasise this theory, stating that “since inclusion in the archive is deemed synonymous with life, exclusion from the archive means death, a death that the archivist is responsible for” (Edenheim 2014: 53). In other words, for some queer people, not existing in the archive may feel like their experiences never existed at all. Edenheim looks to the role of the archivist for the omission of some lives in the archive, suggesting that the archivist holds the power to influence public memory. It must be noted here that while Edenheim’s thoughts on the role of the archivist are

bona fide, the archivist does not exclusively govern what goes into the archive. For instance, individuals may donate large collections which take up much space in the archive, alluding to a wider narrative. In this case, the archivist does not choose to clutter the archive with one kind of narrative; however since the archive is a place of remembrance and safekeeping, the archivist may choose to keep these donations for future research and enjoyment rather than rejecting the donation in order to include different voices in the archive. These intimate kinds of donations are appreciated and respected in queer archives, which may not be the case for other institutional archives.

An archivist is entangled with their positionality, which constitutes bias in the archive when they determine the things that are going to be included or excluded from the archive. The archivist's interaction with donations and collections will be influenced by their personal life experiences, their education, sociopolitical and geographical contexts, amongst other factors. This is not to say that the archivist's positionality should be read negatively. While positionality has the potential to cause negative effects, the archivist's positionality may influence them to think critically about the archival strategies they employ and the kinds of narratives created in the process. Archivists are inherently involved in creating collective remembrance and what we consider to be history since they actively engage with the materials at hand daily, interpreting and creating representations for a wider community. Collaborative archival strategies such as the one illustrated in *Out of the Closet and Into the Archive* allow communities to be in conversation with archivists in relation to the ways in which their stories are recorded since:

> "A passing on of the knowledge necessary for remembering correctly is vital. This cannot be defined as anything but a quest for eternal reproduction, a sort of assurance that only our archiving desire will preserve a (recognizeable) queer time and place in the future. There is no coincidence, then, in the repetition of the symbolic order; there is only a fear of not being remembered 'as we were,' fear of not being represented by future researchers, fear of not being able to reproduce an offspring 'like us'" (Edenheim 2014: 53).

While these outcomes are very exciting to me, they suggest some other questions around what kind of archive the community wants to engage with: a conventional archive that houses documents and records, or an archive that includes ephemera in order to deconstruct what we imagine an archive to be? Writing these collaborative histories into archives that already exist or creating a distinct archive that holds as much weight as those that already exist? Should the

queer archive be a fixed physical space, or a series of temporal engagements with the queer community? These kinds of questions may destabilise the idea that material items are reliable sources of history.

Out of the Closet and Into the Archive demonstrated how collaborative archival strategies allow queer collections to grow, including items that the community finds valuable to their collective identity, rather than the histories attributed to them, empowering the community to take ownership over their histories and be actively included in the authorship; reclaiming their representations and narratives in public memory. In this project, I found that collaborative archives allow for intimate and deeply personal experiences of queerness to be shared, although they may be seen as mundane. As queer people, we deserve access to the histories of our communities. More importantly, we must be documented on our own accounts. Collaborative strategies may give rise to tangible and ephemeral materials as well as oral histories that all people, not only queer, can learn about. These methodologies are essential in countering hegemonic readings of queer archives, where omission and misrepresentation are actively questioned and discussed with the community. Collaborative strategies allow for the decentralisation of the archivist, and the centralisation of the community, recognising the importance that the community has in writing and recording their own histories. With this methodology, representing oneself in the archive becomes about authorship and self-representation while reimagining historical narratives. The possibilities of collaborative archival strategies are attainable. As demonstrated in the exhibition, many people have the desire to engage in the queer archive. But it seems there may be a problem with current archival practices that do not have diverse representations in their archives. Queer people look to the archive to find themselves and their histories represented, so if their histories are omitted from the archive, or are misrepresented in the archive, then they may not be willing to engage meaningfully with the content that the archive holds. In this case, archives can avoid driving away queer people from engaging with the archive by employing collaborative archival strategies. However, the employment of these strategies begins with opening up conversations with community members in order to address methodologies and frameworks that may potentially be uncomfortable.

During the curatorial process, I found that there are a number of ways to represent collaborative engagements with the queer archive. *Out of the Closet and Into the Archive* was an embodiment of one of those representations. The curatorial was an act of re-reading,

reimagining and re-representing archival practices, allowing me to address the main question in this research project: what is the configuration of a queer archive that utilises collaborative archival strategies by prioritising the voices of living queer bodies? Some aspects of the curatorial directly mirrored the configuration of collaborative archival strategies. Particularly, the curatorial demonstrated the fluidity and flux of the queer archive. The curatorial demonstrated how narratives in the archive are intertwined and may influence one another. The inclusion of one object may help us gain a deeper understanding of other objects housed in archives. The curatorial gave rise to archival production of diverse voices who wanted to engage in the archival process. There were moments of imitating 'real life' in the curatorial process which became interesting in demonstrating how items can be archived without being removed from their functions and contexts. While the curatorial was not neutral, it allowed for contributors and viewers of the exhibition to interpret, mediate and reimagine their own encounters with the archive. As the curator, the exhibition allowed me to perform interventions and interpretations of archival materials while re-imagining structures and strategies of archival practice. The curatorial allowed for a practical and non-neutral manifestation of theories and methodologies surrounding queer archival practice.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

To conclude, I would like to share my final thoughts regarding how curatorial practice allowed me to explore collaborative archival practices specifically pertaining to queer archives. The interdisciplinary approach in this project allowed me to explore collaborative archival practices both theoretically through literature, as well as practically through curatorial practice. While the engagement in a range of literatures enabled me to invesigate numerous aspects of my research question that gave me a nuanced understanding of curatorial practice in relation to queer archives, it prevented me from exploring one literature in great depth and restrained the sensitivity with which I could interact with a set of theories. However, this interdisciplinary approach to the research allowed me to bring together curatorial practice and queer archives so that they can be in conversation with one another.

The main question I aimed to investigate in this research paper and exhibition was: what is the configuration of a queer archive that ultilises collaborative archival strategies by prioritising the voices of living queer bodies? I made use of curatorial practice to explore this idea and secondary questions that were raised in the process. In the end, the exhibition demonstrated that collaborative archival strategies are unpredictable, organic, unstructured, intricate and tangled. The exhibition showed less emphasis on the historical aspect of archiving queer bodies, focusing on contemporary queer narratives. Collaborative engagements with queer archival practice through the curatorial allowed queer people to be actively involved in the narration of their histories as well as creating a greater awareness of queer archvies at large.

I observed two established queer archives in great detail in order to understand the possibilities as well as limitations of current queer archival practices. These two case studies, *The Arquives* as well as *Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action* allowed me to gain a greater understanding of how these possibilities and limitations may manifest in a practical manner. The interviews I conducted with affiliates of the chosen case studies provided insight into the experiences and perspectives of those who work with the queer archive on a daily basis. During these interviews, I was able to reflect on the limitations of queer archival practice and address them further through the course of this research project. I found that the primary limitations of established queer archives include bias, lack of diversity, the singular narrative as well as issues around labour.

Out of the Closet and Into the Archive exhibition engaged with themes of memory, collective histories, authorship and collaborative storytelling. The exhibition acted as a mobilisation of items with archival potential and an engagement with the queer community in a manner that is inherently collaborative. The exhibition was a temporal exploration of queer archival practice and did not stand in for physical, brick-and-mortar archive. I imagine this exhibition can be recreated over time by myself as well as by established queer archives to include more contemporary narratives into the archive while providing a structure for queer archives to adopt a collaborative model. The community was engaged both physically and in the digital space, allowing for the writing of collaborative histories. The exhibition remained fluid as to avoid repeating the static nature of some archives. While it is important to reflect on the successes of the exhibition, there were some limitations. While I intended to display these contributions in a way that did not remove them from their original contexts; in the future, I intend to explore more visually exciting methods of displaying these contributions. Perhaps some form of public programming in conversation with the exhibition would nuance these conversations further. I would urge archives who adopt this collaborative strategy to include a public program where the community is educated on the donations that exist in the archive, what kinds of narratives are created and why their contributions help tell form a contemporary narrative of queerness. It may be that the greatest limitation in this exhibition was that these contributions were not formally archived in the end. While I was interested in exploring notions of contributions existing both inside and outside the archive simultaneously, practical limitations such as financial, spatial and knowledge restrictions limited how these items could be archived. While formally archiving these items was not feasible for this project, it may not prove to be a limitation for established queer archives who adopt this model. I aim to address this limitation in future projects so that contributions can be archived and given a sort of permanence, but in the meantime, these contributions go back to their original owners until there is a more permanent space for them to reside in.

An interesting relationship between the curatorial and the archival took shape during the project. As a curator, I was able to perform interventions and interpretations in order to re-imagine structures and strategies of archival practice without being neutral. My curatorial endeavour provided me with a solid foundation for imagining, theorizing and devloping my ideas around queer archival practice. In this project, I served as both the researcher and the curator. As the researcher, I was able to engage with and encounter materials with archival potential while imagining modes of futurity for quer archival practices. As the curator, I was able to demonstrate

my ideas in a practical way while exploring nuances and discourses that had not emerged in the research process. The curatorial built an interpretational aspect where I represented contributions through juxtapositions and similarities, engaging in interesting conversations. The curatorial encouraged the interpretation of singular contributions as well as a larger narrative that began to emerge. By re-looking, re-thinking and re-imagining archival practice, I engaged in creating lasting conversations for future archival strategies. The duality of the archival and curatorial allowed me to explore, justify and denote my research both theoretically and practically.

In the future, I imagine that I will engage in a project resemblant of this one - only it will propose a permanent physical space for queer people to document their histories collaboratively using curatorial practice. I will keep the stories shared with me close in the imagining of a more permanent archive - one that is touched by the vulnerability, tenderness, love and compassion that I have experienced in this project. In the meantime, I hope that the people who have participated in this project have become more comfortable with the queer archive, acknowledging how their stories can change historical narratives. I imagine that established queer archives may use curatorial practices to engage in collaborative conversations with the queer community. I remain optimistic that the people who have engaged in this project will continue to challenge representations in the archive and become comfortable with the uncomfortable, even if it is unsettling at times.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ARONDEKAR, A. & CVETKOVICH, A. & HANHARDT, C.B. & KUNZEL, R. & NYONG'O, T. & RODRIGUEZ, J.M. & STRYKER, S. (2015). Queering Archives: A Roundtable Discussion. Readical History Review.

BADER, S. (2022). Interview with post doctoral researcher on 23 March 2022. Online. Digital Recording in possession of E. Prior.

BAUCOM, E. (2018). An Exploration into Archival Descriptions of LGBTQ Materials. The American Archivist. Volume 8, Issue 1. DOI: 10.17723/0360-9081-81.1.65.

BOSKEY, E. (2020). Gender Essentialism Theory. [Online] Accessed 10 June 2020 from https://www.verywellhealth.com/what-is-gender-essentialism-3132613

BOWKER, G.C. & STAR, S.L. (1999). Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

BROWNE, K. & NASH, C.J. (2010). Queer Methods and Methodologies: An Introduction. Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theory and Social Science Research. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing.

BURTON, A.M. (2005). Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History. Durham: Duke University Press.

BUTLER, J. (1986). Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex. London: Yale University Press.

BUTLER, J. (1988). Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

BUTLER, J. (1990). Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. Routledge: New York.

BUTLER, J. (1993). Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’. New York: Routledge.

CARRIER, D. (2007). Why Curators Matter. In Rand, S. & Kouris, H (eds). Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating. New York: Apexart.

CASWELL, M. (2016). ‘The Archive’ is not an Archive: On Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies. Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture 16.1.

CASWELL, M. & CIFOR, M. (2016). From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives. Archivaria.

CHENIER, E. (2016). Reclaiming the Lesbian Archives. Oral History Review. Volume 43.

COOK, T. (1997). What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift. Archivaria. Volume 43.

CORBETT, A.M. (2015). Queering New Media: Connectivity in Imagined Communities on the Internet. PhD Thesis. Ohio: Graduate College of Bowling Green State University.

CVETKOVICH, A. (2003). An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

DE BEAUVOIR, S. (2015) [1949]. The Second Sex. London: Vintage Classic. ISBN: 9781782870386. Translated by Constance Borde & Sheila Malovany-Chevallier.

DERRIDA, J. (1995). Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

DIRKS, N. (2015). Autobiography of an Archive: A Scholar's Passage to India. Columbia University Press.

DISEMELO, K. (2019). Performing the Queer Archive: Strategies of Self-Styling on Instagram. In J. Pather & C. Boulle (eds.), Acts of Transgression: Contemporary Live Art in South Africa. 219 - 242. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

DOAN, L. (2017). Queer History/Queer Memory: The Case of Alan Turing. GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies. Volume 23. Durham: Duke University Press.

EDENHEIM, S. (2013). Lost and Never Found: The Queer Archive of Feelings and Its Historical Propriety. Differences, 24 (3). 36 - 62. DOI: 10.1215/10407391-2391950.

FOUCAULT, M. (1972). The Archaeology of Knowledge. Translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books.

FREEMAN, E. (2010). Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories. Durham: Duke University Press.

GILLILAND, A. (2010). Afterword: In and Out of the Archives. Archival Science 10. 333 - 343.

GILLILAND, A. & CASWELL, M. (2015). Records and their Imaginaries: Imagining the Impossible, Making Possible the Imagined. Archival Science 16. 53 - 75.

HALBERSTAM, J. (2005). In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives. New York: New York University Press.

HANDLEY-GIRARD, L (2022). Interview with the archivist on 18 March 2022. Online. Digital Recording in possession of E. Prior.

HOSFELD, B. (2018). Archival of the Fittest: The Role of Archives in Constructing Public Memory of Queer History. Independent Study Project Collection.

HUTTON, PH. 1993: History as an Art of Memory. Hanover: University Press of New England.

KUMBIER, A. (2014). Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archive. Sacramento, California: Litwin Books.

KVALE, S. (1996). Interview Views: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

LEE, J.A. (2015). A Queer/ed Archival Methodology: Theorizing Practice through Radica Interrogations of the Archival Body. Phd Diss., University of Arizona.

LOUW, GJ. (2022). Interview with the program's coordinator on 25 March 2022. Online. Digital Recording in possession of E. Prior.

LOVE, H. (2007). Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

MANION, M. & MORGAN, R. (2006). The Gay and Lesbian Archives: Documenting Same-Sexuality in an African context, Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity, 29 - 35.

MBEMBE, A. (2002). The Power of the Archive and its Limits. In Refiguring the Archive. Cape Town: David Philip.

McCLEAN, N. (2014). Considering the Internet as Enabling Queer Publics/Counter Publics. [Online] Accessed 10 June 2020 from http://spheres-journal.org/considering-the-internet-as-enabling-queer-publicscounter-publics/

MINOTT, R. (2019). The Past is Now: Confronting Museums' Complicity in Imperial Celebration. Third Test 33.

MUNIZ REED, I. (2015). Thoughts on Curatorial Practices in the Decolonial Turn. Broadsheet Journal. Volume 45, Issue 2.

MUNOZ, J.E. (1999). Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

NDIKUNG, BSB. (2018). Those Who Are Dead Are Never Gone: On the Maintenance of Supremacy, the Ethnological Museum and the Intricacies of the Humboldt Forum. Berlin: Archive Books.

ORR, R. (2017). The Ageing of the Archives: Community, Conflict, and Queer Potential at the Lesbian Herstory Archives. PhD Thesis (Sociology). New York: Syracuse University

OSBORNE, T. (1999). The Ordinariness of the Archive. History of the Human Sciences. DOI: 10.1177/09526959922120243.

RHEINBERGER, H.J. (2010). On Historicizing Epistemology: An Essay. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

SANDOVAL, C. (2000). Methodology of the Oppressed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

SEDGWICK, E.K. (1991). Epistemology of the Closet. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

SINGH, J. (2018). No Archive Will Restore You. Santa Barbara, California: Punctum Books.

SIZEMORE-BARBER, A. (2017). Archival Movements: South Africa's Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action. Safundi 18(2). 117 - 130. Doi: 10.1080/17533171.2016.1270568.

STOLER, A.L. (2009). Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

SULLIVAN, N. (2003). A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory. New York: New York University Press.

THIEL, M. (2018). Introducing Queer Theory in Internatinoal Relations. [Online] Accessed 9 June 2020 from https://www.e-ir.info/2018/01/07/queer-theory-in-international-relations/

TOLIA-KELLY, D. (2016). Race and Affect at the Museum - The Museum as a Theater of Pain. In D. Tolia-Kelly, E. Waterton, S. Watson (eds) Heritage, Affect and Emotion. London: Routledge.

VERMA, T. & CHAPMAN-ORR, E. & DAVIS, A. (2018). Queer Theory. Grinnell College: Subcultures and Sociology. [Online]. Accessed 25 August 2020 from https://haenfler.sites.grinnell.edu/subcultural-theory-and-theorists/queer-theory/

APPENDIX 1: DOCUMENTATION OF THE EXHIBITION

Additional photographs, video walkthroughs and social media engagement can be found at https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1KtPzg4PtZLrO-FbbXw7ETpIR3J9U37dv?usp=sharing



Out of the Closet and Into the Archive Exhibition. Photograph by Emma Prior.



Out of the Closet and Into the Archive Exhibition. Photograph by Emma Prior.



Out of the Closet and Into the Archive Exhibition. Photograph by Emma Prior.



Out of the Closet and Into the Archive Exhibition. Photograph by Emma Prior.



Man Purse. Contribution by Oluvo Gidi. Photograph by Emma Prior.

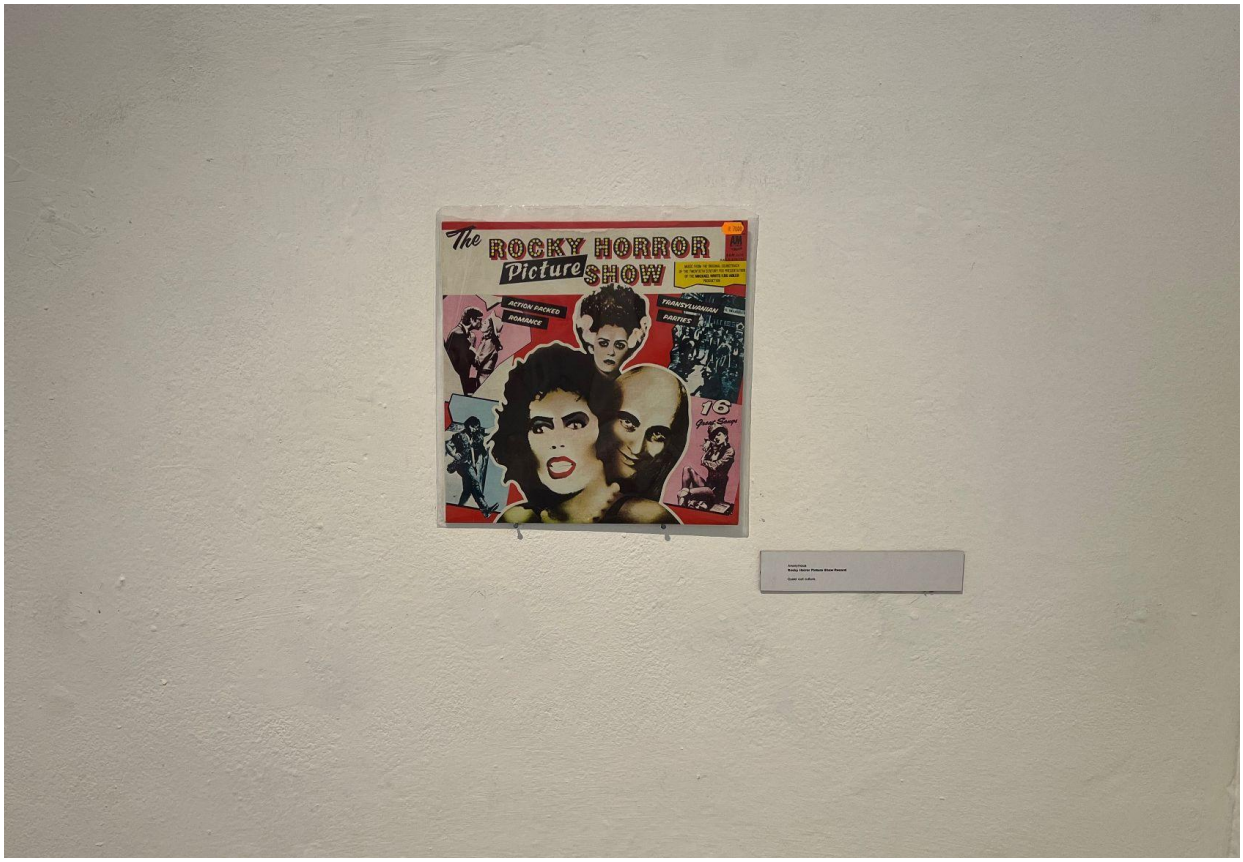


The Heels I was too Scared to Wear. Contribution by Anonymous. Photographed by Emma Prior.

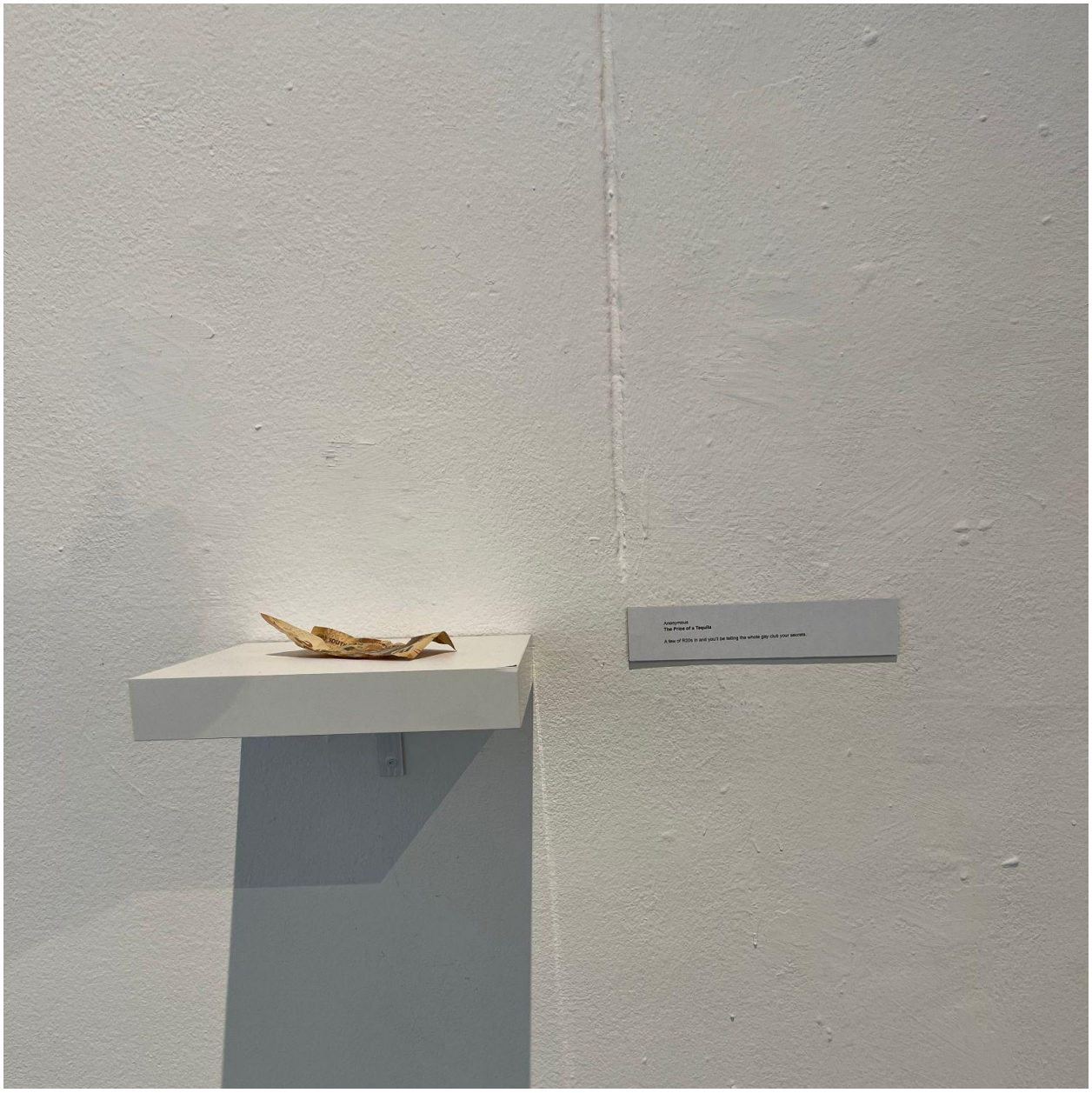
“I felt an immense pressure to dress and act more masculine after I came out of the closet. I’d always loved dressing more feminine, but it was almost expected of me to embrace a masculinity that I was not in touch with. For a long time, I stopped wearing dresses and heels and anything that was remotely feminine. This isn’t to say that I’d dress in a more ‘masculine’ way though - it was more neutral. As I grew more comfortable with myself and my sexuality, I slowly became more and more comfortable with my femininity as a lesbian. Although I still haven’t brought myself to wear these heels since I came out”.



Torn Vans. Contribution by Anonymous. Photograph by Emma Prior.



Rocky Horror Picture Show Record. Contributed by Anonymous. Photographed by Emma Prior.



The Price of a Tequila. Contributed by Anonymous. Photographed by Emma Prior.

“A few R20s in and you’ll be telling the whole gay club your secrets”.



Supporting Our Child. Contribution by Jonathan and Beryl Prior. Photographed by Emma Prior.



Pink Bear. Contribution by Oluvo Gidi and Kimon Phirippides. Photographed by Emma Prior.

“A symbol of their love”.



Poetry. Contribution by Oluvo Gidi. Photographed by Emma Prior.

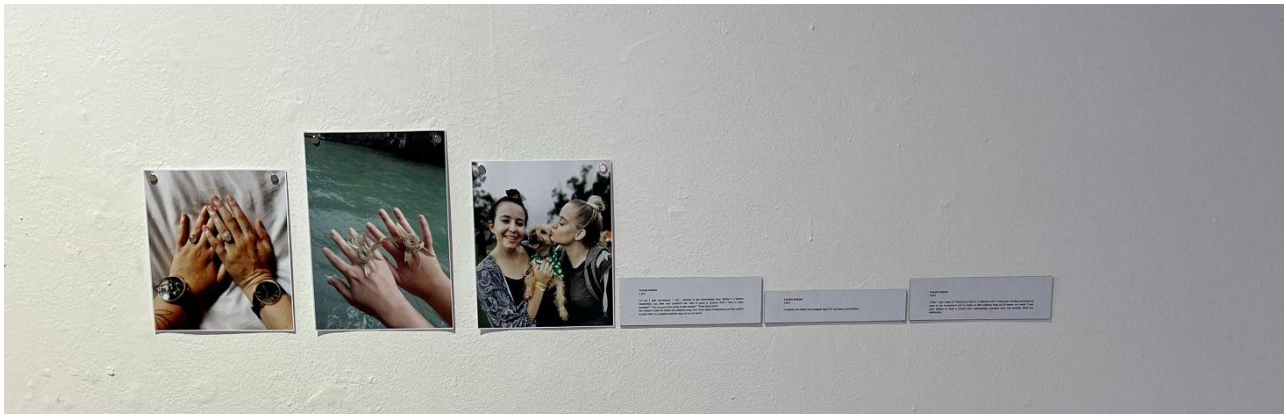


Memories Past. Contribution by Kimon Phirippides. Photographed by Emma Prior.



Two Photographs. Contribution by Karabo Moeti. Photograph by Emma Prior.

“These images are part of my ongoing series during my foundation course at the market photo workshop. This is my journey of healing not only that but also acceptance of my sexuality and it is also coming to terms with past traumas and celebrating my pride as I have found it difficult for the past years to open up but I could not help it how I feel or how I expressed myself, it’s still a work in progress hoping that I can finish this work focusing more on addressing issues that affects us queer people in our communities believing in the power to educate can have an impact not only on our communities in the country but the whole continent so queer people don’t have to be afraid to love freely.”



1 of 3; 2 of 3; 3 of 3. Contribution by Daniella Webster. Photograph by Emma Prior.

“For our five year anniversary, T and I decided to get commitment rings. Bring in a lesbian relationship, you often hear questions like ‘who is going to propose first?. ‘Who is more romantic?’ ‘Are you guys even going to get married?’ ‘What about kids?’
We wanted to take the stress and pressure away from those types of questions and fully commit to each other in a typically symbolic way, but on our own terms”.

“Furbabies are easier (and cheaper) than IVF, surrogacy and adoption”.

“When T and I were in Thailand we went in a little boat ride with a Thai guide. He was convinced we were on our honeymoon and he made us little wedding rings out of leaves and reeds. It was quite special to have a human who automatically accepted (and was excited) about our relationship”



Plaid. Contribution by Anonymous. Photograph by Emma Prior.



Pride Shirt. Contribution by Emma Prior. Photograph by Emma Prior.



Shredding the Binary. Contribution by Larissa Pienaar. Photograph by Emma Prior.

“I’ve been thinking a lot about my identity in the last couple of years, especially since the whole concept of non-binary came into my awareness. I’ve spent a lot of time in my life trying to fit into the traditional idea of femininity and never quite managing it. I’d buy beautiful dresses that looked great in the store and then every time I put them on, I felt like I was roleplaying this fancy, girly persona that I really wanted to want to be. I was always just a little too sweaty or a little too tall or a little too large in my own skin when I was wearing these things. They would ride up and twist around and I never felt like the poised and confident individual I thought these clothes were supposed to turn me into. I’ve clung for a long time to clothes like that. They’ve hung in my closet for years, unworn. I’ve given up taking them off the hanger but have been resisting actually removing them. I am currently in the process of redesigning my wardrobe with clothes that I finally feel like I fit into, body and soul, and it feels a bit like killing off this other person who’s been inhabiting my skin. Now I gotta figure out a way to bring my Self back to life redefined and reimagined and honestly I have no idea what that looks like but making art out of it seems like a good beginning”.



Open and Affirming Minister. Contribution by Oluvo Gidi. Photograph by Emma Prior.

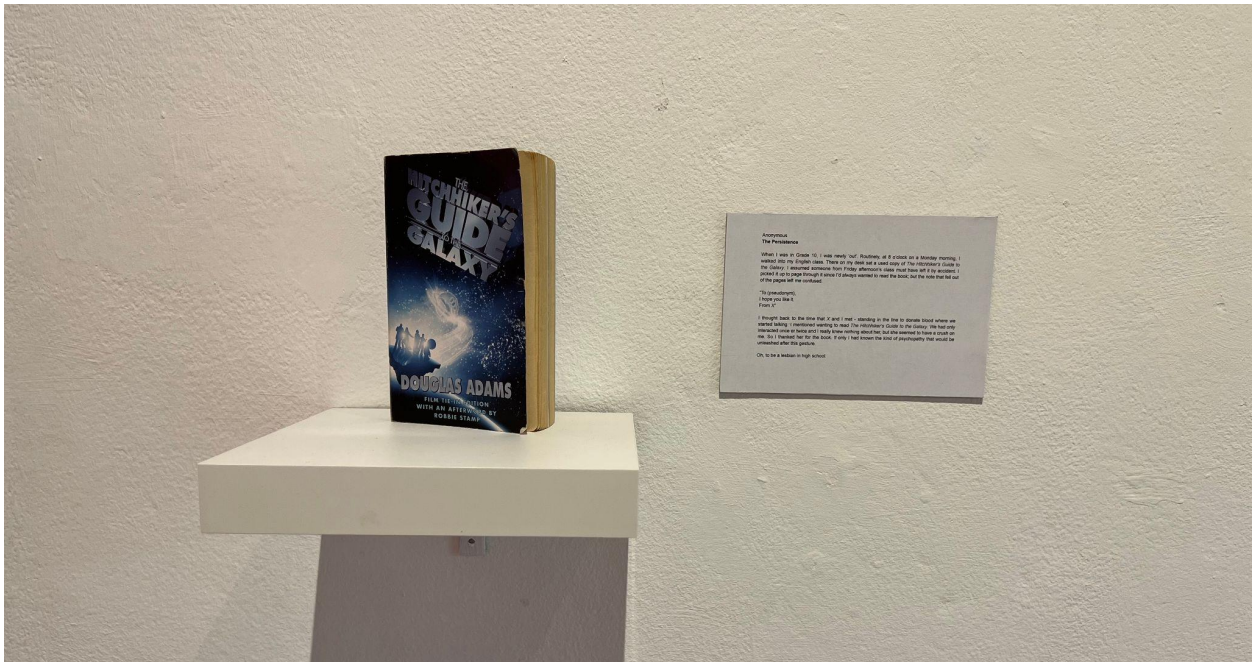


Denim Dungarees. Contribution by Daniella Webster. Photographed by Emma Prior.

“A pair of denim dungarees that I bought when I wanted to look as gay as I felt”.



Striped Scarf. Contribution by Kimon Phirippides. Photograph by Emma Prior.



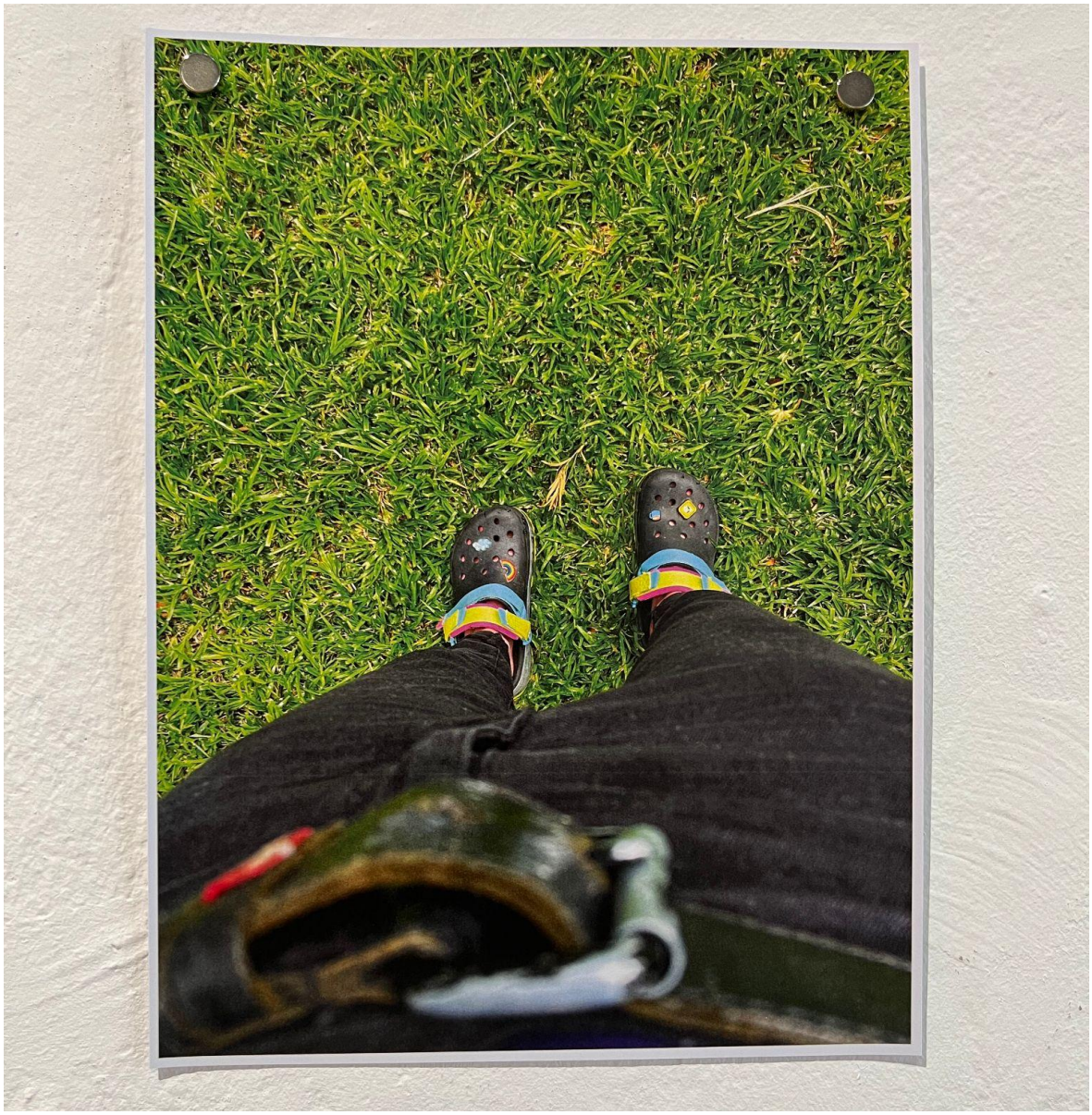
The Persistence. Contribution by Anonymous. Photograph by Emma Prior.

“When I was in Grade 10, I was newly ‘out’. Routinely, at 8 o’clock on a Monday morning, I walked into my English class. There on my desk sat a used copy of *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy.* I assumed someone from Friday afternoon’s class must have left it by accident. I picked it up to page through it since I’d always wanted to read the book; but the note that fell out of the pages left me confused.

‘To (pseudonym,
I hope you like it.
From X’

I thought back to the time that X and I met - standing in the line to donate blood where we started talking. I mentioned wanting to read *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy.* We had only interacted once or twice and I really knew nothing about her, but she seemed to have a crush on me. So I thanked her for the book. If only I had known the kind of psychopathy that would be unleashed after this gesture.

Oh, to be a lesbian in high school”.



Crocs with Skinny Jeans. Contribution by Lisle Jenneke. Photographed by Emma Prior.

“My identity has changed with the times as has the way I view myself based on the people and places I’ve seen and people and places I’ve been. Today I’m on grass and these are my clothes. My identity tho isn’t fashion, it isn’t even something I’m aware of until I take a photograph. It is an unorchestrated tumbling out of many different things. What I like is that it doesn’t matter - it’s still me. And I can change my clothes and never disappear. I’ve worn these jeans almost every day for about 3 years. And I got these crocs for Christmas. I’ve worn this belt through at least 3 relationships. That’s it. That’s my story. I change like rain on sunny days and already wet grass. I’m still me. And I’m almost accidentally queer as fuck.”



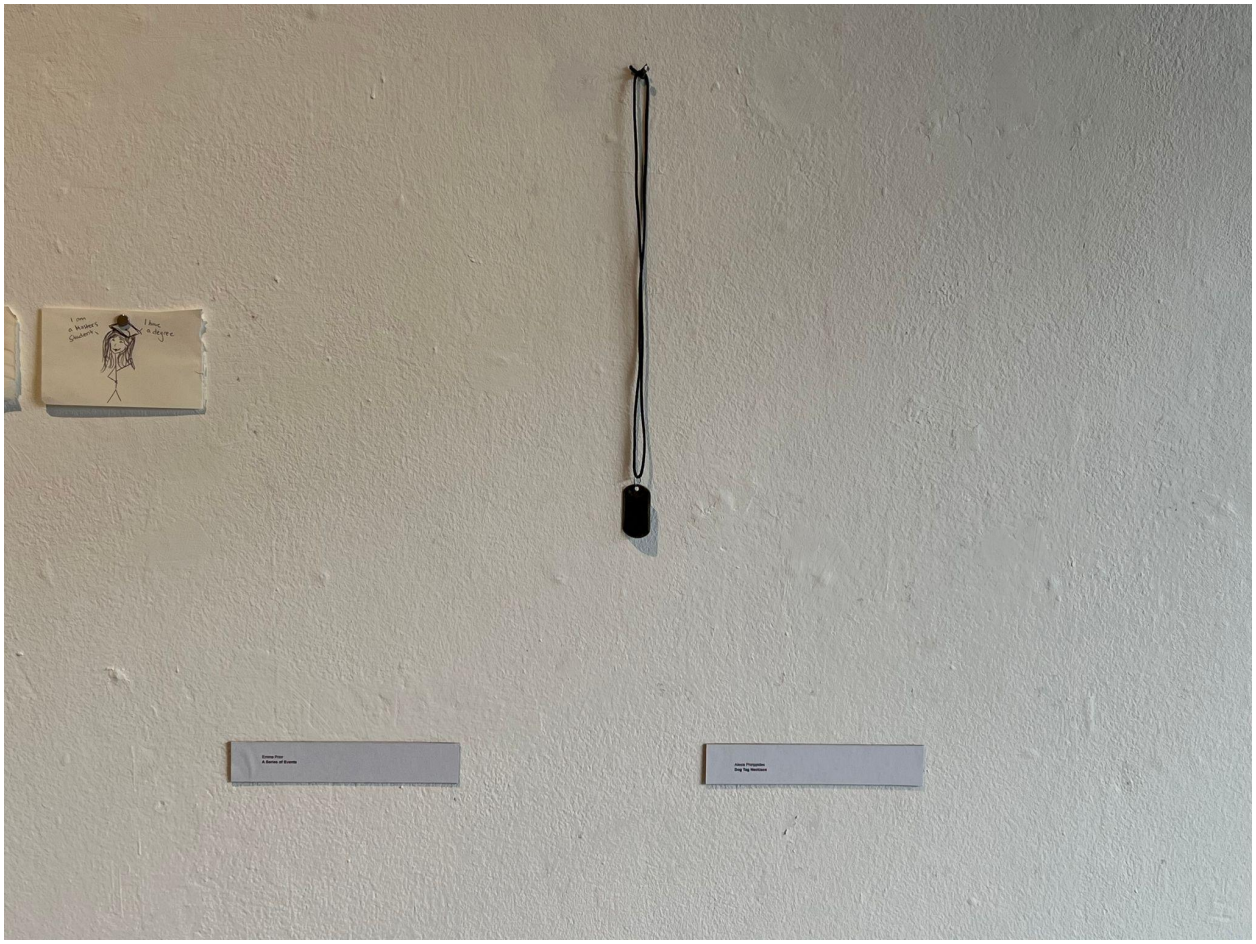
Portrait of a Woman. Contribution by Anonymous. Photographed by Emma Prior.



Coming Out. Contribution by Anonymous. Photographed by Emma Prior.



A Series of Events. Contribution by Emma Prior. Photographed by Emma Prior.



Dog Tag Necklace. Contribution by Alexia Phirippides. Photographed by Emma Prior.



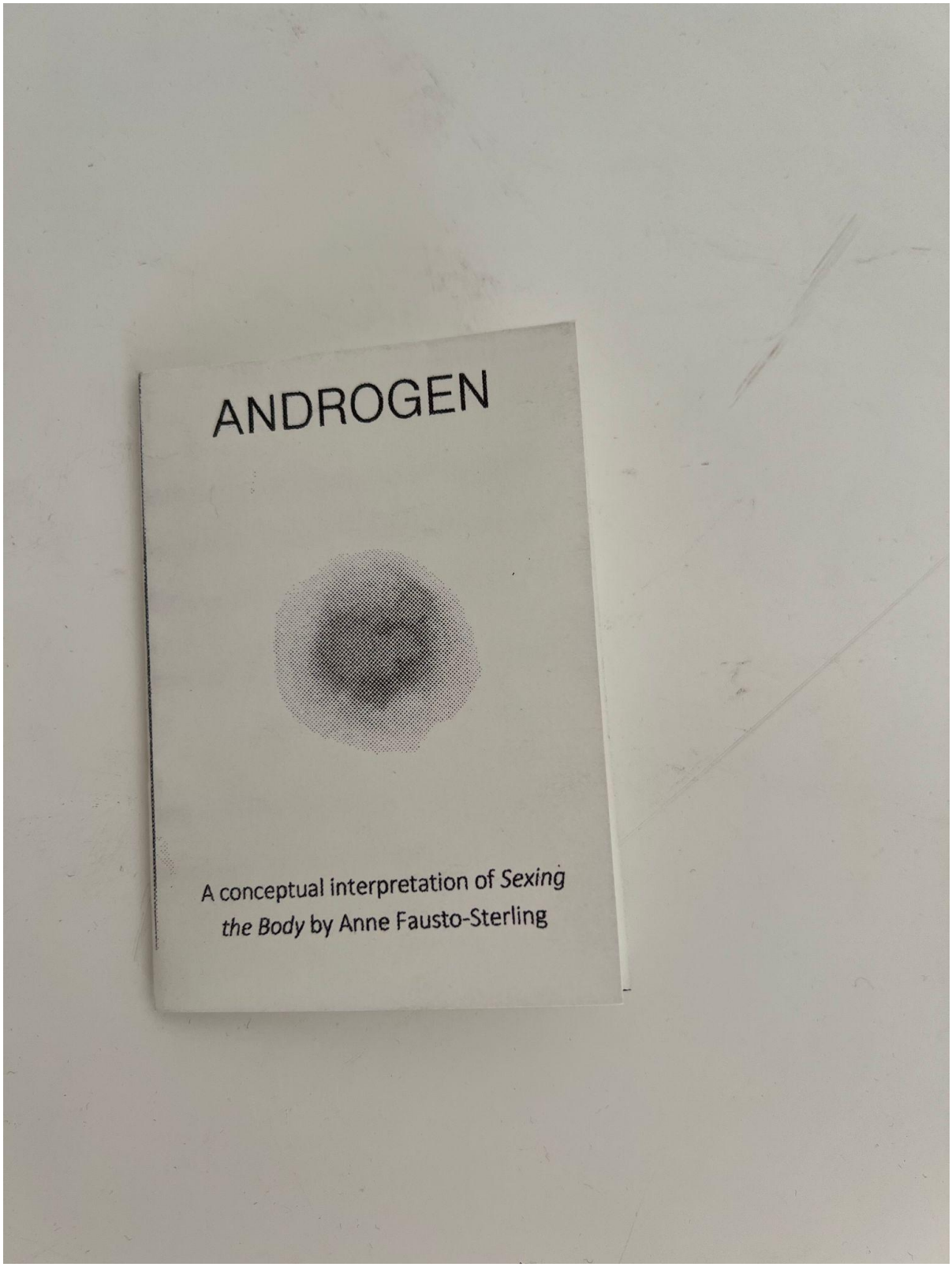
Two Kings, Two Queens. Contribution by Alexia Phirippides. Photographed by Emma Prior.



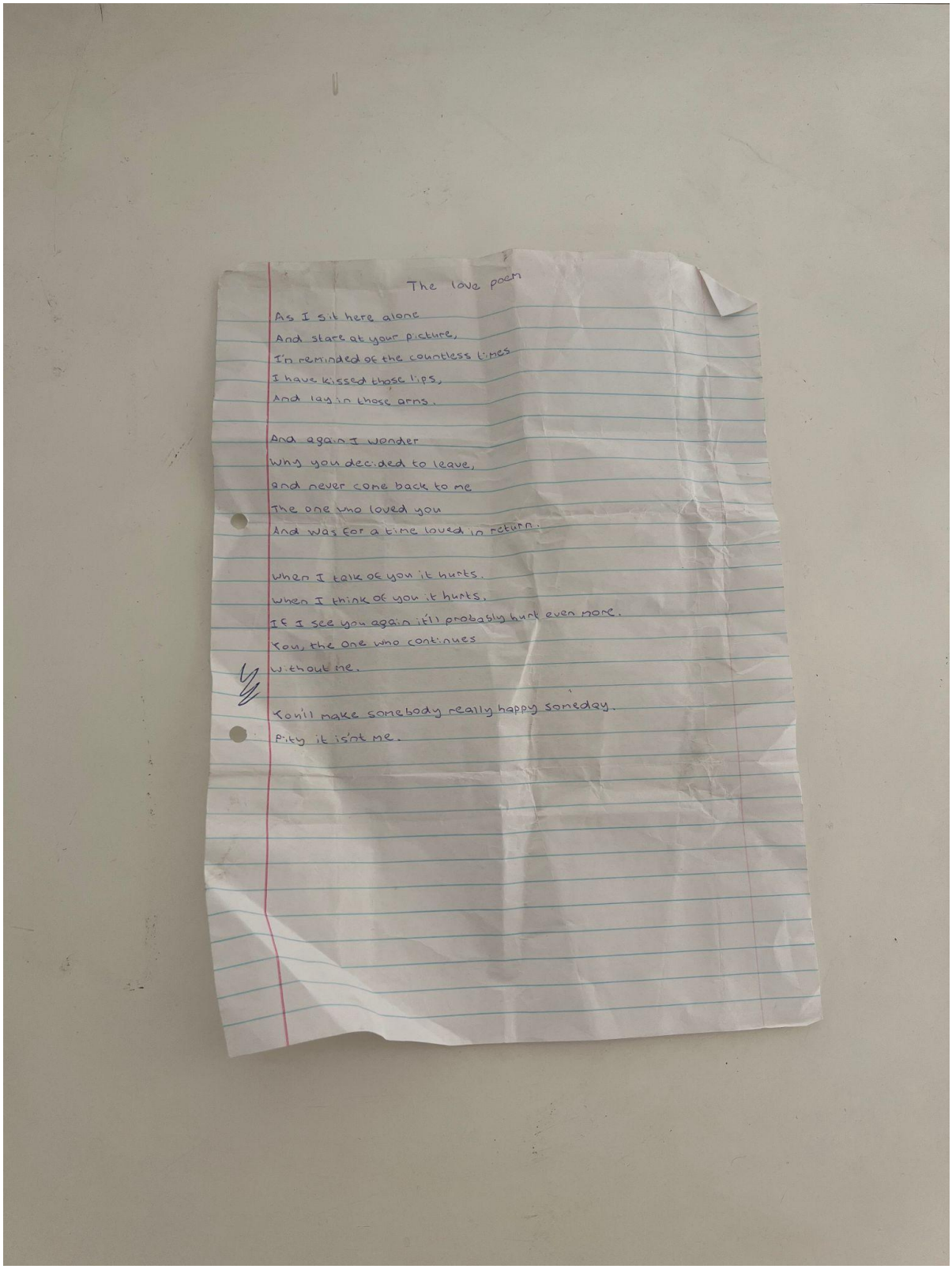
The Queer Movement. Contribution by EPOC. Photographed by Emma Prior.



Unnamed. Contribution by Miz Campbell (Miss Drag SA). Photograph by Emma Prior.



Unnamed. Contribution by Anonymous. Photographed by Emma Prior.



Unnamed. Contribution by Anonymous. Photographed by Emma Prior.

APPENDIX 2: TRANSCRIPTIONS OF PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH GENEVIEVE LOUW - GALA'S PROGRAMS COORDINATOR. 25 MARCH 2022. DIGITAL RECORDING IN POSSESSION OF EMMA PRIOR.

[00:00:00.14] Genevieve Louw: I give you all the permissions.

[00:00:03.03] Emma Prior: Okay. Cool. Thank you. So I don't want to take up too much of your time. I know you probably have a lot of other stuff going on. I just have a couple of questions, about seven questions around what you do and your experience of queer archives and then your opinions. So today, I'm really just looking to hear about what you think. So, my first question is a bit more adminy. It's sort of around who you are, and a brief description of your sort of role and relationship with GALA.

[00:00:43.12] Genevieve Louw: Great, so my name is Genevieve Jeanne Lowe. I am the Programs Coordinator for the GALA queer archive. I started working for GALA in 2017 as a project manager for a training project that was focused on sensitizing school management teams across South Africa and three different provinces. This was also related to a training manual that was developed and was being rolled out. And over time, after completing this training project, I started to raise funding for the organization. And I started to manage more training programs, and subsequently became the program's coordinator. [00:01:27.29] And now I basically coordinate and run educational programs, in university spaces, in organizations, with various entities. So my role is really now to kind of coordinate the education program for the archive itself.

[00:01:49.00] Emma Prior: Okay, brilliant. And could you give just a sort of brief history of GALA?

[00:01:59.21] Genevieve Louw: Sure, I mean I'm not the archivist. So I can't give you all the juicy details. But I can tell you that GALA was established in 1997 by Graham Reed who is the founder of GALA formally. But Graham Reed, who is a very well known queer academic and human rights activist, he works for Human Rights Watch in New York. And basically, Graham started the archive by registering it as a formal organization in 1997 alongside other activists. So

there were people at the time, like Judge Edwin Cameron, Pumi Mtetwa, Bev Ditsy, Simon Nkoli, a little bit earlier though who all expressed this need to record queer histories. [00:02:55.13] And one of the main reasons for this in our history in South Africa shows us that the stories, the campaigns, even the legislative work by queer communities were erased by government. So there was censorship laws, for example, and basically GALA was established in 1997 by a group of of queer activists to address the omission and erasure of LGBTIQ histories. Now when I talk about histories, it's basically inclusive of campaigns, of any recorded histories right? So that's in a nutshell why GALA was established. [00:03:37.20] And then over the years, GALA became and built up more into a formal archive. At first Gala was hosted by the South African historical archives, which is known as SAHA. And then also moved to the Wits University Library, and existed in the library space for quite some time, then moved into its own space and became the GALA library and archive that we know today, which is still kind of under the ... I would say it's still connected, but it's under the umbrella of the university in the sense that it's supported with space and resources in order to host an archive. Currently in its physical form, the archive itself, the documents, the collections are all stored off site and document warehouse. And then of course, there are some things that are stored on site, but that's the kind of physical iteration of it at this point.

[00:04:46.08] Emma Prior: Okay, brilliant. Thank you and in your sort of opinion, do you think that... so we spoke about this word non historical. This word is still been of much contention to me and still something that I'm thinking through and working through at the moment. But for now let's call it contemporary. So that word that GALA I sort of agreed on was a good alternative. So would you say that, in your opinion, contemporary bodies are well documented or well recorded in the GALA archive?

[00:05:25.09] Genevieve Louw: I mean, I think that's an interesting question because, of course, when we think about contemporary bodies then I'm thinking, I need to understand who you are talking about with contemporary bodies? Are these black, queer young people? Are these transgender people? Is it youth? If you're talking about contemporary queer bodies, who are you talking about? But if I was just going to talk about contemporary experiences, and let's, for example, say the process of recording what is happening now. So from my experience, as an activist on the ground, I go to queer events, I go to conferences, I go to court cases, I monitor protests. I'm there to document things that are happening at the moment. Do I think that it's recorded well? No, because I think that you could have hundreds of people recording things

constantly and sending them to the GALA queer archive and there could be a constant influx of photographs, videos, interviews, constantly being fed into the archive. It's obviously just not happening like that for various reasons. [00:06:42.21] I make a point out of it personally to do so whenever I'm engaging in either a conference or in a protest or at an event. But there's no formal system at the archive to say, "Okay, we are going to be recording the contemporary experiences of queer bodies". It happens sporadically. It happens organically. Not in a structured way. I would say that is an ongoing process to record press. So there is the constant filing of media stuff. So your newspaper articles, your online news that's related to LGBTI rights regionally is constantly filed. Recording contemporary experiences, that happens either through projects. So that would be through publications, or it would be through the education program. But there's no formal structure to record the contemporary experiences or have a constant influx. It's more sporadic, it's definitely more organic in that sense. There's no structure to it.

[00:08:02.06] Emma Prior: Has GALA mobilised any projects? I'll use the broad term projects. But has GALA mobilised any projects to include contemporary bodies? I suppose let me define contemporary bodies. When I think of the kind of work that I'm trying to do, I'm thinking very much of the queer people. And I'm using the term queer as a sort of umbrella term, right? I thought a lot about what it means for an archive to be queer. And it's actually something that's one of my later questions. So we'll get into that a little bit later. But when I'm thinking of the kinds of people that I'm trying to document in this archive, I'm thinking of queer people that are living in a contemporary moment. So identifying as some sort of queerness, gender identity is something that wouldn't necessarily always be welcomed in like a mainstream archive or heteronormative archive. And so I really don't want to put any limits on whether it's only trans people or whether it's only lesbians. So I really wanted it to be an inclusive space. But how I'm defining what I'm collecting is, for lack of a better term, people who haven't necessarily done something, activisty. You know, if that makes sense?

[00:10:02.25] Genevieve Louw: Sure. So GALA has implemented numerous projects that would be recording the experiences of contemporary queer people. So let me go through the publication's and then I'll talk about the education program as well. So firstly, I would definitely make reference to Meanwhile, which is a comic, it's a graphic novel that was produced by activists but also artists. So there was a project that involved queer people, some of them are also just creatives from southern and eastern Africa. And then they had workshops with graphic artists who were also queer. So they would basically have these storytelling sessions where

they shared experiences amongst one another. And then stories were created into this graphic novel, illustrated in a graphic novel format. [00:11:01.16] Meanwhile, which is a comic book that you can come and pick up, it's free, we've got copies to distribute from GALA and I can also send you the PDF. But basically, it's one example of how contemporary experiences have been recorded through one of the projects facilitated or implemented by GALA. So an archive doesn't always have to record the experiences of people in the sense of actually photographing them and recording their stories like oral histories, there are various ways to record experiences. [00:11:34.19] So there's the graphic novel project, which I think is fabulous, because it really opens up the possibility for engagement with communities and with anyone really, anyone who is interested in graphic novels, for example would pick it up and read it and learn so much about gender and sexual diversity, will learn so much about the experiences of people that are not often recorded or told. [00:12:01.29] Some of the stories are about queer joy. Some of the stories are about pleasure. Some of the stories are about relationships with parents which are universal. It's not limited only to the experiences of gender and sexually diverse persons. So opens up a little bit of space for complexity and creativity, which is where I think we can also start to think about the role of the archive using art space methodologies. Now, we also have Hopes and Dreams that Sounds like Yours, which is another anthology that was produced with activists who also tell their stories. But again, the stories aren't just activisty as you as you term it. There are stories about people who will reminisce about their favorite song, and write a story about how the song basically helped them come out of the closet. Like these are personal experiences from black queer people across the region. So we have people from Eastern Africa, we have people from various different African countries who are either trans or gender nonconforming, or queer and they tell the stories. And in those stories, again, we worked with more queer illustrators. [00:13:16.14] So the queer illustrators will then get together, read the stories, and interpret these stories in collaboration with the storytellers. So there's a whole program that's online, by the way, that's also recorded. So you have those conversations that are also recorded, because the conversations are just as important. And the publication was then created. Another one will be coming out this year, which is going to be focused on Francophone countries, including French speaking African queer folks. So the publication will be in French. So there's so many different projects. Then of course then altros corpos norsos which was a production of a photobook that was done in collaboration with a photographer who is basically part of this queer community in Maputo Mozambique. [00:14:14.14] And this is photography, so it's a little bit more conventional. So really going and documenting these underground Vogue nights that happen in Maputo, these underground queer spaces that exist.

So again, that's also on the periphery, where we're not talking about documenting queer people in the sense of being extractive. It's about working with the community and actually they had a huge say in how they were represented, what they wore, where the photographs would be taken, when and how all of it, and they also co wrote the publication. It was done with a Portuguese queer researcher who engaged communities and know these people personally. So then Altros was produced and then also turned into an exhibition. And then the exhibition also invited people to come and engage with the work in Maputo. Again, a lot of this is in Portuguese. So we're not just talking about English here, and documenting the experiences, the contemporary experiences of queer folks in Maputo. Then of course, we have all of the work that was produced between 2020 and now, which really was led by myself because of the pandemic. [00:15:30.09] And I started to really work with video a lot more because it was a more accessible material to access online. So basically, there are a number of projects that you can find on the YouTube channel that use video as a means of storytelling and documenting queer experiences that are not always central to the narratives. So for example, one of these stories is called Geleza Diaries, which feature Sicka Starban who is a traditional healer, lesbian woman, and a hip hop artist. And her story is about hip hop. Her story also includes a music video that is called amaLGBTI, which then also speaks about her unpacking that acronym in Zulu in vanac. And also speaks about her experiences as being a traditional healer, which in itself culturally also lends itself to being gender queer because you can embody the gender of your ancestors, when you go through twasa. [00:16:32.19] So there's all this stuff in Zulu, that is discussed in Geleza. And then there are two other films that were produced last year, they're known as the Relief on the Edge videos that then is really talking about and interrogating the need for relief in queer communities during the COVID 19 pandemic. So, I mean, I can tell you that there are numerous projects that basically centralised the voices of queer people or communities that are not usually central to the narrative. Who is usually central to the narrative? We can find that in the archives very easily, you go back to the 90s, and you're just gonna see white gay men. It's not rocket science. And there's reasons why that happened. And there's political reasons why that happened, because black queer bodies were not documented, for reasons, very good ones that unfortunately, have created the archive from the 90s all the way into the mid 2000s. And it takes work, and it takes people to address that omission. And to be very deliberate about who needs to be the focus, who needs to be included within these kinds of projects. In a nutshell, there's lots of... and I can share all of those publications and links to the videos with you if you want to look at them.

[00:18:04.24] Emma Prior: Yes, please. I would love to. One of the things that...So I spoke to my queer friends about it. I don't want to mention names because they haven't given me consent to. It's not only with archives, but when we go into these institutional spaces, there's this feeling like you're maybe not meant to be there. So these spaces can be really scary to access. And when you do access them, you don't always feel comfortable. And I think that's a lot of the time in museums for me. And sometimes in galleries, there's like that feeling of uncomfort. I'm not sure if you experience that as well. But how does GALA move around that and with that to allow queer people? For me, approaching people and asking for these interviews was a little bit intimidating because you feel like these spaces are not always meant for you. I know that's not the fault of GALA or any queer archive or museum but it still exists. So how does GALA get around that and work with that to ensure that queer people are still able to benefit from the archive? That's why the archive is there, right? So we can share our stories.

[00:19:43.07] Genevieve Louw: And that's why all archives should exist, right? But do all archives exist for that purpose?

[00:19:48.17] Emma Prior: No.

[00:19:52.21] Genevieve Louw: Yeah. So let's think critically about it. So what is an archive and why does it exist firstly? A lot of the time and archives as they are, are not accessible. They are not accessible spaces because they're usually created to safeguard stuff. So they're usually kind of pushed into a basement somewhere. And there's always a librarian who is usually a white woman who guards the material. That's kind of the stereotypical idea of what an archive looks like. And most of the time, that is what it is. It's used to safeguard. So oftentimes, it is not accessible. So for example, just in GALA's very physical space, it's hard to access it. There's security at the university that you have to contend with. There's a lot of barriers before you can even get into space. And then when you are there, what is it that you are doing this? So you'd have to have an idea, firstly, of what you want to look at. If you go to an archive, you need to have a research question, or you need to have an idea. [00:21:04.02] So you look at the catalog, and you'll say, "Okay, I want to look at all of these things". The average person does not do that. The average person who's interested in the archive will know about the history through being in the spaces. So for example, what I do is outside of the archives. I'm in the community, I'm doing educational work and whatever. So what do we do? We do storytelling, we incorporate it into our spaces when we talk about this. I mean, oftentimes, we will have Bev Ditzy right there

and she's telling us the story is right with us. We were talking about this just this past weekend at a conference and what will I do? I'll record Bev as she's talking because I have to record everything. There's so much pressure on me out there to record, record, record, record. Because if I don't, who will? Is it going to be recorded? Does it matter? Does anyone care? [00:22:02.12] So these are all questions I don't have answers for, but I can tell you for sure that I deeply believe in the importance of recording, because even if it is just in a folder, in an inaccessible computer, it exists. And I will fight for that. I really will, I really know that there is importance in filing and recording, even if no one ever sees it, because it exists. And you have to fight against these things all the time when you're working in an institution that is rooted within these kinds of... just like the very particular kinds of ways of archiving are that you have to record and you have to file and you have to save and you have to safeguard. So how does GALA address these things? I definitely think in the past five years, there's been a shift at the archive. So through these publications, that's how GALA addresses. So it's not just a book. Hopes and Dreams that Sounds like Yours is an entire community. And it also exists online, and continues. Then of course, there's the launch events that then invite the public. And then there's more storytelling, and there's more recording that happened at those spaces, usually, again, organically. But that's how I think that queer community benefits from the archive is through those kinds of projects that are either publications or oral history engagements. And then again, what I do, which is the education program, so when I go into the community, and I'm facilitating a workshop, I always co facilitated with other queer facilitators. Most of the time, a lot of the methodology that's included is storytelling. And what do we talk about, we talk about the stories from the archive. We talk about that history that comes before us because we do not stand alone when we speak. We speak with all of that history behind us. I cannot stand in front of a group of young queer people, particularly young black queer South Africans, and not talk about the legacy of Bev Ditzy and the legacy of Pumi Mtetwa and the work that has been done in 1996 with the Equality Act, which you can go and find in the archive, sure. [00:24:20.07] But I can tell you the story. And it may be inaccessible in its physical form. For example, in its box, you can go and find the amicus curiae material. You will see piles and piles of papers of people who wrote amicus curiae supporting material for the Equality Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity in our Constitution. There's so much evidence, but can you access that piece of paper? No. But can you learn about the story? Yes, you can. You can learn about it either through this kind of engagement with educational programming with publishing. We've got lots and lots of these types of stories and books that are published and tried to get them out into the public as much as possible, through events that engage queer community that maybe use these

publications as a springboard for dialogue. And then of course, video, I do believe that some of the video work we've produced has definitely got a way and a means of telling this history. I do believe that that is also very powerful to film the archive. So for example, in Relief on the Edge, you do see the archival materials. In the actual visuals, you'll start to see posters, placards, things like that, that are filmed to show you that the archive is also a physical thing. It exists, these placards have been archived for years. And sometimes we also show them at exhibitions. So exhibitions are also another way of bringing the archive into the public, I can tell you for sure that archives are never going to become as accessible as we need them to be unless they all become completely digital inaccessible, which in itself is extremely difficult to do when you have no funding.

[00:26:01.15] Emma Prior: It's also not completely accessible. I mean, it may be more accessible like in a South African context. And that's something that I battled with, as well so much. What does accessibility mean? And I think understanding the difference between accessibility and visibility because what's accessible for me may never be accessible for you, and what's accessible for you may not be accessible to me. So I think that that's an interesting relationship. But I'm really interested in what you were talking about, in terms of... so we can learn from these things, right, we may not see them. And so I think I was maybe quite naive coming into this project, in my view of what it means when an object sits in a box for 50 years. And so to me, I think that that signified the death of an item. And so in my sort of conversations... So you know the Ar_qu_ives but it's pronounced The Ar_chives? In my conversations with them, that position started to change a lot because I really started to understand. There were two main ideas that I'm really interested in, and I'd love to hear from your perspective what you think about something going into the archive and maybe just sitting there for fifty years. The first opinion that I really loved was that archives are there to record life. So simply by being in the archive, that means it will live forever, it means it's never dead. And on the same hand, just because it's dormant for now, or it's sleeping for now. And we didn't use the word rediscovered but it's there to be reengaged or remembered. And who knows how long that can take? So just because it's in a state of not being looked at at this moment, that doesn't mean it's necessarily dead. [00:28:31.23] Then the other opinion is that if something goes into a box and sits for fifty years, then of course it's dead. But that death is really important to the archive and its probably really necessary because it speaks to our experiences as queer people and our constant state of flux; and being inside the archive and what that means and being okay

with those things dying because it's important. I think those two ideas of the afterlife of the object in the archive changed my perspective. I'd love to hear what you think.

[00:29:15.24] Genevieve Louw: This is very important. This is very important to me. When I first started working with GALA, I did not really understand what GALA actually kept. I was under the kind of impression that it would be photographs, documents, historical documents, that type of thing. But the more I learned from being very inquisitive and having access to it, I started to discover objects in the archive that were kept. And a very good example of this would be Sally Gross collection at GALA. What happens a lot when people die, and they are very well known queer activists ... So Sally Gross was an intersex activist and she was instrumental in our constitution to include intersex into the Equality Act. But not only that, she was also working for the ANC and she was in exile for many years. [00:30:27.23] Very interesting person, extremely interesting person. And basically, I didn't know her personally, but a lot of people knew her. And then I started working at GALA and I got to know her through her collection. And how did that happen? So I wanted to find out more about Sally. So I ordered the boxes. And one of the boxes that is at the archive includes her personal belongings. She was a very religious person, she moved between Catholicism, Quakerism and Judaism in her practice and in her spiritual practice, as well. And she had a bell and the bell was in the box. She had a walking stick, which is in the box. This long beautiful cape that she would wear when she was still a priest is there. Her rosary is there. [00:31:38.05] And I started to touch the objects. I would pick them up, listen to the bell, touch the walking stick, and think to myself, how do I have the right to touch these things? Because this is a person's belongings. I didn't know Sally. But I know her through so many people. Then I started reading her work. By the way that's also archived, unbelievable stuff. Then I became a detective. So I started seeing all these notes that she wrote. And I started to ask people, can they translate the Hebrew for me. And there were all these little clues that I started to find in her writing about her own spiritual beliefs, and how interlinked they were to intersex characteristics, how she spoke about Jesus as intersex. [00:32:36.03] She spoke about intersex as divine in her work, and I'm finding all this stuff like a detective. One year later, I go to a conference. It's an international conference, and I meet these intersex activists from New Zealand. And one of them comes to me and says, "Do you work for the GALA archive?" I'm like yes. She's like, "I've got something for you". She gives me this little box. In the box is stone, a rock. And intersex activists that new Sally who is an indigenous person and has indigenous beliefs; basically did a ceremony with Sally in New Zealand. And what happens is you put your soul or your essence into the stone, and you put it on a shrine, and then it stays

there. But after you die, the rock, if you're not from that land, it has to be returned to your home soil. [00:33:34.21] So they brought Sandy stone across the seas, gave it to me and said, "You must put this with her stuff. You must put this with her clothing". So in the GALA queer archive, now, at this point, you can go and you can see there is a box for Sally. And Sally Stone is there with a message from money written on paper. And I mean, that's if not anything, there's a spiritual practice attached to this. I'm very superstitious when it comes to the objects in the archive. I treat them with respect, like I would treat a tomb or a memorial space. So when you speak about death, it's important because there's the death of the person. There's the remaining objects there's all of these things that are archived and to keep them is to have almost like a graveyard. [00:34:35.29] Eudy Simelane's boots. Think about that, the fact that her family gave her soccer kit, her whistle, we have those objects in the archive. What does that mean? Maybe it will never see the light of day, maybe Eudy's boots will never come out of that box. Maybe her whistle will never be heard again. It's a memorialization, yes. But it takes people who want to engage with those objects who want to say I want to do something with this, I want to touch this object, I want to hear that whistle. It takes people to engage. Getting people to engage, though. on that level, again, is another process. [00:35:23.21] So is that the responsibility of the archive? Yes, I believe it is. 100%. Do I think that GALA is getting it right? No, I don't. Do I think that GALA is doing the best the archive can? Absolutely. But I can engage with the stuff critically, because I'm in the community. And I know people who knew Eudy Simelane, and I tell them you can access these things. There's a superstition around it as well. What does it mean for us to hold Sally's stone? I mean, I had an entire workshop with intersex people where we all held a stone. What did it mean for them? It meant something to them. It's very, very complex. But I do think that there's something in the memorialization and the death. It's like a tombstone in a way. These things often don't see the light of day and somebody like myself will go in there and scratch in there and hold it and get all excited and sentimental about it. Because not everyone is going to do this. But we still keep it.

[00:36:34.20] Emma Prior: Yeah, I mean, so what I find really interesting is it's the second time I've heard the queer archive being described as a graveyard, which I think is really interesting. Because I think that there is this really delicate balance in the archive of it being a graveyard and a memorial site, but at the same time, being really dynamic and being alive and being full of life. So I think that that's a really interesting balance.

[00:37:05.10] Genevieve Louw: It takes people to make it alive, though.

[00:37:10.03] Emma Prior: That leads me into my next question. So with all the stories that you're telling me, I can hear it's really evident that you know a lot about the stories. And I think my question is, how does GALA archive these things so that they're sort of complexities and nuances aren't lost, right? Because eventually, I assume one day, whether that's in 100 years or 200 years, you probably won't work with GALA anymore, right.

[00:37:43.25] Genevieve Louw: I'm not going to be working for GALA after July. My five year term ngala is ending and I'm training somebody new in July already.

[00:37:58.02] Emma Prior: So that's really interesting, right? Because it's so soon. So in July, how does all the knowledge that you have on these things...there's so much, how will the knowledge we have get imparted in a way that it's not completely lost, that it still remains? So how are those things archived that we can still, when Gen is gone, we can still understand those nuances and those complexities?

[00:38:25.12] Genevieve Louw: I think that's a great question. And I think it's definitely how these things go with institutions like archives. Unfortunately, there is a hierarchy. And this is a question for the archivist. It's the role of the archivists to think about those things. And I think I can most definitely say with all certainty that no matter where I go, I take all as I take GALA's stories with me into my work in many various ways. I definitely know that, for example, with a PhD that I will be pursuing, then it will be a very large focus of the methodology and also the actual resources that will be used, for example, that's just me on a personal level. [00:39:14.16] But Genevieve going out there in the world leaves GALA, somebody else comes in. What happens to the history, sometimes it gets lost forever. I can't tell you, I don't know. I don't know if anyone is gonna remember anything that I did for the organization for five years. I have no idea if any of that stuff will be accessible. I have no idea how it would look. I have no idea if there's even an interest in archiving it.I guess it's just up to me as an activist, I believe very deeply in the significance of these archives, because I believe they've actually shaped me to be the person that I am today. I would not be who I am if I didn't get to know Sally through the archive. I would not be who I am today if I didn't read the Joe Ganesan collection that really documents the entire immorality Amendment Act. You read these personal letters that he wrote that are really great. I would really recommend it if you enjoy a good story, reading those letters. I would not be who I am today if I did not read those very instrumental stories. I would not be who I am

today if I did not get to know Kewpie. [00:40:37.14] If I didn't engage with all of the community, in such a way through that connection. So wherever I go, I carry that with me. And I know that if I ever have to introduce people to these stories, I can put them in touch with the archive. Do I think that it's the most accessible resource in the world? No, but I know how to get it because I was inside for a while. So I'll be able to tell you to speak to this person, they're gonna send you this thing. And then I'm going to put you in touch with this person, because this person can tell you the right story. Because I know the people, right? I'm inside. But it's not accessible just for someone who goes online, and then sees the show. You can find the catalog online, and you can engage with whatever the online collections are, that have been digitised, right. And I think that's sufficient. It's good, it's nice, it's good that you can get in touch and you can get to see the photographs and you can engage with these collections. [00:41:42.01] But archives are so many things. I can literally talk to you about the Kewpie collection in a way that you would not access if you just looked at the photographs, you know what I mean? So I think that the oral history is important. It goes with me wherever I go. I'll always be connected to GALA in some way, whether I'm working for them remotely, or doing whatever kind of work for GALA. I believe very passionately in the archive itself and the role of the archive. And I often disrupt it because I believe it's also my role to do so to try and decolonise the structure of the archive and to say we need to encourage more storytelling, more oral history, more engagement with communities, and how do we make the archive as accessible as possible? [00:42:28.16] So I mean, these are questions that I'm always asking in my work. So I don't think there's one definitive answer. But I can tell you for sure, there's no, there's no way that I have any certainty that any of the stuff I've done is going to be archived. I can donate the material, it'll go into a folder. Doesn't mean that people are going to look for it. Unless... which is another thing. So here comes access, right? Unless I create a collection. And I stipulate that this is the Genevieve Lowe collection, and I make it a formal collection and I give all of my materials to the collection, then it'll get included in the catalog, and then people might access it. So yeah, that's how these things work.

[00:43:21.21] Emma Prior: I think one of the things that I'm finding myself on both sides, sort of, I would hardly call it an argument, but I really understand both sides at the moment, right? So I think that sometimes when one archivists documents a community that that representation can become really flattened, right. And sometimes, some communities aren't even represented at all or accounted for at all. Because we can't expect and we shouldn't expect, and one archivist should never represent all bodies from different cultures, communities and socio political contexts. So that's a really strong opinion I have. I don't think that archiving should ever be

singular. But at the same time, I completely understand that queer archives are often not the best funded spaces, because there just isn't the same sort of value... societal value in archiving. Which is not to say that's right, or that's wrong. I don't know.

[00:44:46.13] Genevieve Louw: It's just is what it is. I mean, think about how much money will go into the SAPS. Not that there's a lot of money for it, but at least it's managed. So for example, SAPS, South African Police Service has an archive. The criminal justice court has an archive. These things are managed for very particular societal purposes. But why would one be? How can one get support, for example, for a queer archive in, in that context? The reason why the archive is funded is because we run educational programs. Programs are funded, the community work is funded. The archive then becomes a huge part of the pursuit for seeking support through international donors. We do not have support from government. I have never, maybe once I think we got funding, that's it. And that's not technically government. But you would then see how you have to support and you have to write why the archive needs to be safeguarded and why you need to spend money on that. So in order to do so you need to be implementing programming, otherwise, you won't get funding.

[00:46:01.10] Emma Prior: On the one hand, there's this idea around why we should never have a singular archivists, because that can be really bad for representation. But on the other hand, when all you've got is one archivist, what do you do? The archivist is working overtime to document the hundreds of collections, trying to be email back people like Emma asked them for an interview, and to that extent, you're so overworked, and I understand that. To some extent, you can try to work with the person wanting to contribute as much as possible. So, you can try to work with the people who understand that position the best and from experience. I'm kind of just interested to hear what you think, because I'm always stuck on the two sides, right? Never a singular archivist. But also at the same time, there's just logistic and admin issues that happen.

[00:47:04.10] Genevieve Louw: If I could, like share my dream for GALA, it would be for GALA to be run by a black queer person, in terms of black queer archivist, you'd have one archivist. But then you'd have young people who are interns, maybe one or two. It'd be nice to because we also have for example, we've got one intern at the moment is an archive intern, right. But like, basically, it would be good to continue that into the future and for GALA to continue to get interns. My dream one day is to see GALA be ran by a black queer archivist. I think it would be brilliant for the archive itself, because the positionality of the archivist matters. Because

whatever the archivist deems important to, to archive, and whatever the archivist is going out of their way to archive has a lot to do with their positionality. And this is this is not me standing here and criticizing Linda, who is the archivist, but she is a cisgendered white woman who is heterosexual. She's an archivist, which means that she does her job very well, she catalogs and she archives and she's always an excellent ally. [00:48:23.09] But her positionality also deems whatever she's archiving or going out of her way to archive what is important to archive and what is not important to archive. Now, a lot of things that are important to me, are not necessarily important to her, because she might think that there's no value in archiving something or filing something because from her particular positionality, she's more focused on other things. And this is just a fact of life. My dream for GALA would be to see that shift and to see that really change eventually. And obviously for Linda, with all of her experience and all of her knowledge to be able to pass that on to somebody. You know, in the future. I'm talking about a couple of years to build up an archivist that is coming from a different positionality, an African positionality, a black positionality, I think is exceptionally important to address the gaps. A gender non conforming queer person is great. Anyone who's queer would be great because anyone who's queer would have that insight and that positionality to say, we must archive more of these kinds of stories on the periphery. [00:49:39.10] I think that the archivists role has a lot to do with with that. And it's really just important to pass that knowledge on. And then I also think that bringing young people into the archive is essential to this conversation. You need to have youth all the time. I'm talking young people. Our 20 year olds we want on are fresh, first year university students. Get them in, get them engaging with the archive. If they're not learning how to archive, they need to access the archive, get them to do projects on archive, like we're doing with our intern at the moment. He's going and he's quite cataloging things, but he's also learning as he goes. [00:50:20.14] And that kind of engagement is key, it's crucial to keeping the archive alive and relevant. So I agree with you 100%, you cannot have one singular archivist in any sense. To have a really politically conscious archive. It's a queer archive, it has to be decolonial as to be feminist. It has to be all these things. I don't think it successfully is because I think like you said, we are contending with all of the challenges. Then there is a qualified archivist. There are very few qualified archivists in the country, there are so few qualifications available for people to study. There are very few people and very few institutions that offer it. And it's very inaccessible. But currently our intern for example, he's studying heritage studies, which includes archiving in it. But it's so rare to access those things, right? So again, that access then becomes a problem. We need to bring young people into the archive, they need to engage with it. [00:51:21.02] This is a dream. This is a pie in the sky dream because it would be fantastic if

there were programs that was specifically focused on archive, capacity building, get these these young black queer people in there and let them learn about the archive, train, capacitate, uplift people who are interested in studying history, academics, get scholars in and make it more of a collective archiving practice where it's not just one singular archivist, but this stuff being archived by all these people all the time. I would think that that would be a really nice way to address that problem. Do I think it's possible to do that currently? No. I wish. It would be great. But I guess the way that GALA is addressing it currently is by having an intern. So at least there's that.

[00:52:26.13] Emma Prior: It sounds like although you're not the archivist, you know, the archive really well and its contents. So one of the things that's come up a lot is repetition in archives. So, repetition in two senses. So you may be archiving something, researching something or just looking at one thing, and months later, you come across something that goes with it, but they're in sort of completely different spaces. And then repetition in the sense of different people, but similar stories, right? So similar lived experiences. So you see a lot of repetition?

[00:53:07.08] Genevieve Louw: Yeah, of course. What becomes quite interesting but also a little bit depressing is when things are repeated, like, serious homophobia and transphobia that's recorded. So for example, in the 1960s, there's this collection by Joe Ganesan, and he had like a branch of his own personal objects that he donated. So one of these things is this little eight track tape. And he recorded radio shows in the 60s of the topic homosexuality. If it was on the radio, or something, he would always record it. So I listened to the thing. And it's a show in 1964, it's in Durban. Two gay guys who are now converted. So now they went through the conversion therapy, and they on the show, and they telling us how important it is to basically convert back to Christianity, and that homosexuality is a sin, and that you can get over it. There's hope for you in life. But I'm going to fast forward now all the way to 2022 where I have seen this conversation recorded in, for example, the press. You will see like all the stuff that we record all the time of conversations that are happening in the States, where conversion therapy is becoming a serious consideration for people to even advocate for in schools. Look at the legislation. There's the no gay bill. Don't say gay. [00:54:46.20] Yeah, there's anti-trans legislation happening. Then of course you see it in South Africa as well with the opposition to gender and sexuality, diversity, education and comprehensive sexuality education. There are people speaking up about it. Parents are pissed. Parents are saying that we need to convert our children back to Christianity. So do we see things repeated? Yes, we do. Sometimes it's not always the most pleasant things. I think homophobia and transphobia is very strong in society

today. And it's fascinating when you go back to the 1960s and you hear the conversation is exactly the same. It's legitimately the same.That's a bit depressing. But it's also very real, it's exactly one of the things I've seen repeated. But I've also seen so many other connections. Definitely, like od similar experiences, for example, through different collections from just people talking about, for example, there's this zine collection, right. And in the zine collection, a colleague of mine, who was laid before me, Gabriel Hussain Khan was actually at GALA before me. And he also was the archivist for a short period of time. Fascinating. But basically, he did a zine workshop. And in the workshop, these young queer people, especially refugees are talking about being homeless, and not having a roof over their heads. And then you go back into the archives, and you see interviews with Pumi Mtetwa, and how she talks about staying with Matakos. And Matakos who's basically a figure in the archives, it's a very important story, open to her home for queer people in Soweto. And people would come and stay with her and live with her. [00:56:41.27] And the famous thing about her is her postbox. So she had this little post box that people would put letters in there to say thank you for giving them a place to live. And the postbox itself is in the archive, but it's actually loaned to the apartheid Museum. The object is still there. Like this little house, this little postbox, it's a real object. So you look at the object and you think queer people are still experiencing homelessness today. But this object, which looks like a house, which also kind of now becomes the house of GALA, which is another interesting iteration of how GALA has transformed in the past five years, like getting to the space where we're kind of a house now. We're an extended family. And that this becomes a symbol that speaks about this very real connection that I guess is a shared experience amongst queer folks is that shelter, home. There's so many connections. I could talk forever. And I don't know the archive as well as I obviously could if I was able to spend time really looking at all 200 collections. I mean, that's gonna take forever. But the little bit that I've seen, you're always gonna find repetition.

[00:58:13.24] Emma Prior: I think specifically in the South African context, when we speak about any sort of queer archive, I think GALA is always going to be the first one that comes to mind. I'm hesitant to call GALAmainstream. So maybe it's called a larger one of the only...

[00:58:39.06] Genevieve Louw: Established.

[00:58:39.06] Emma Prior: Yeah, that's a good word. And one of really the only established queer archives in South Africa. And so, you know, based on my research in Africa at large as

well, I mean, of course, these things, I think, must exist in some way or form, they may not always look like an archive or what we consider to traditionally be an archive. So I don't want to say that GALA is the only one. But I mean, do you think that there's a problem in GALA being the only sort of mainstream archive that's recording queer lives in South Africa?

[00:59:22.09] Genevieve Louw: I guess, yeah, the idea that GALA is an established or the only established archive, right, the fact that since the 90s, it was gay and lesbian archives. But then we know that, for example, other organizations have archives. So like Iranti, which is a media focused organization has an archive, and they're currently building their own archives. They're gonna establish their own archive, and create it more formally. We also have an archive in Namibia currently recording and it's like a small museum. And then there's one that I know of in Angola, for example, it's also like a kind of makeshift little archive situation. Do I think it's a problem? I guess? I think it can create a little bit of a situation where one archive might have the monopoly of recording and telling the stories over others because it is more established. But I'm quite confident that because of the way that GALA is managed and run that our politics are likely in the space of basically not taking ownership. [01:00:45.16] Like, even though we archive collections or donations of materials, we do not own those stories. So you must understand that becomes a problem. Like if an organization takes ownership of a story. Imagine we went around and said we're the only people who can tell Kewpie's story. There are people out there who believe that. There are people who believe that they are the only ones who can tell Kewpie's story. I won't mention names, but there are actually people who believe that. And they're not even from Kewpies community. So the fact that the collection is with GALA is actually, for example, a good thing, because we're also allowed to... obviously, it's accessible to people who want to access it. And if people want to tell stories, we can facilitate the dialogue with the family and with the people who matter in that particular connection, which is Kewpie's sister and the District Six Museum. Those people matter, they are the ones who should be able to give some insight. [01:01:50.13] So if you wanted to make a movie about Kewpie and you're like, Hey, I'm gonna make a movie about Kewpie, I've got a million different resources to do this, we can come into the conversation and say, We don't own the story, it's not ours, but we can put you in touch with people who can advise you, but we surely can protect it. So there is this interesting relationship, I guess, with archives that are formalised, and they are actually established, as opposed to archives that are not. And I would love to see GALA collaborate more with archives, you know what I mean. These kinds of underground archives that are happening, it'd be so cool to have exchanges with them, and to learn from them as well. And to support their work,

because we shouldn't be the only archive, we aren't the only archive. We never go around saying we're the only archive in the world, only archive in Africa, because we know there are other archives. But we're the only established archive. And it's because of our history that we are. [01:02:55.08] And that's also because we're very privileged to be located in South Africa as opposed to Angola, for example, where you can't have an established archive. So what does GALA's role then become? It should become a support system where people can archive things that they really need to archive with us. And we can keep those things safe. In contexts like Zambia, for example, it's illegal to be queer, then we would archive things that we can keep safe organizations. We did the same thing for girls in Zimbabwe. So those are things we need to really think about in terms of what GALA's role is, especially going forward into this crazy time period that we are in the world. We have to think through, like how GALA can be more of a support. We don't hold the monopoly on anything. But we certainly have the clout, we have the name behind us, in order to actually properly say that we are in an established archive, and things should be archived with us if they cannot be archived property somewhere else. And that says something there is a little bit of a power dynamic. I agree. But I also think that in some cases, it's very useful. [01:04:11.22] We just need to be open and transparent. I'm very cognizant of the fact that GALA is run by the Board, their politics, for example, the chair of our board is Dr. Z Masibeni. The way that she sees archives and archiving is very influential in the way we practice. So we cannot hold that power in the space, but we can certainly be as active as we possibly can to try and live up to that pressure. Because there's a lot of pressure attached to it, trust me.

[01:04:45.22] Emma Prior: Oh, yeah. I can imagine. And I think that's one of the things that I've heard come up a lot, right. It is the sort of pressure to... this is part of the whole reason that this project came about. And I think that it's really important for these smaller spaces, or non established spaces. The spaces that don't have, the amount that GALA has or the forces that GALA has. And I think it's really important for these spaces to exist. And not only to be able to collaborate, but also to be able to critique one another, right? I think that constant critique is really important and it has to exist, you know. The last sort of formal question is what makes an archive queer?

[01:05:48.07] Genevieve Louw: Oh, that's lovely. I thought about that quite often as well. It transcends beyond the keeping of objects to something more. And I think this goes back to the conversation about the tombstone, the graveyard, the spirituality of the objects, that they are

more than just objects. And the decision to keep them and to honor them is actually a very spiritual practice. That I think is queer. I think that it doesn't necessarily fit in with the conventions of archiving, which is more on a practical level around safeguarding historical objects. Whereas a lot of the objects that we keep on are not necessarily historical objects, they're personal objects. Some of them are bizarre, like we literally have a taxidermy dog on a skateboard. I'm not joking. From one of the first Pride marches, there was a queen who walked through the streets with the taxidermy dog attached to a skateboard. We have it in the archive, I don't think is anything more queer than that. We also have crazy mother city queer party collection, which includes a lot of the outfits, the clothing, the costumes that were created. So in true MCQP fashion, back in the day, what used to happen is we used to create objects out of all kinds of recyclable materials and crap. [01:07:33.13] So one of the dresses is made out of condoms that we have in the archive. Is it stored properly? No. Is it degrading? Yes it's degrading, because condoms don't last forever. But it's in a box, and it's kept in the MCQP collection. It's fantastic that we have this stuff. I mean, there's so many dresses that are just made out of the most crazy materials. Do I think that's queer? Yes, I do. Because you could have thought about it in a sense of, okay, can GALA really keep these objects like these outfits? Because they probably have to be in some kind of like, airtight temperature controlled environment. But GALA is going to keep it anyway. Why? Because it's going to end up in the bin. Because nobody else is going to keep it. Sally Gross' rope was going to end up in the bin. But GALA kept it because it matters. That is queer archiving for me. There's an honoring of our community, there's an honoring of our ancestry, there's an honoring on a spiritual level. [01:08:42.05] Sometimes it's really funny, like the taxidermy dog story, which is queer as all hell. It almost rejects this idea of having to only archive in a certain way. So it archives all kinds of interesting and bizarre objects and stories. And then of course, it's queer in its very nature that it's deliberately recording experiences that counter heteronormativity, and even if some of the stories in themselves or maybe homonormative or whatever, the deliberate act of existing in itself in a heteronormative society is queer. It completely counteracts the colonial structure of the institution that is only meant to be archiving specific stories in a specific way, and you cannot take objects and you can't go and archive an entire collection of drag queens dresses. But we do because we're queer as fuck. It's fascinating. You would never know It was there if you didn't look at the catalog, you have to look very carefully, it'll say, MCQP outfits. You can order them in and look at these things. [01:10:08.29] I mean, one of my dreams was: imagine we had a fashion show, we got all the queens to dress up in these old outfits. It'll drive you crazy working

at GALA because you think of all these possibilities, you can't do them all. You can do a little bit. You can't do everything.

[01:10:26.08] Emma Prior: I think that's one of the things that I really love about GALA. What defines being in the archive, right? Do you have to be queer to be in the archive? And I love that it sort of transcends sexual orientation and gender identity. And it really goes into, well, what does it mean to not be heteronormative? You know, and let's look at that in terms of archives. So I love that sort of definition of queer. Because The Arquives in Canada, their definition of what it means to be queer. And what makes the archive queer is based around sexual identity, and gender identity. So I think that that's a really interesting sort of relationship that's happening

[01:11:31.15] Genevieve Louw: There's so much. Like, honestly, you will never stop. When you see the placards of Stephen Cohen's work that we've archived. It'll blow your mind. So like I said, like a lot of people in archives wouldn't necessarily take those things, because why would they keep, like a zebra outfit? But we're like we need to archive absolutely everything that we can. And if this is an important aspect of our history, then then we'll keep the fucking zebra outfit. But then, you know, I guess it's many things. I think it's about breaking structures and it's about resisting linear forms of telling history. Even though the GALA archive still does follow a very kind of, you know, it follows like a structure. So it's a real archive. So obviously, it exists. And it's archived, it's cataloged and all that. But we also understand that there's so many objects that just can't be, like, named or labeled. I think that's another thing that's very interesting about queer archiving. What happens to the miscellaneous collections where there's just stuff that can't be labeled? So many possibilities to engage with this. It's one of those things, I guess that doesn't really have a clear answer. But all the people you speak to, will give you their own personal interpretation of it.

[01:13:12.13] Emma Prior: On that note, does GALA ever turn down any sorts of contributions?

[01:13:19.19] Genevieve Louw: Maybe some of them we should have turned down (jokingly). Like, for example, this is a funny story. The Out in Africa collection which was a huge film festival happened over many years in South Africa. It basically dies down. And they've got all this equipment, and I'm talking old school video equipment, and then dozens of queer forms on DVDs. So basically, the person who donated came to Joburg in a truck, and gave us all of the stuff that stood all over the place. We didn't have enough space for it, but we took it all. And of

course, some of the stuff we will give away like the old equipment that we can't use, maybe we can give it to people who can use it and stuff. But something like that you can't turn down. You can't turn down that Out in Africa collection. I mean, you have to take it even if you have no space. We took it. We're still trying to catalogue all those films. But it's amazing that we have all these queer African films in the archive now. Anyway. Long story short, yes, there are some things that we just wouldn't take. [01:14:35.05] Like if somebody wanted to donate something that we just could not physically keep. Like, if you wanted to donate your car, maybe you would say no. But if you wanted to donate your house, maybe we'd say yes. Maybe we could move it into a bigger space so we have more space to archive things. It's very important to realise that they are very specific roles at GALA. I don't have any say when it comes to the archive. None. I can give advice, I can tell you how I feel I can be very passionate, I can tell you how I believe the archive should do this and that. But I'm not the archivist. So you have to ask that question to the archivist and she'll tell you what she thinks. Because she'll probably tell you about a bunch of stuff that I don't have any idea about. Like there might be some kind of criteria that I don't know about.

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH LUCIE HANDLEY-GIRARD - THE ARQUIVES ARCHIVIST. 18 MARCH 2022. DIGITAL RECORDING IN POSSESSION OF EMMA PRIOR.

[00:00:03] Emma Prior: So just a reminder that you can withdraw consent from the interview at any time or choose not to answer any question without any consequence of any kind. I don't want to take up too much of your time. I have around 18 questions for you. [00:00:24] I think maybe it's best for me to start off with a sort of brief overview of the project. So when I started my Masters degree, I was really interested in working with queer archives and I was hoping to work with GALA. I don't know if you know them? The Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action...okay. [00:00:45] So I was hoping to sort of just start with an exploration of the archive and see what happened. At the time that I started, there were these really strict sort of national restrictions because of Covid that made it really difficult to go in and just explore the archive. So I was hoping for this exploration in the beginning and it became even more difficult to explore because most of their archive is stored off site. So they needed me to go through this catalogue and go through the items that I wanted to see. [00:01:27] But that wasn't really where I wanted to start. I didn't have a specific intention in mind at that point. So that became quite frustrating for me. But as I went on with the project, I realised that it really wasn't GALA that I was frustrated by. I think I was frustrated by queer archives at large. And a lot of the responses that I've received from this project are assumptions that I'd been attacking GALA, which is not the situation at all. It was never the intention and never will be the intention. But I think it seemed that way because GALA is one of the only queer archives that exists in South Africa and Afria at large based on my research; and I think that's a huge problem. And so what does that say about the sort of diversity of queer lives in South Africa and how our stories are told? [00:02:28] So I became frustrated by having to rely on this catalogue and pick out items of interest and not being allowed to just explore and play without a specific intention. And then I became frustrated by not seeing myself in the archive and not seeing people that I knew in the archive. So I think that queer archives sort of at large generally do a really incredible job of recording these really big historical moments and historical bodies which of course is a vital part of the archive but I think in some ways, that the non historical or the contemporary body isn't allowed the same sort of visibility. And I think in my research to some extent, it seemed that the experiences and histories and the stories of just the everyday queer body weren't being accounted for. [00:03:24] And so in the project, I wanted to document the more mundane moments of what makes queer life what it is. So I wanted to explore the documentation of ephemeral material and really break down what we consider to be achievable. And so I was focused on the non historic subject which I

thought had equally as much importance and interest as the historic. [00:03:55] But with that in mind, although I was sort of dissecting what I found to be the problems with the queer archive, I never really intended to fix those problems. I did, though, want to image sort of modes of futurity and explore how queerr archives can exist in different ways while still documenting queer lives. And mostly, the main aim of the project above all else was to shift the lens and allow archiving to become collaborative rather than singular. [00:04:31] And I was really interested in the discourse around who is allowed to archive and what a self determined account of queerness looks like. So I was thinking about the queer archive through the framework of the queer body. The queer archive is a practice of everyday life because our bodies serve as a sort of memory and as a sort of archive. [00:04:55] So I was particularly interested in investigating the relationship between the queer body and the queer archive when someone sees themselves represented, or parts of their community represented without being part of the authorship. Because I think that there might be a gap with how an individual sees themselves represented and how they think of themselves. So while I understand that it may be completely impossible to create an archive that is accessible to all and accounts for all lived histories, I stilll think it's a worthwhile space to explore to see how best non historical bodies or contemporary queer bodies can document themselves because I think these transformations start to occur when the communities represented are prioritised. [00:05:48] So the project really wan't at all about finding any solid answers to questions but rather exploring different ways of archiving queer bodies and playing with those ideas and seeing a shift from archival silence to transformative discourse and collaboration. [00:06:06] And so in that sense, I think that the project is inherently playful and explorative. So then the exhibition went up which I sent you some videos of. So I put out these calls for contributions of objects, stories, ephemeral material to be contributed to the archive. There was really no sort of limitation on what could be contributed. And in the beginning, I became really focused on how many of my own friends and people I knew were contributing because I really didn't want it to become Emma's archive of friends. But as time went on and I digital marketed the exhibition, a lot of people I didn't know and had absolutely no mutual friends with started to contribute. [00:06:57] And in a walk about in the exhibition with GALA was actually when I realised that starting with my friends wasn't such a bad thing. And I think in some ways that it was quite innocent. The curatorial aspect of the exhibition was quite fluid which I really enjoyed because my Masters is in Contemporary Curatorial Studies. So I collected contributions until the morning of the opening and then put them up. So there was a really interesting dynamic to have these things in the space and not really know what the final exhibition was going to look like until the moment that the show opened. [00:07:38] So there

was this playful aspect of putting things up and moving them around as the objects came in and there was still a space in the exhibition for people to contribute if they hadn't received the calls for contribution beforehand. And I think one of the things that really stuck out to me about the collections is that a lot of people took the opportunity to show off their love or to share their journey of self discovery. [00:08:07] And the objects they contributed were nothing particularly spectacular or grand but they were really innocent and vulnerable. And I think that they really shared the experiences that these people have been through. And in the curatorial there was this sort of moment of imitating 'real life'. So I was really interested in what would happen with putting shoes on the floor as opposed to putting shoes on a plinth; and clothes on hangers as opposed to hanging them up like artworks. [00:08:42] So that relationship became really interesting to me and I was more concerned with keeping these objects as part of a dynamic culture rather than removing them completely from their contexts and treating them like artefacts. Because at the end of the day, the objects that people contributed are deeply personal and i found it really important to preserve their contexts and their lives and allow them to live in rather than dying in the archive which is not to say that things always die when they enter the archive, but sometimes I think it does happen and that was something that I really wanted to avoid. [00:09:20] So the objects after the exhibition were returned to the people who contributed. And that relationship of living inside and outside of the archive was something that I wanted to explore a lot. So while these objects exist in the archive in some ways, they're not removed from their lives and from their functions and from their owners. So they continue to live in their lives while still forming a really integral part of the archive. So the exhibition made archiving collaborative, I think, while questioning notions of who is allowed to archive and what kinds of things can be archived. And in that sense, at least for this project, I think I saw a shift from archival silence to archival production from contemporary queer bodies who felt that they didn't exist in archives. [00:10:19] And so through the process of the project, I always saw the exhibition as the ending point, the final archive and it's neat and tidy and I can write a paper on it. But what I've realised is that the exhibition was not at all the ending point, but rather a catalyst for collections. And it is definitely not as neat and tidy as I thought it would be. It's messy and it's complex and it's diverse. So I think I'm going to stop there. I think that's a good brief overview of everything that's happened in this project so far.

[00:10:59] Lucie Handley-Girard: Cool. Thanks for sharing. Yeah there's a lot there. A lot of the things that you said sort of really remind me of what we do so just like a lot of the things you talked about sort of mimic the origins of any community archive a lot of the time. So I think

GALA is a community archive right. [00:11:45] So, do you wanna ask me questions? I can ramble and just go but I don't wanna waste your time.

[00:11:57] Emma Prior: No, not at all. So I think maybe can we start, could you just state your name and maybe give a brief description of your role. Maybe I should've started with the names. But could you give a description of your role and the relationship with the archive that you're associated with.

[00:12:16] Lucie Handley-Girard: My name is Lucie Handley Girard and I work for The Arquives, Canada's LGBTQ2+ archives in Toronto. I am one of the archivists there... one of the employed archivists, we have a lot of volunteers. And I've worked there since 2017ish.

[00:12:49] Emma Prior: Could you give a sort of brief history of the archive. I've done my research and I do know a bit, but I'd like to hear from your point of view.

[00:13:04] Lucie Handley-Girard: Sure. So The Arquives were founded in 1973 out of the records of the Body Politic which was Canada's most significant gay liberation newspaper at the time. And so a point that you said earlier the folks who were publishing the newspaper were largely white cis gay men. And so the records that came to The Arquives initially and for many years were from their friends. [00:13:39] So it was kind of like... and you can problematise that in many ways. Collecting was quite narrow in some regard or in many regards. So we're one of or the largest independent queer archives in the world. But we don't receive any sort of consistent institutional funding. We rely a lot on volunteers. And maybe up until ten years ago, it was mainly just volunteers doing the work.

[00:14:28] Emma Prior: And what would you say the purpose of the Arquives is?

[00:14:34] Lucie Handley-Girard: We collect materials that are about or created by queer folks in Canads or relating to Canada. That doesn't mean to say that we don't have a lot of international material as well, we do. And we collect everything from personal and organisational collections to art to posters to photographs to library books to artefacts or objects, textiles; the whole shabang. [00:15:15] We collect materials to make them accessible for research or preserve them for future generations.

[00:15:25] Emma Prior: And as the archivist, or one of the archivists, could you describe the sort of work that you do on a day to day basis?

[00:15:35] Lucie Handley-Girard: That's a good question. Because we're a community archive, I tend to have my hands in a lot of different pots. My co-worker is more of a processing archivist. I am more of a reference archivist. I deal with volunteers, I do a lot of coordinating. I do a lot of donations and outreach; that kind of thing. But I have been a processing archivist and it's way more fun to be honest I think. [00:16:13] So we've made collections available for folks to come in and look at. And I don't need to get into the nitty gritty of the archival process but then I also sort of help facilitate access to researchers and outreach to folks who might want to donate things to their collections or have contacted me.

[00:16:41] Emma Prior: What kinds of bodies does The Arquives represent?

[00:16:50] Lucie Handley-Girard: When you say bodies, like people? Or bodies as in organisations? or all of the above?

[00:17:04] Emma Prior: All of the above. I'm interested to hear about both

[00:17:07] Lucie Handley-Girard: Because we're a community archive, we don't have the same kind of filter that a more traditional archive has. So we take the stance that everything that any queer person creates is of enduring research value. So if someone is younger and they want to donate their diary or a zine that they made or anything, a birthday card, a love letter; we will archive it. It doesn't have to be someone who is famous or made some sort of significant activist impact or something like that. [00:17:58] We have very mundane, everyday material as well as more high stakes legal stuff and activist stuff, that kind of thing; 'historical' which I read in your pdf. You were making this distinction between historical and nonhistorical and then like 'mundane' and I forget the word you used. I think you used historical again. I'm not sure. Or what we classify as historical. So we try to turn the concept of historical and what history is defined as on its head. We're not super interested in only the grand narrative of history because we know that is problematic inherently. [00:19:01] And in order to be as inclusive and as equitable as possible, we know that we have to have representation of all aspects of queer life. So like you said, and even in your videos. Like the shoes, the Darth Vader diary thing. We have all that kind of stuff.

[00:19:30] Emma Prior: Do you or have you ever rejected any sorts of... or not necessarily rejected but not been able to archive what somebody has contributed to your archive.

[00:19:47] Lucie Handley-Girard: I get this question a lot. The only things that we really turn down are materials that we do not have the ability to care for properly. So for example, large sculptural donations just because we don't have space and because the material might be better suited elsewhere. [00:20:17] So we have to know our capacity and know what we can actually preserve within our limitations. And then there are certain things like duplicates of books. We don't take, we remove duplicates of materials in general. There's certain collecting preferences in the library but library books are lower stake or whatever. So no.

[00:21:02] Emma Prior: And is your entire archive housed at your official address?

[00:21:09] Lucie Handley-Girard: Well part of it is. We have like two off site storage locations. Maybe you've seen a picture of the house on our website. It is not that big. So it's also not great for archival records. So we do have two off site storage locations and I'm always going back and forth between one of them at least.

[00:21:38] Emma Prior: Sorry, this is a little bit of a back track. We were talking about the sort of notion of historical. This term non historical has been much debated throughout the process. And it's a term that I think in the beginning really seemed to encompass what I was talking about. My supervisor and I sat for many hours finding this term that really represented the kinds of people I wanted to participate in this archive. And the more you speak to people, they begin to problematise that term and debate that term. [00:22:29] So that term has been much debated and it's not something I'm completely married to but it's one of those things. And I've been looking at different terms like contemporary. So I think in the beginning, the term non historical definitely related to not being seen the same way that we see 'historical' figures like in a South African context. Like Kewpie for example, or Simon Nkoli. But the term has been problematised a lot more throughout the project and I think the notion that when I say non historical that I'm referring to people without histories. Because I'm not at all. Obviously we all have histories as queer people. So I think that term is much debated, it's still debated. I'm still working around the term and with the term and deciding if that term is correct. [00:23:50] But in your opinion, would

you say that queer bodies are accurately archived? Or do you think there's a lot of the archivist's own biases?

[00:24:17] Lucie Handley-Girard: I think it really depends on what kind of archive we're talking about. There are archives that are better at it than others. For example, an archive such as the one I work for would be better at it than the federal archive in Canada that deals with personal records but also has a lot of erasure queer content. [00:24:55] So inevitably, there's bias in every archive. Some archives to a greater degree than others, depending on collecting priorities, depending on transphobia, homophobia or whatever. That's a really big question. Even within my archive there's huge bias. So even within my archive there's huge erasure. Well, the archives I work for, I shouldn't call it my archive. There's historical erasure, transphobia, there's huge erasure. Historically, The Arquives mimics society and all of its oppression and white supremacy. So within Canada and Toronto, it's just a microcosm of society. [00:25:59] So with a gay cis male stance right. So yeah there's always bias. It's part of my job and the other archivists in recent years to engage in outreach to underrepresented groups, to try and do a lot of repair with communities to ensure they do feel safe to donate their records. Doing archival work is a lot of emotional labour. So because folks don't know that their records are valid, their records do have value, that we do want them, especially like you said with younger folks, or people who are just living their lives not doing anything super activity. [00:27:02] We do a lot of one on ones. We have someone who does outreach specifically to the trans community. We know that employing someone that is part of the trans community is important to do that work. I as a cis woman, I'm not going to be recieved the same way as someone that is trans by the trans community. So I know that I can't make people feel safe in the same way that someone from their community does. So that's a project that we have ongoing for example. [00:27:39] I'm going off on a tangent. But there's bias in everything. Doing archival descriptions and writing content, like writing the finding aids, we take the stance that we don't put anything in the finding aids that is not evident in the collection or is not a mass known public fact. So I'm not going to lable someone gay unless it's in the records. I'm not going to presume someone is gay when they could have been bi. So we are very careful about the language that we use and labels especially. And that's why a lot of people sometimes find our records... well they are problematic, like the archivists records historically can be problematic. But we're taking the stance now and in recent years, it has to be evident. The facts have to be evident to write them out. Or you leave it out and the researcher determines for themselves whatever they want to determine. But then that causes problems with finding things sometimes.

[00:29:18] Emma Prior: So in relation to what you were saying a little bit earlier. Has The Arquives mobilised any sort of projects to include the voices of contemporary bodies in the archiving process? And if so, what are these projects?

[00:29:36] Lucie Handley-Girard: So we have had in recent years a variety of projects that have been sort of outreach projects or curatorial projects that turn into archival collections. So part of our work is to work with community groups who are contemporary. I can give an example. We did an exihbit called Legacies in Motion which was exhibiting materials from black queer activists in Toronto. And that whole process became a collecting project. [00:30:33] So folks donated their materials to The Arquives so we could create the exhibit with the community and it became this transfer of materials. There's that example. And I can think of just prior to the pandemic, we did a South Asian writing workshop with youth. So the youth were engaged in writing fiction and non fiction about their lives and about being queer, coming out, et cetera. And then that material was donated to The Arquives. So there's all these different ways that we are trying to engage. [00:31:25] And then there's the other route where we were trying to start archiving more social media, like public social media. Web archiving is a whole thing in itself because we know a lot of younger folks are not necessarily making the same kinds of records as folks in their 50s and 60s. So we're working to develop a system to archive particular groups or people that are mostly online based. That's a whole other conversation though. But there's a whole lot of ways we go about it.

[00:32:27] Emma Prior: And in your opinion, who do you think The Arquives serves? So who do you think benefits the most from The Arquives?

[00:32:38] Lucie Handley-Girard: Benefits the most? Like...

[00:32:52] Emma Prior: So in terms of who gets to access The Arquives. I understand that it's... as far as I understand from my research, it's an open access archive. So anybody is really allowed to explore that archive. But because something is open access, it doesn't always make it accessible to all kinds of people. So I think from that aspect what I'm trying to find out is how... I'm hesitant to use the word accessible because what's accessible for one person is always inaccessible for another. But how much interaction from the queer community do you get and what sorts of people from the queer community benefit from the archive in terms of knowledge

and experience? So is it a lot of the older community or the younger community? A more privileged or less privileged community?

[00:34:06] Lucie Handley-Girard: Good question. I think prior to Covid, we were open in the evenings for folks to walk in. We're situated in an area of Toronto that is very close to the Gay Village. So there's that kind of access albeit there's problems with the village. There's gentrification, there's a white dominant privilege within the village. So access in that regard is like we're much closer to the queer strip as it were, but who lives around the queer strip is... it's been gentrified. [00:35:04] So there's that. So we have walk-ins. Anyone can walk in off the street usually. We provide a lot of access to folks in university doing a variety of degrees from all over the world. So there's that level of privilege. I'm always providing access to people doing documentaries. So I know that the result of the information that I give to them or their research is going to reach a wider audience if someone is going to watch the documentary. The other day, I helped someone access their great uncle's records because he died of HIV. [00:36:08] So there's the familial thing as well, like biological and chosen family. There's people who come through on tours. We do a lot of group tours from community organisations and non community organisations like corporate tours, a lot of school tours, high school and university about what The Arquives is. And then with regards to interaction with the community during Covid for example, we've had trivia nights and people are really enjoying those; accessing The Arquives materials within a very fun way. [00:37:02] I can talk about it forever, but those are the main big ones. We do get a lot of researchers through the door because we're in Toronto and there's the biggest universities in Canada. We do get a lot of PhDs. This week, I've had someone in from The Brooklyn Museum all week researching an exhibit. It's a huge range. And then I should also say that the volunteers; there's the older folks who have been volunteering for many decades and then there's the younger folks who want to be involved or are involved in... we offer a way to practice archival work for people who are new professionals coming out of school or during archival school or a variety of different programs; preservation programs, etc. And so we understand the value in mentorship and providing a safe space or trying to be a safe space for folks who are looking for queer mentors that they haven't been able to find elsewhere. [00:38:48] As we say, because of the AIDS crisis, there is a huge gap in people who are literally living to be mentors. So there's that kind of access as well, more kind of mentorship thing.

[00:39:10] Emma Prior: How many volunteers do you have at the moment?

[00:39:14] Lucie Handley-Girard: I'm not actually sure at the moment because Covid's been wacky. But like normally, we have about 100

[00:39:22] Emma Prior: Wow, that's a large number. Especially for volunteers.

[00:39:26] Lucie Handley-Girard: Yeah. Because normally we have 7 committees and each committee does a different thing. So there's like collections, like the archives committee; but then there's like the fundraising committee; communications committee; the GALA committee; the facilities committee; the community engagement committee. Everyone's sort of in their group and helping out because we can't do it all ourselves.

[00:40:01] Emma Prior: I think that sometimes when one archivist documents a community, that representation of that community can become flattened, and sometimes some communities aren't accounted for at all since one archivist can't represent all bodies from different cultures and socio-political contexts. So how does The Arquives deal with those issues if at all?

[00:40:31] Lucie Handley-Girard: So you're talking about for example, how do I describe the experience of someone who is South Asian and lesbian? Like I am not South Asian, and I don't personally identify as a lesbian. Do you know what I mean? Is that what you're asking?

[00:40:56] Emma Prior: Yeah

[00:40:56] Lucie Handley-Girard: Okay. Good question. We sort of try ... so there's multiple. There's a couple ways we try to work this. We try to work closely with the donor. All of the sort of description work that I might do can get run by them. We are often in constant... if it's someone's personal records, we're in dialogue with the person about how they want to be represented or how they identify or their life's history or their life's work. [00:41:42] So there's that kind of dialogue that's usually happening. And then for example, if I get a large donation of photos, we'll do photo naming projects with the donor. So we recently got a large donation of photos from someone whose been taking photos of the Black queer community in Toronto for 30 years and it's thousands of photos. So we're working with him to name people so that photos are not what we call 'orphaned'. Like their context is not erased or does not continue to be undocumented in the archives. So there's that kind of engagement. [00:42:36] We're always talking with people. With the example of the person who does trans collections outreach, part of their job is also to

work with the community itself but also on the collections. And so part of my job is to mentor them in how to do archival work specifically with those collections.

[00:43:03] Emma Prior: And when things enter the archive, how do you, as the archivist, make sure that the sort of nuances and complexities and discourses that come with that thing that's being archived are not lost?

[00:43:28] Lucie Handley-Girard: Through working with the donor and research; through looking at the records, through a lot of reading and making descriptions as accurate and unbiased as possible. So similar to the answer previously

[00:43:53] Emma Prior: Okay so it's about a lot of care for the objects coming in; and doing a lot of research and making sure all sorts of different points of views are accounted for?

[00:44:10] Lucie Handley-Girard: Yeah.

[00:44:13] Emma Prior: And when these materials come into your archive, how do they stay alive and continue to be a sort of dynamic part of society? Or when materials enter the archive, do they die?

[00:44:31] Lucie Handley-Girard: Big question.

[00:44:38] Emma Prior: I mean it's a tricky question because it's something I'm dealing with and it's such a complex question because I think the whole point of the archive is for things not to die. So why are we recording? So things can live on. But then I think there's this interesting relationship where sometimes something should be a dynamic part of culture but then it goes into an archive and gets put into a box and not looked at for 50 years. And does that mean the death of the object because it's put in a box and not looked at for 50 years. Or does that mean that the object lives because it's in the archive?

[00:45:31] Lucie Handley-Girard: I suppose I would pose a question in return. So if an object comes into the archive and is processed by the archivist and is made available to researchers but isn't necessarily requested by researchers; versus if that object or thing stayed at the creator's house or was disposed of in the garbage because they died... I suppose I struggle with

what ... I forget the phrase that you use but active within culture or something like that. How would it be active in culture if it was under someone's bed gathering dust?

[00:46:42] Emma Prior: Yeah I mean, like I was saying, it's a question that I'm struggling with so much at the moment and it's a catch 22. You put something in the archive because you want it to live but then it's not looked at, so does that mean it's dead? Does that mean it's alive? I don't think there is an answer but it was good to hear your return question on it because I hadn't thought about it that way. But what sorts of discourses do you think surround queer archival practices or in your opinion, do you think there is an inherent problem in the current mode of archving queer bodies?

[00:47:41] Lucie Handley-Girard: Okay I just want to say one more point to the question before. You can look at it in a very practical sense. Like it's going to go into the archive and no one is going to look at it. Or it's going to be under someone's bed and no one is going to look at it. I experience people who donate like 60 years of material and they donate their letters that they wrote as a 19 year old. And they don't know that they wrote those anymore. So they have no recollection of what they did with that thing. Then I go through their records and I feel like I know more about them as a 19 year old than they do. [00:48:16] I will bring things to them like do you remember this? Did you remember doing this? And they're like no. So in a way, it has 'died'; I don't like that word; but it has become a faded memory or a non memory for them in and of themselves. And I'm going through the records and going oh this happened to you and sort of realivening them that way. [00:48:52] And then I can also add the point that we talk about artists activating the archives. So we try to do work with people who are going to come in and use the records in a way that brings exposure to them. So in a way that alivens them, in a way that people can enjoy and learn, et cetera, and feel represented through them. So through exhibits and stuff like you said.

[00:49:29] Emma Prior: I really like that word non memory as opposed to a death. I find death really sort of final and really one or the other. And I think with these objects, it's so hard to say that they go into an archive and die because it's not final, they still live there to be rediscovered. So I like that non memory transitional period of not being looked at as opposed to having died.

[00:50:11] Lucie Handley-Girard: I mean you can also use the word activate. I don't know if I would pick rediscovered. It feels very colonial to me. But yeah to reactivate the records, sort of

give them a shot of electricity or something. Yeah. I think memory, like having an active memory and having a reactive memory to something that you are re remembering; I think it's better than those binary life and death kind of things. Because memory is very fluid. It's like sexuality and gender. We are living and then we die; but while we're living, we create stuff that lives on past us. So it's not like the records die when I die. It's not like the records die when they go into the archive. They are there. Yeah, kind of complicate it a bit. What was your next question? I forgot

[00:51:37] Emma Prior: My question was... I think it's a two part question. I don't know, maybe it's a one part question. What kind of discourses do you think surround queer archival practices? Or in your opinion, do you think there's a sort of inherent problem in the current mode of archiving queer bodies?

[00:52:11] Lucie Handley-Girard: As an archivist, I'm always trying to balance the practice with the theory. Ultimately, it comes down to the practice. The practice as in how are we working with folks and how are we writing descriptions. I think part of my job is to work with other archivists who are not necessarily at queer archives only, who are maybe working with queer records at another institution to educate folks on practices and standards of using the community knowledge, talking to elders, looking at what is in the records themselves instead of making assumptoins. [00:53:22] I think queer archiving has a lot to learn from indigenous archiving in Canada and indigenous practices, memory practices overall. Because we know we can't decolonise the archive, we have to be anti colonial and anti oppressive. There is so much problematic stuff because people are problematic. I forgot your question, but yeah. I don't think it's quite possible to separate ourselves from the problematic nature of individuals in society. You can do your best to frame your work or practise your work in an as anti colonial and anti oppressive way as possible. [00:54:48] We do a lot of checking of each other. Like would you keep this? Would you get rid of it? Like ethics around that kind of thing. The archivist's position is very political. So we have the ability to keep or dispose of stuff because we can't keep everything. And some archives will be more ruthless. Some archivists will be more ruthless than others. So it's like this... I don't have a crystal ball I can look into and say a researcher will find this really interesting in the future or this is really essential to keep for the collection's overall understanding. [00:55:35] But the more you practise actual archival work, the more familiar you get with what is of 'enduring research value' or what the really quirky things researchers wanna look at. They look at the weirdest stuff. So you sort of end up; at least me, I'm talking about my personal practice; giving a lot of benefit of the doubt to what people might want to see and what

is of enduring research value or what was significant to the person or organisation that you're archiving. That's probably the best way I can answer that.

[00:56:24] Emma Prior: I think that's great; but it definately leads into my next question which is: do you think that a singular archivist acts as a sort of gatekeeper for the queer archive?

[00:56:41] Lucie Handley-Girard: Good question. I think that's why it's important to involve the community. So you're being checked by the community. And the queer community is very vocal about what you've done wrong or what you need to do better. I think having a dialogue is really important and consulting people who are... like elders for example is really important. I do understand how an archivist can be a gatekeeper. There is a huge power in like 'okay yeah you can come in on this day and I can give you this stuff to look at'. And I've felt more so like that since Covid because I haven't been able to provide access to as many people as I had before and people really want to look at certain things. It's really essential. They want to be able to access x, y, z things and I can't necessarily provide that to them because of labour issues. [00:58:16] So there's that kind of access to it; like that kind of physical gatekeeper-y thing. And then there's the intellectual political gatekeep-y thing with what we're keeping and not keeping and what we're describing. We can get into the really nitty gritty. If a file folder has 10 documents, it's always balancing their labour and time versus how much of the file folder they're describing. So if I have 100 boxes of materials to go through, I'm not necessarily going to itemise each piece of paper in the file. It has to be kind of symbiotic... it has to be this kind of compromise that I don't always feel good about between the archivist and the researcher. [00:59:10] So inevitable there are going to be things that aren't documented in the way that I'd like them to be but we do learn. When you're looking through a collection, you learn what is of more 'historical significance' but you're looking at that through your own bias. There's a lot of problems. I will highlight something in a collection through describing it in greater detail at a file or item level if it is significant to highlight because it's lacking from the archive's collection overall. So for example, if someone went to a workshop in 1972 about transsexuality, and that's really important because it's underrepresented elsewhere; I'm going to write more words for that. [01:00:22] So we're always balancing. Versus I'm not going to spend as much time writing about their financials from 1982 to 1983. We're always balancing our labour and the level of description we're giving because there are only so many hours in the day. So unfortunately; and as a community archive, we're not picking or selecting who gets to donate. We get over 100 donations a year. So there's a lot of work to do. It's kind of this catch 22 again. It sucks

[01:01:15] Emma Prior: And sort of power relation that the archivist has. I mean of course the archivist has the power to write people in and out of the archive. But I think there's a really interesting power relation with the archivist and logistics of how to do things. Like you said, over 100 contributions a year, it's a lot to document. And so I understand what you're saying, it's about compromise. And about looking at what is really well represented in the archive and what we need more of. So I'm on my last question now. I did start with 18, but you answered a lot of them as you were talking which is really great. So my last question is: what makes an archive queer?

[01:02:22] Lucie Handley-Girard: Oh, okay. Good question. We can think of queer in many ways right. That's such a big question. All these big questions coming from you!

[01:02:47] Emma Prior: I thought long and hard about them! It's all the things that I don't know that I'm hoping someone with more experience... I don't like this right and wrong answer thing. I'm really just interested in hearing what you think.

[01:03:19] Lucie Handley-Girard: I will give the 'anything can make an archive queer' answer. Queerness is undefineable in many respects. It's about sexuality and gender, but it's also just about difference and being an outsider. So if we're talking about queerness strictly as in LGBTQ2+ queer, that kind of queerness; then an archive can be queer or a collection can be queer because someone is in it that is gay and they don't have to be in a queer archive to be queer. That sort of sounds very erasurey if I'm going to say like the federal archives in Canada isn't queer because there's no queer people in it. There definately are queer people in it, but they aren't emphasised as being queer necesarily or they've been erased as queer. [01:04:45] Just because someone's queerness has been erased by the institution, it doesn't mean that they weren't or aren't. Then I can think about the term and how it's changed over time; the usage of the term.

[01:05:21] Emma Prior: Sorry. As an archivist; if The Arquives is primarily sort of... sorry I'm trying to think about how to word this. If what defines The Arquives is being queer in terms of sexuality; as the archivist, how do you deal with someone wanting to archive something that has nothing to do with the queer experience, and that person isn't queer?

[01:06:04] Lucie Handley-Girard: That person isn't queer? Then we wouldn't collect it. If it has nothing to do with the queer experience and the person isn't queer themselves, then we wouldn't collect it.

[01:06:17] Emma Prior: I'm really interested. I don't know if it's a geographical thing, but in South Africa, we would either say; I mean we have a lot of words; we have queer, we have LGBTQIA+, LGBT. But I've never heard of LGBTQ2+.

[01:06:38] Lucie Handley-Girard: The 2 is North American specific. Or it's two spirit. So it's an indegenous; it's a general term for folks who are indigenous in Canada and the United States and the Americas I suppose. It was coined in 1990 at a conference in Canada; a First Nations conference which is like Native American / Canadian and it is meant to be the general encapsulating word for folks who are indigenous in Canada and the Americas. Because they recognised that each nation or each tribe or first nation as we call it; each first nation has its own language and own way of encapsulating gender and sexuality and that it's not necessarily one word, it's multiple words and different languages. It's a thing. You can read about it, there's a lot online.

[01:08:05] Emma Prior: I definitely will. That is the end of my questions. But I want to open it up if you have any questions for me, or there's something you've wanted to say that maybe we haven't covered in the questions?

[01:08:24] Lucie Handley-Girard: Thanks for chatting. It's always nice to talk to someone who is doing something different. I'm in the practical administrative work everyday and so it's nice to step into the theory. I'm using a different part of my brain. I don't know. I think if you'd like to... you know you're doing your thesis... you're doing your thesis right?

[01:09:00] Emma Prior: So yes. But with my degree, you can either do it by research report and coursework or by dissertation. I personally love the interaction of coursework, so I did mine by coursework and research report. So technically, yes it is like a thesis. It's just a lot shorter. So it's like 40 000 words as opposed to like 100 000.

[01:09:32] Lucie Handley-Girard: If you would like, at the end of your process, you could donate your work to The Arquives. We would collect it. We also sort of collect materials about community archiving as well, or archiving in general. Especially queer archiving.

[01:09:58] Emma Prior: Yes absolutely. Before my Masters, I actually have a BA in FIne Arts. So primarily, before a curator I see myself as an artist first. Most of, I would say probably all of my work has at least something to do with being queer in South Africa in the contemporary moment around rights, specifically in Africa at large. Gay rights are horrific. It's still punishable by death in 4 countries in Africa. So I did a video piece titled Is Homosexuality UnAfrican? where I really dug into what it means, and if homophobia is African or if it's an artefact of colonialism. So I looked at that a lot. So I've done a lot of work with queer people in South Africa. So I'll definitely look at donating an artwork to the archive as well. That would be great.

[01:11:26] Lucie Handley-Girard: Cool. I guess my other question would be: would GALA archive your material? I'm not sure about their collecting policy. As a non historical person yourself, would GALA take your material?

[01:11:50] Emma Prior: Yes probably. As much as I've had a lot of... I wouldn't say criticisms, I would call them thoughts about GALA's practice. What was so frustrating was GALA was the only one that I could look at in South Africa and I actually wanted to look at two south african queer archives. So GALA is associated with the University of Witwatersrand which is the university that I'm at. So they're literally a stone throw away from my campus. So obviously they were my first point of contact and I started researching more and I was like okay they're the only one in South Africa. That's problematic as it is. And then I started researching in Africa. And it's not to say those archives don't exist. But what I am saying is that I haven't found them in my research. And my research has been meticulous. So I think my frustration was that I found a lot more historical bodies than non historical bodies going through catalogues and stuff. If I approached them, they probably would be willing to archive, but yeah.

[01:13:26] Lucie Handley-Girard: You're basically talking about not feeling seen and that's kind of what we encounter all the time. And the only way to counter that is to try and donate. So you can act as a 'oh I'm going to donate so someone else can see themselves there as a nonhistorical person'. I would also say the criticism or thoughts you have around GALA probably are the same kinds of thoughts people have around the archives I work for. And it's not

uncommon for there to eb a lot of reservations. I'm not sure what your thoughts are but a lot of it is based on a lack of understanding around labour. So the reason probably that GALA has historical records more available is because the older things are prioritised labour wise when that shouldn't always be the case; but historically that is the case. Like moving forward, things that are of more current context should be prioritised as well. But historically thinking about the way archives have functioned, older stuff has been prioritised. And then you're stuck with a huge backlog of material to go through.

[01:15:30] Emma Prior: At the beginning of this project; I think one of the reasons I was so attracted to researching queer archives... so I identify as a lesbian. I am a queer person. But I've always found the archival space really interesting. I think I have a keen love of history and looking at older things and new things. So I've always liked the archival space and I felt like I haven't always been able to explore it enough. One of the first archives I ever went to was the Wits Art Museum archive. Their archive is insane. They've got floors and floors and floors of artworks and artefacts. So I think that was the first moment when I became really interested in archives seriously and thought about it as a career option. So I'm gonna stop recording.

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH DOCTOR SCHEM BADER - THE ARQUIVES POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHER. 23 MARCH 2022. DIGITAL RECORDING IN POSSESSION OF EMMA PRIOR.

[00:00:03] Emma Prior: Okay, so maybe let me take you through a bit of the project. And then just a reminder quickly that you may withdraw consent from the interview at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequence of any kind. So, yeah, it's not super formal. I really am just wanting to hear your opinions from the experience that you have. So, I don't want to take up too much of your time. But I have like 10 questions for you. We did go over them in the email a little. But yeah, so maybe let me start with a brief overview of the project. [00:00:48] So when I started the Master's degree, I was really interested in working with queer archives, and I was hoping to start working with GALA, the Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action LGBTQ archive. And so I was really hoping to just start with a sort of exploration of the archive and see what happened. And at the time, there were these... because it was just like the beginning of COVID, there were these really strict national restrictions because of COVID. And that made it really difficult to go and explore the archive. And it made it a little bit more difficult as well, because most of the archive was stored off site. So they needed me to sort of do this process of going through a catalog and you know, picking things out. But that wasn't really where I wanted to start. [00:01:45] I really didn't have any sort of specific intention in mind at that point. I just wanted to explore. So that became a little bit frustrating for me. But as the project kind of went on, I realised more and more that it was never GALA that I was frustrated with but sort of queer archives at large. And some of the responses that I've received from this project are assumptions that I was attacking GALA, but that was never the intention. [00:02:19] And I think it seemed that way because GALA is really the only queer archive, like we were talking about in South Africa and Africa at large. And I think that that's another huge problem that GALA is the only queer archive? So what does that say about the the diversity of queer lives in South Africa, and the ways in which our stories are sort of told? [00:02:44] So I became frustrated by having to sort of rely on this catalog to pick out items of interest. And that's across the board in archives everywhere, not specifically queer archives. And not just being allowed to explore. And then I became frustrated going through these catalogs of not explicitly seeing, you know, myself and others... I use the word loosely here, non historical bodies in the archives. This word non historical has been of much debate, which will, I'd love to hear your opinion on a little bit later. And so yeah, I mean, I think that queer archives do an incredible job at recording these really big historical moments and historical bodies, which, of course, is a really vital part of the archive.

But I think in some ways that non historical bodies are not accounted for, or contemporary bodies are not accounted for, or allowed that same visibility, right? [00:03:46] Like, if you look at an example in GALA, I mean, they have a huge section on Kewpie, daughter of District Six. And of course, that person was incredibly important to our history. But it seems that perhaps the contemporary or the non historical is slightly negated in that space. So yeah, it seemed to some extent, to me at that point, like the experiences and the histories and the stories of everyday queer body aren't accounted for. So in the project, I wanted to document the more mundane moments of what makes queer life queer life. I really wanted to explore the sort of documentation of ephemeral material, and really break down what we consider to be archivable. So I was really focused on the non-historical contemporary body, and which I think has equally as much to offer as the historic subject. [00:04:49] And with that in mind, although I was sort of dissecting what I found to be the problems with queer archives, I never intended to fix those problems. I did though, want to imagine sort of modes of futurity, and explore how archives can exist in different ways while documenting queer lives still. And I think most importantly, the aim of the project above sort of all else was to shift the lens and allow archiving to become collaborative, rather than a sort of singular thing. So I was really interested in the discourses around who is allowed to archive and what a self determined account of queerness looks like. [00:05:34] So I was thinking about the queer archive through the framework of the queer body, because, you know, the queer archive is a practice of everyday life. And I think that our bodies and memories also serve as a sort of archive. So I was interested in investigating this relationship between the queer body and queer archive, when one sees themself, or parts of their community represented without being part of the authorship. I think that there may be a gap between what an individual sees represented, and how we think about ourselves when we're not part of that authorship. So I completely understand and acknowledge that it may be completely impossible to create an archive that's accessible for all and accounts for all queer lived histories, I think that it's still worthwhile to explore that space and see how best non historical bodies can be documented and can document themselves. [00:06:37] Because I think that these transformations begin to occur when the communities represented are prioritised. So this project really wasn't about finding any solid answers to questions, but rather exploring different ways of archiving queer bodies, and playing with those ideas and seeing a shift from archival silence to sort of transformative discourse and collaboration. And so in that sense, the project is inherently explorative. [00:07:10] So then the exhibition went up, I put out calls for contributions of objects, stories, ephemeral material, etc. to be contributed to a queer archive, and it was really open to what kinds of things could be contributed and limitations, and I really

didn't want to set those limitations. [00:07:34] And in the beginning, I became really focused on how many of my friends and people that I knew were contributing to the archive, because I really didn't want it to become Emma's archive of friends. But sort of as time went on, and the exhibition was digitally marketed to a lot of people that I didn't know and had no mutual friends with started to contribute. And it was actually in a walkabout with GALA, when I realised that starting with friends wasn't such a bad thing. It was actually quite innocent, in some ways. [00:08:21] So the curatorial aspect was quite fluid. I collected contributions until the morning of the opening, and put them up and it was open for a week. So five days, a working week. So it was an interesting dynamic to have these things in the space, and completely not know what the final exhibition was going to look like until the show opened. You know, because we just constantly put things up and move things around until the last moment. So there was the sort of playful aspect of putting things up and moving them around. And there was also a space in the exhibition for people to contribute if they hadn't received the calls for contributions beforehand. And I think one of the things that really stuck out to me about collections was that a lot of people took the opportunity to show off their love or share their journey of self discovery. And the objects that were contributed were nothing particularly spectacular, but really innocent and vulnerable things that really spoke to the experiences that the people who were contributing, you know, had lived through. [00:09:42] So in the curatorial, there was a sort of moment of imitating 'real life'. So I was really interested in what would happen with putting shoes on a plinth as opposed to keeping them on the floor and putting clothes on hangers, as opposed to, you know, sort of treating them like artworks. So this relationship became really interesting to me. And I was far more concerned with keeping those objects as a part of a sort of dynamic culture, rather than removing them from their contexts and treating them as artifacts. [00:10:17] Because you know, the objects that were contributed were deeply personal. And I found it really important to preserve their contexts and their lives and allow them to live on rather than dying in an archive, which is not to say that when things go to the archive, they die. But it does happen sometimes. And it's something that I really wanted to avoid. So the objects were returned to the contributors after the exhibition ended. And that became really interesting to me, this sort of relationship of living inside and outside the archive at the same time. So while these objects existed in the archive, they weren't removed from their lives and from their functions, and continue to live their dynamic lives while forming a really integral part of this archive. [00:11:08] So the exhibition made archiving collaborative, and questioned notions of who was allowed to archive and what kinds of things can be archived. And I think, for me, at least, I started to see a self determined account of queerness. And that's what I was really looking for; what does this

look like? [00:11:31] And, and in that sense, for this project, at least, I definitely saw a shift from an archival silence, to archival production, from contemporary queer bodies who feel like they don't exist in archives, right. So through the process of this project, I always saw the exhibition as a sort of ending point, a final archive that's nice and neat and tidy, and that I can write a paper on. But what I've realised is that the exhibition was not the ending point at all. But much rather a catalyst for collections. And it's definitely not as nice and neat and tidy as I thought it would be. It's really messy, and really complex and really diverse. So I think let me stop there, and hear from you because I can feel I'm getting dry mouth.

[00:12:35] Dr Schem Bader: That was so great, Emma, that was really awesome. And I mean, one of the things that I noticed in the WeTransfers that you sent me was how great the install was.

[00:12:47] Emma Prior: Thank you.

[00:12:49] Dr Schem Bader: So as a curator, I can really see the nuances of how things were put together, a pink wall here, a pink wall there. The video being tucked in that particular corner, I could see the logic. You know, first I was like, oh, why isn't there over there? Oh, there's a window over there. That's why. Really smart, like the decisions you made. Kudos to you.

[00:13:15] Emma Prior: Thank you so much. Thank you. I mean, I completely cannot take all the credit for it. The official curator of the space, The Point of Order, Reshma Chhiba, offered so much advice and so much help. You know, so really learning from her, I think was honestly one of the best experiences. Getting to work under someone who has so much experience and is so knowledgeable. But thank you so much. I really do appreciate that.

[00:13:50] Dr Schem Bader: Awesome. Where do you want to start?

[00:13:55] Emma Prior: I think maybe let's start with the sort of admin stuff. So just briefly, would you be able to tell me your name and a brief description of your role and relationship with The Arquives?

[00:14:17] Dr Schem Bader: Sure. My name is Schem Rogerson Bader, and I just recently completed my postdoc at The Aquives. It's not really clear how you pronounce it. Is it ar_qu_ives? Is it ar_qu_ee_ves? It's unknown. I was calling it The Ar_qu_ives. (shrugs).

[00:14:51] Emma Prior: I think in my defense, you know, to me until we met you were S_kem B_ader. Very South African, the pronunciation. So for me it was also really interesting to find out that it's The Arquives, and it was this completely made up word. And I thought that that was really interesting.

[00:15:14] Dr Schem Bader: Yeah, it's a made up word. And I think that the queer archives got like a linguist involved to try and figure out how to do this, how to create this new word. So I called it The Ar_qu_ives. And then the archivists there were like, "oh, no, we really didn't want people to call it that". It's in the spelling. If there wasn't a 'u', then it would be ar_qu_eeves. But anyway, I think part of them having a formal linguist maybe works for them and against them. Maybe they needed an artist to come up with their name. Maybe they needed an artist, not a linguist.

[00:16:20] Emma Prior: What has been your sort of relationship with them?

[00:16:27] Dr Schem Bader: So during my postdoc, I was looking at vulnerable media that hadn't had a lot of traction in that particular archive for an NFB film. NFB is an acronym here for the National Film Board of Canada. And the producer is Justine Pimblett, and the director is Noam Gonick. So they were looking for these kinds of odd moments for their film. And they had given a timeline of what their film was, you know, there's this and this and this and this. But they didn't really know exactly what they wanted. And there's also the limits of the archive, which maybe we can talk about a little bit in a minute. But the archive doesn't hold everything that you want constantly, all the time. All the big secrets aren't revealed of all the things in the world in the archive. [00:17:39] There's lots of stuff where there's lots of gaps. It's just the way that goes. It might be based on keywords, it might be the acquisition numbers, there could be real practical issues as to why. So what I felt as a visual researcher, for that film, at the queer archives was that, essentially they were looking for the idiosyncratic. So if I'm looking for the idiosyncratic, what's the norm? Like, if I'm looking for the odd things, what's the norm? Right. So okay, great. Look for the idiosyncratic. Well, what's the norm in this archive? I don't know. [00:18:30] I was just as new to it as anybody I hadn't been working there for years. So looking at a lot of pride

footage, you know, you see it's pretty repetitive. In fact, I think it's fair to say in any archive, there's a lot of repetition. So even though there's gaps, there's repetition of the same files under different materials or media, but it's the same thing repeated over and over again. I don't know if that was your experience. But so this is this idea that you were kind of talking about earlier, like representation and visibility. And what happens in the archive, and I would argue that archival structures, as laid out by Aristotle... I mean, he really was the first guy kind of talking about it, I think. There's really these very formal structures of what constitutes collecting and saving. Things need acquisition numbers, they need to be contained in certain areas, so that you can always go back. So that means you're gonna have a lot of repetition of the same thing. [00:20:00] So here's an example that I came across in the queer archives. So there was this, like Toronto's Stonewall was basically in the 80s, early 80s. No, it was the 70s. No, it was the 80s. There was all these bathhouse raids, and like cops would go into these kind of public sauna houses and beat the shit out of men and drag them off to prison for being gay. [00:20:37] And they were allowed to. So it was called Operation Soap. That's what the cops called it. So there's all this kind of material about Operation Soap at the queer archive. Personal, news footage, documentaries, personal photographs, you name it. There's so much there about it. And then I found this one weird thing that was in a file in a big box called 'unknown'. So I was like, I'm gonna go through the unknown box. And all files were called 'unknown', 'unknown'. So nobody knows anything. Great. I'd love to look through this box. [00:21:31] And in this box, I found these medium format photographs. So medium format is way bigger than a 35 millimeter negative. So these really large old school kind of photographs and negatives of this naked guy being dragged out by a cop in this locker room, and he's naked, the towel over his crotch. And I was like, "that's from Operation Soap. Why is this in the unknown file? Who the hell is this guy? Why is nobody talking about this? Why have I never heard about this?". So I went on this sideways operation that took like several weeks, only to find out... I went down this rabbit hole of sideways ness; totally dizzying and I ended up finding out that those pictures were, quote unquote, reenactment of Operation Soap. Reenactment for what? Was it a theater production? Was it a film? I don't know. [00:22:50] Then going through more of the archive, looking for stuff for this film, I see those same images in different files, labeled different things over and over, and over again, it just so happened that I started with the unknown. But if I had started with another file, it would have told me right off that this is a reenactment done by... sorry, I forget his name. Alex, I forgot his last name. But I can give that to you if you need. So that's sort of like an anecdotal story to sort of explain that the archive is always fucked up. It's always fucked up. You

can easily get what is readily available at that archive. [00:23:55] Otherwise, everything else is sideways in almost every archive I've ever been in. I never find what I want when I want it.

[00:24:09] Emma Prior: I think for me, that's also been the frustrating thing, right? I mean, sometimes you also don't know what you're looking for, until you find it. So going through these immensely long catalogs and boxes. I mean, it's crazy. There's so much, and I think what you've said about a lot of repetition in the archive has resonated so deeply because I've never actually thought about it that way. And maybe that's one of the things that I've been feeling. And I think repetition and a sort of... emotional way, but in a sort of more abstracted way as well. We know the stories that are in the archive, and I think that to some extent, those kinds of stories are repeated and repeated and repeated. And so it's really hard for people like me... it's really intimidating to go to these spaces and try to find myself, you know?

[00:25:24.11] Dr Schem Bader: Totally. I don't know what to say about that. I really don't know what to say about that. I would like to talk about this idea of your interest in the queer archives here, The Arquives as quote unquote, 'one of the largest'. And so I'd like to talk about what that means. And I think you brought that up, what is the largest? So I think it'd be good to talk about what does that mean? Because there are many other queer archives in Canada. Yes, many. One that I would point you to immediately would be the Two Spirit archive in Winnipeg. [00:26:16.08] So that's like the largest indigenous queer archive. And then there's several different kinds of trans archives. Because we're so large of a country, and our geographies can really profoundly vary. Atlantic Canada has a really different narrative than sort of the industrial part of like Ontario, versus the mountains over in the West Coast. All of these areas have different clear archives doing various different kinds of programs. Some of them are part of unis so that they have a built in system that's got their back. And the archivists that work there are part of the unions of that university. [00:27:18.05] While there's other ones that are not for profit and are only going from grant to grant; sort of always scrambling to stay afloat and alive. So some of the archives like the Two Spirit archive is part of the University of Winnipeg. So that's great, right? It's preserved, it's protected, the workers are protected, the archivists are protected. But The Arquives is not part of a uni. And so that gives them independence to do whatever they want to a certain degree. They have a board of directors but they're also extremely precarious. So they're always one grant to another grant. I think there's only two full time people there. Like, their phone is ringing off the hook. They're so busy. They need way more staff.

[00:28:35.09] Emma Prior: I mean this is one of the things... I spoke to the archivist at The Arquives as well.

[00:28:45.25] Dr Schem Bader: Lucie or Regan?

[00:28:47.26] Emma Prior: Lucie. She was really great to talk to. One of the things we spoke about was... with my frustrations, although they're important and justified; in my conversation with her I actually started to understand the more logical side of why archives are that way. Because they're underfunded. Even in South Africa. I would say especially in South Africa. Such underfunded spaces. [00:29:33.02] And then you've got a couple of people stretched super thin to document a whole bunch of stuff, to answer phone calls, to reply to people like Emma. It's a lot. And I think that was one of the moments where I started to realise the problems that exist that are not the fault of an archivist, that are not the fault of anybody working there or running those archives; but the importance that we place on archives and those spaces being underfunded. [00:30:13.18] But with what you've said in mind, I do want to hear from you; you asked me about largest. So in all my research and all the sorts of things that I've read and the documentaries that I've watched, talking about The Arquives, it's constantly cited as being ... So in like, the 90s or maybe it was the early 2000s, this documentary. I must just double check the date. These people kept talking about it being 'the largest'. In more recent readings that I'm doing, it's coming up as 'one of the largest'. So I think that's also interesting to me. And I think it's difficult to gauge these things. [00:31:07.18] How do we know that it's the largest? What are we talking about when we say largest? Is it purely the amount of files? Is it the largest in the value that we place on those files? So that's really difficult to say. But on what you were saying with how much the archives vary in Canada, I'm interested to hear from your perspective what kinds of bodies do you think The Arquives documents?

[00:31:58.02] Dr Schem Bader: Well, I feel like that's a bit of a controversial question. Because of our anxiety of equality and black lives, I think there's an anxiety to talk about what kind of bodies an archive holds. Because the queer archives of Toronto comes out of a certain time period, where Toronto was a much smaller city. It wasn't as diverse as it is now. Yeah, now it's epically diverse. But in like the 60s and 70s, it wasn't that it was somewhat diverse, but it wasn't as diverse. There wasn't the same amount of population, there wasn't the same amount of diversity. A number of wars hadn't started. There's a lot to contribute toward urban change. Now, because Canada's been part of the Commonwealth. We've always had connections to the

Caribbean, right? So there's always been a presence, a Caribbean presence in Toronto, for as long as I can remember. So to answer your question The Arquives is under scrutiny at the moment for its lack of diversity. And it deserves that critique. I don't even have a desire to defend The Arquives in terms of that. But I will say the population has radically changed; population numbers, things like that. However, the queer archives here started from a group of white gay men and a couple of lesbians. I mean, even trans didn't exist in a way that we can describe it as now, but there wasn't visible trans women that were part of that initial collective of people and that initial collective of people was The Body Politic. [00:34:50.02] So I don't know if you've heard about them, but that magazine and sort of editorial is the neucleus to the queer archives and everything from from the Body Politic comes out of that. So the body politic, they were Trotskyists. So they were like heavy duty left wing. They were really anti-cop, for obvious reasons, they were being bashed in the head by cops. But they also saw that there was racial inequality. They also wanted to end poverty, so these groups, this group, within the body politic, were super left wing. So here's an example of what the original politic was, of even starting a journal or even saving anything was because of Operations Soap, that's when Toronto had its biggest protest, the bathhouse raid riots. There's some really incredible footage of the bathhouse raid riots. A lot of those photos are taken by Gerald Moldenhauer who now lives in Morocco. Incredible images. So the starting of that protest, the major protest sign, a handmade banner said 'enough is enough. Stop police violence'. Not 'we're here we're queer get used to it'. Not 'we're gay. Leave us alone'. No, the message was about police brutality. That sexuality was insinuated, because everyone there was really out and kissing in the streets and being super out. Interesting, right? Yet, so many of the bodies represented early in this archive are white. [00:37:27.18] So what the archive's responsibility is now, due to the huge diversity of Toronto, is to do better outreach. So what might feel like a really white organization to a radical black queer Canadian; I'd say let's create space in the organization for for those radical politics, because it started with radical politics. Now, if you only have two full time staff, how do you manage everybody's radical politics? And do the nitty gritty of fucking archiving material? Because you have so much material that you've had to close the gallery down, and it's filled with boxes? It's COVID. Everyone's going through their things thinking, "I'm gonna give this to a queer archive". It is packed with donations. How are these two people ever going to get through that? Plus, do all these kinds of large community initiatives? It's not possible. They need more staff, they need more funding. Because their politics are there. It's not that they don't see these problems. I think Lucie would be the first one to talk about this, for sure. But there's a reason why that gap is

there. At the moment, I can't speak for historically, but at the moment, that gap is there, due to an organization's precarity. And there's no one to fucking do it. Do you think I'm being fair?

[00:39:21.09] Emma Prior: I'm in agreeance with you. I think there's two sides. I feel very split down the middle with this. I can completely acknowledge this underfunding. How on earth are two people ever supposed to get through that stuff? Like you were saying, especially when that archiving process is so meticulous. And then at the same time, as a queer person, we need to do better. For me, that's where I'm really struggling. I really feel both sides of the argument and I understand both sides, so I'm not quite sure where I sit there. But what I did want to ask you is how do you think queer bodies are being represented now? Although we've spoken about the issues with the physical archival process when the bodies are archived; how do you think they're being archived? And do you think they could be better archived?

[00:40:58.25] Dr Schem Bader: I mean, once you get the rhythm of how the logic of the archive works, just through going through their website, seeing the secession number, just following sort of the archives logic; you can get pretty far. But you're not going to find the marginal, you're not going to find the idiosyncratic that easily if you're using all the top picks. So I think part of it is how systems of collection even function. So because you've started an archive with the number 1; your object number one, by the time you're at object 14,000,000,062. You think 'shit, I would have done this archive differently if I had known there'd be so many numbers. Shit, now we're all the way here. I can't change it. I've got to just keep going with this system'. [00:42:20.13] So I think that's the largest problem in community archiving. Because they're a living organism. They're different from a state run archive. Like the Nelson Mandela archive, there isn't really going to be that many new things going into that archive. Because he's dead and he's been dead for a while. When we're trying to archive queer stories, and people are still alive, then we're dealing with a living archive. We can't end the story yet, because it hasn't ended. So how do you keep those organisms, those structural parts of the archive, these old fashioned structures working on this other thing? They don't match. Because archiving always was about sort of waiting to death, right? It's about then once you're dead, you leave this thing. So then no new things can be added. Maybe one or two, I found this, I found that. But when we're talking about being 25, and wanting to create your own archive, it's going to change 12 billion times.

[00:44:05.20] Emma Prior: I mean, I think it's also about how do you keep pace with a community that is always changing, that's always evolving? So keeping pace with that

completely changing community? Like you said, the community in Toronto has changed completely since what it was 30 years ago. And the same for South Africa. So not only keeping that alive, but I mean, things only ever grow, right? I mean, I think it's probably quite controversial to get rid of things from an archive. So how do you deal with this thing that keeps growing? I mean, at what point is everything just sitting in storage boxes?

[00:44:57.17] Dr Schem Bader: Everything is sitting in storage boxes. So they have like a couple of off site areas that are just storage. And whenever I would see a file that I was like, 'Oh, I'm interested in seeing this file', they'd say, 'Oh, that's the off site storage' which was this unspoken 'please don't make me go there. It's hell on earth'. It was like an unspoken please don't make me go there. So I never pushed it. I never pushed, wanting to see what was over there.

[00:45:42.10] Emma Prior: Yeah, so Lucie and I sort of had this conversation as well. And my question to her... I can read it. So my question to her was, "how do your materials stay alive in the archive and continue to be dynamic parts of society? Or do materials die once they enter the archive?". And then we had this conversation, where she brought a complete new light to how I'd been thinking of these things. So I think one of the mistakes that I made was that I was quite stubborn and I believe that once materials enter an archive, and they're sitting in a box for 50 years, that means that they're dead. And so Lucie, and I sort of had this conversation. Well, what does it mean when something goes to die, because that's why archives are here, to remember life and to remember what's happened. And so in that sense, they will live forever. So in that sense, they're very much alive because they exist in an archive. They're waiting to be reignited. Refound, right? Reengaged with maybe. But on the other hand, you know, that thing is sitting there. And then Lucie had the sort of idea, but it's either going to sit in the archive for 50 years and not be looked at and maybe one day be reengaged by someone like you or me. Or it's going to sit in that at someone's house for 50 years and never be looked at and never even be given the chance to be engaged with. Then when you die, it goes in the trash. So it was something that was sort of hard for me to come to terms with because I'd had this really solid idea of being in a box for 50 years means dead. And so I'm interested to sort of hear your opinion on the afterlife of the object in the archive, the life of the object in the archive.

[00:48:04.27] Dr Schem Bader: Yeah, I really liked that question. And I see it as a staffing issue. I think there are so many talented people out in the world would happily program queer archives, that will do really smart, innovative things given there's any funding to do it. I think it's

about financing creativity. Truly. If there was more people at GALA or more people at the queer archives that just have funding for programming. I mean, the queer archives here used to have programming, but then funding just whittled away and now it's just a storage unit. But I think having people doing programming as part and parcel of the archive is an essential part of the archive. Programming and an archive should not be considered by funders to be an add on. It should be as valued as much as the archivist like as a position as a role to keep things alive and engaged in room for debate and inquiry.

[00:49:39.14] Emma Prior: I think there's also this sort of thing that I'm dealing with at the moment. So although we spoke a little earlier about the assumptions that any parts of the project had been criticizing GALA or any other queer archive, actually... it never was. But I think that there's always going to be more power in 10 smaller archives versus one huge one that just can't keep up. And that's not to say that necessarily 10 smaller archives are always going to be able to keep up, they may experience the exact same problems. But I think that the sort of representation then becomes different and the diversity of representation. And I think that the relationship of one object existing in multiple archives is really interesting to me, then to see how that thing is represented. I think my question for you, though, is, the objects that have been in boxes for 50 years, do you view them as dead or alive or in purgatory, or none of the above, or all of the above?

[00:51:10.01] Dr Schem Bader: The tough part in the queer archive is that so many are dead that wouldn't be that old now. You know, looking at the queer archive is the face of AIDS. That's a big part of it. And certainly, in more recent years cancer. But I think that death is really important, actually and is something of a comfort. I mean, in a way, yes, it's a cemetery, but in a way, yeah. An archive is a cemetery. But I think death is really important to the study of queerness. Both in its past and in its future. I think queerness is born purely out of struggle. If queerness is not born out of struggle, that's not where I've been, and not where I'm going. I'm not looking for life to be easier. I'm looking for life to be more fair.

[00:52:29.21] Emma Prior: So the death of the object is not necessarily a bad thing?

[00:52:32.08] Dr Schem Bader: I might even say it's important that it is. It's important that we recognise that. I think it's an existential approach to the archive, where all we know is that life is absurd. Because we're born to die. So that's fucked up. That's not you know, anything

particularly new but it's true. It's crazy. We're born to die. It's absurd. And in the archive, so much of it is the face of AIDS and the face of disease and marginality. So many people that made their way into the queer art archive, maybe were never that obvious out in the world. Maybe the archive is their only place of being really, really, really seen and is just being held there. Maybe they couldn't be cared for anywhere else. I think queer lives are born of struggle. And I think it's something that empowers us over the average fucking idiot. Because we go through struggles, we must be able to be more compassionate. Struggle makes us better people. Kim Kardashian is an asshole. Right? We don't want to be these fucking assholes. We don't want to be these assholes. Being born of struggle makes a fucking richer life. It sucks, but it makes for a richer life.

[00:54:32.11] Emma Prior: I think it's one of the things that's so prominent in the South African archives. Well, archive. There's anyone queer archive. In Africa, being gay is still punishable by death in four countries, which is appalling. This sort of homophobia is still really ripe in this country. My partner and I will not even hold hands in public, we just won't, because we know our chances of getting hate crimed are just so high.

[00:55:16.10] Dr Schem Bader: Are you in Joburg?

[00:55:17.12] Emma Prior: Yes.

[00:55:19.03] Dr Schem Bader: And you're like a huge city

[00:55:25.08] Emma Prior: It's bad. being gay in South Africa is hard, and I can only speak from my experience, and I'm extremely privileged. I'm in an extremely privileged position to even be able to have a partner. You know, like, women get raped all the time for being gay. And so I think that those sorts of struggles are really prominent in the archive. And I think that that's something that's really important when we talk about the archive, and the struggle that we've been through to get here. I think that it bleeds the struggle. And it's really important that it does.

[00:56:25.00] Dr Schem Bader: Totally, and I think we've been taught these crumbs that we think are really huge milestones, like same sex marriage. We're supposed to be all thrilled to bits about these things that are to legitimise us in society. Maybe I don't want to be legitimised. I like

being an outsider, I don't want to be legitimised. But it also those legitimizations, don't stop you from getting your head kicked in walking down the street. So they're tokens, really.

[00:57:06.21] Emma Prior: One of the other questions I have for you is something that I'm a little bit critical of. But doing this archive, I think I've really tried to sort of, not steer clear of because I know that it's inevitable, I'm the one documenting so it's going to happen. But I think that sometimes when one archivist documents a community, right, that that representation can become really flattened. And some communities aren't accounted for at all since one archivist cannot represent all bodies, from different cultures, and socio-political contexts. And so in my conversation with Lucie, we spoke a little bit about how she as the archivist deals with that. And so, she was saying she includes the person archiving as much as possible, or members from that community as much as possible. But I almost feel like it's still not enough. At the end of the day, we cannot have one archivist. And I think that it's perhaps my own frustration coming from South Africa, we have so many different cultures, and so many languages, and all of them are so diverse. I mean, we have 11 official languages. That's a huge amount of official languages. Think about all the different cultures associated with those languages. So one person cannot ever understand the nuances and the complexities of every single object from different people from different cultures. And so that's what I really wanted to sort of interrogate, was what happens when it's not one archivist deciding how you want to be archived or how your specific community wants to be archived. So I am interested to hear your thoughts about the role of the singular archivist.

[00:59:30.09] Dr Schem Bader: The singular archivist. Well, we all have biases. So that's the first thing. We all have biases, even if we're convinced we don't have biases, we do. So an example of how adorable biases can be is… because not all biases are violent and horrific. And of course, some of them are just about preference and what we're interested in, what grabs up. That's the bias, it just grabs us. So I was digitizing this particular film that had been undigitised. And I had been donated a long time ago, and no one had had a chance to get to it. But basically, the whole film was about the sort of black Afro Cuban experience in Toronto. So the Afro Cuban experience in Toronto. And they were really interested in like indigeneity here as well, and filmed a lot of pride events. And so their biases, their bias with every single videotape that they took, and I digitised a lot of their material was really cute black Cuban men dancing. They really were very focused on that. And this is like hundreds of hours of tape. So they had one that was like, Dyke March 1994. And I thought, Oh, great. I really want to see their

perspective on the Dyke March. So they're on the Dyke March, and then looking at the dykes, the big fat dikes skinny little dykes, the big tits a little tense all the dyke. And then a black Cuban man is way in the distance, and you can see the camera zoom in and then just follow the guy. That moment encapsulated for me how we just get swept away with what we're interested in. It doesn't matter what we're trying to accomplish at the time. We're interested in what we're interested in. Hilarious, right, like these gay guys had no interest in the dyke march. They were just trying to document it because it's awesome. But the first chance they got to get distracted, they were like bye. So that's kind of a lovely anecdote. But I think it has to do with how we all sort of perceive the thing in front of us. So one person can't do everything. It's impossible. You need a team. You need a team with a single goal, but different variations of how to get there. So it stays innovative and creative.

[01:03:14.13] Emma Prior: How can we begin to archive these stories and make sure that they sort of nuances and complexities and discourses aren't lost?

[01:03:36.14] Dr Schem Bader: I think you're doing it right now, Emma. I think what you're doing is trying to reach over that gap. I think just doing what you're doing is doing it.

[01:03:55.24] Emma Prior: Thank you.

[01:03:59.28] Dr Schem Bader: You're a participant in making that happen.

[01:04:06.06] Emma Prior: Thank you. It was one of the things that was really important to me. One of the things I was finding frustrating is that not all of these things come with a story or any sort of background or voice from the person that it belonged to. [01:06:40.05] I can resonate with all of the objects. I know in some way, shape or form; they must have belonged to some queer person. It's a feeling sometimes, of being a bit disconnected. My last offocial question is what kinds of discourses do you think surround queer archival practices?

[01:07:22.01] Dr Schem Bader: And by discourses, are you talking about books? Or are you talking about theory?

[01:07:46.22] Emma Prior: When I'm asking you about the discourses, I think I'm referring to the complexities. Or maybe the question should be phrased differently. Maybe the question should be: what do you think are the inherent problems with queer archival practices?

[01:08:23.01] Dr Schem Bader: Well, I think the two main problems of queer archives is that they're living so they're constantly moving. The second problem is that archives function on a very high level, right brain, numeric, ethnographic approach. Its whole methodology. Archiving itself, its whole methodology is to take the whole of something and to bring it right down to a succession number. AP 2004 Dash slash nine, six, right? Done. The job of the archivist is done. the archivist is not there to critique. The archivist is not there to wander, the archivist is to preserve materials. What's the difference between this material and that material? Well, if this one hits the cold, it's going to deteriorate or whatever it is right. They're interested in materiality and its preservation. Queers are interested in an ever evolving political discussion of itself. These two things are incongruent. One is old fashioned, it's like this old fashioned, clunky machine, and the other one is brand new and they don't mix. So there's always going to be a problem. So how do we fix that problem? Maybe we don't fix that problem, maybe we have to accept the archives for that memory we know it is set out in a very particular, it's mapped out in a very particular way. And we have to adhere to its cryptography or whatever. We don't like that. We don't like being told, you have to conform to this thing. But that's what's happened for like, hundreds and hundreds of years. People have put their things in libraries and archives, and they have done the exact same thing that queer archives do. Yeah, things go through a category and a system, an archival system that's incongruent with queerness, that wants to be unruly and wild and critique itself. So I don't see a way of fixing it. Maybe other people do. But I'm not worried about it. I think it's good, I don't have that problem. Keep unpacking, and kicking it around. Maybe something else will develop, but I don't see a way out of it because of how things are stored or how materials need to be stored.

[01:11:57.10] Emma Prior: We were speaking about it a little bit earlier, as a sort of logic to the way that archives need to work, right? At the end of the day, we want to store these materials. And I think that that's one of the reasons. So with my project, there was a very conscious choice. My supervisor, and I spoke about it for a long time over weeks, about what was going to happen to the objects. There were a few things that were happening. The first was, do I have the means to take care of these objects? So do I have the knowledge base to know how to store and if something gets damaged, do I know how to repair or restore? I know my limitations and

repairing is not one of them. I had to put myself in the position of people I was hoping would contribute. I was hoping people would contribute these really vulnerable moments of their lives. And so one of the processes for me was expecting people to contribute these really vulnerable things. And I ended up contributing something because if I was expecting other people to contribute, I had to be able to do the same. I had to be able to also experience that level of vulnerability. So I contributed these little drawings that my partner did for our five year anniversary. So, I was thinking I would hate to let go of those, but at the same time, I'd want them to exist in the archive. So I was also thinking about this relationship of sometimes people don't always want to give stuff away, and especially if it's this new sort of archive that people haven't already heard of, now they're giving their really important things that speak to their really important lived experiences and now they're giving it away. Primarily the main reason was logistical. What was I going to do with these objects that was different from what GALA does or any other archive in the world does. That's what I was trying to critique. At the end of the day, they would have probably ended up in a box because how better do you protect them? So although there's this discourse around these things going into a box and then they die, there's a reason they need to be in the box. So we can look at them again in 150 years and say "cool look at this thing that happened in 2022". So I think that's one of the things I've been learning about a lot and coming to terms with. Even in my documentation process, when the exhibition came down, I took everything with me to document before returning. To be honest with you, the stuff sat there for a solid three days because how was this one person supposed to do everything? And then I get it, and think I shouldn't be so critical. So I think the nuances of exactly what it takes to keep an archive running and to keep these materials protected. Although it may seem counterproductive to what we're looking for in an archive. We're looking for... well for me at least, I'm looking for these objects that are alive. I think what you spoke about in terms of death in the archive is something that I need to think about a lot more. In all my research, nobody has had that perspective. So I think that's an interesting layer to add to the archive that the deaths are necessary and important. My actual last question for you, and something I don't know and I struggle with everyday... I can never seem to get it quite right. What makes an archive queer? When I was creating this project, there was this moment of defining what queerness is. What makes this archive queer and what kinds of people can contribute? There was this definition of queer that it is anybody who is different. Not necessarily sexual orientation or gender identitiy, but more about being different. That wasn't necessarily what I was looking for. Something that I find frustrating is that there aren't may queer spaces in the world just for queer people to be safe and to live. So that was frustrating for me. But at the same time I didn't

want to be exclusionary and not be inclusive of different bodies and different people. I then opened it up to the queer experience. So you don't necessarily have to identify as queer or as gay or bisexual, but talking about your queer experience. So if that was going to pride with your friends, or the first time you ever saw a gay person as a straight person. I think that queer archives seem to be based on sexual identity and gender identity. I'm just interested to hear from you what makes an archive queer.

[01:19:57.05] Dr Schem Bader: I think that you're right that often queer archives are about sexual identity and gender expression. And it usually, or always falls under a very specific politic. It's a left wing politic. So if we're talking about a queer archive... and I don't know what in South Africa, the term is there, but here we call conservative gays log cabin gays. And I don't see them as queer. I see them as gay men who are as bad as anybody else. They just fuck guys, but they're awful. We're not together. A right wing, white supremacist gay guy would never ever, ever be in my archive. So we're obviously saying that queer archives would not accept a white supremacist, neo Nazi, even if he was fucking a guy. So there's already built into a queer archive a very specific idea around what social justice is. So I would argue that queerness comes from a particular political slant. And Sara Ahmed, I don't know if you've read any of her stuff, queer phenomenology, but she talks about like queerness being as an orientation. We look at the horizon line and it's this straight, linear narrative. And if queerness comes in and out of that, it's a way of seeing within time and space. So I like the idea of queerness being about time and space and not functioning in a straight line. But it needs more than that. And it needs a politic of social justice behind it. What's going to keep the gay racists out of the queer archive? They're gay, so why can't they spew racist shit. They can't. The queer archive has no space for that.

[01:22:57.21] Emma Prior: I think that's a particularly interesting perspective to have. I've been frustrated by this definition of queer archives based on sexual orientation and gender identity and it sort of stops there. I haven't come across someone that I agree with and can say "yes, how do we take that idea further?". But I'm interested to hear your critiques or thoughts now that we've spoken a bit more about the project. I tried to sum it up in a nutshell. It's been a year long process. It's been really difficult to sum it up. It's like the dinner table conversation, and I feel like once you get down what you're doing in your masters in less than five minutes, then you've achieved something big. It's very much in a nutshell. I think there's nuances that I haven't even

processed yet. I'm interested to hear your critiques and where you think the project could have gone differently or better.

[01:28:55.04] Dr Schem Bader: I have nothing of the sort to say to you at all. It's perfect just the way it is. And I think you should celebrate your hard work and I'm really excited about all the things you're going to do in the future.

[01:29:18.14] Emma Prior: Thank you. That's such a good thing to hear.