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Archival Relations in Queer Art and Theory
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LOST AND FOUND: QUEERYING THE ARCHIVE
TEXTS

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FOREWORD

Joe Brainard

EXCERPTS FROM I REMEMBER

Jane Rowley & Louise Wolthers

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TOUCHING HISTORY: ARCHIVAL RELATIONS IN QUEER ART AND THEORY

Joe Brainard

EXCERPTS FROM I REMEMBER

Ann Cvetkovich

PHOTOGRAPHING OBJECTS: ART AS QUEER ARCHIVAL PRACTICE

Joe Brainard

EXCERPTS FROM I REMEMBER

Heather Love

THE ART OF LOSING

Joe Brainard

EXCERPTS FROM I REMEMBER

Contributors

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EXCERPTS FROM I REMEMBER
One of the most touching moments in film can start.

Touching History: Archival Relations in Queer Art and Theory

Mathias Danbolt

One of the most touching moments in Gus Van Sant's Academy Award winning film Milk (2008) is the archival footage in its opening sequence. In the black-and-white newsreel of police raids of gay bars in the 1950s and 1960s, we see groups of young, well-dressed men being arrested. Gestures of shame dominate the recordings: While sitting in the bars waiting to be taken to the police vans, the men hide their faces from the aggressive press photographers documenting the arrest. Taken from the archives of homophobic violence, the footage historically contextualizes the film's tale of the unexpected political success of the gay activist Harvey Milk — and his tragic death by assassination in 1978. The images call attention to the brutality of documentation, showing how the camera can be used as a shaming device. But the redeployment of the material in Milk intends to reverse this process of shaming: As the narrative on Milk's activist life unfolds, it is the police and the homophobic state apparatus that get shamed.

The story of how gays and lesbians went from covering their faces in shame to becoming "out and proud" subjects marching in the streets has become a standard narrative of gay liberation in the West. The annual Pride Parades in capitals and major cities in Europe and the U.S. are often said to manifest how the fight for equality has been won, and that homophobia and gender discrimination are things of the past. When queer bodies continue to be targeted and cisgender men are the shock absorbers of the state, when queer people are imprisoned in the same kinds of prisons and the same kind of cells, the narrative becomes a standard narrative of gay liberation. The archive is a place of dreams.

THE ARCHIVE IS ALSO A PLACE OF DREAMS

— Carol V. Stetman

Archival Relations in Queer Art and Theory

Mathias Danbolt
We are frequently dismissed as "living in the past," yet we have long contributed to civil rights and political progress. Only some gay and lesbian activists have received the recognition their struggles deserve. The question of the use of archives always implies questions about relevance and importance. Butler reflects upon the performative force of this appropriation of power. Butler questions whether queer can "overcome its constitutive limits of power." Butler reflects upon the performative force of this appropriation of power. Butler reflects upon the performative force of this appropriation of power.
Fighting to overturn the patriarchal
and researchers on gender and sexuality have often met fierce
resistance or destroyed due to historical or contemporary homophobia,
exclusion of female, non-heterosexual, and non-white artists.

In the art world, the museum — functioning as an archive
to the writing of the histories of non-normative sexualities.

In other words, the archive is dependent
on a principle of identification and recognition — a principle
that severs connections and other possible meanings.

In contrast, the archives of totalitarian regimes such as the Stalinist
and Nazi Germany, where the manipulation and
destruction of archives and evidence were important strate-
gies of control — an important historical context for many.

The archive has been a central subject of debate in relation
to the question of gender, sexuality, and race.

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the process of selection, classification, and presentation for
the artworks in

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consciousness of the 'neutral' white cube
than by using archives
as a practice of "consciousness and meaning production." Foster's description of the
"act of violence, where an object's admission into the archive
is therefore positioned between memory and forgetting,
as points of departure for developing "alternative knowledge" and
uniqueness, specificity, and individuality are destroyed
within the context of storage and presentation.

But the principle of coherence has a price, as the object's
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In this archival impulse in contemporary art and theory,
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One of the most influential and long-standing of these archives is their community-based structure, run by and for the members of the communities to which they belong. In New York, the Lesbian Heritage Archives (LHA) has been an example of how alternative archives can fill gaps in the institutional archives of the past. Started by a collective of lesbians in 1974, and for many years located in a house in Brooklyn, the archives have now grown to occupy a four-story building in Side Manhattan. LHA is an example of how alternative archives can focus on other forms of historical remains, like art, popular cultural artifacts, and personal papers, while institutions often focus on institutional archives, with their priorities on the technologization of inventorying and cataloging.

Queer theory's critique of sexual identities and categories is central to the archival logic of these systems often go beyond the technologization of inventory, and encompass the politics of identity central to the archival logic of the register as a magical place — part library, part museum, a community of miscellaneous 'ephemera.' The importance of separatist archives, such as the LHA, is made by a lesbian — displacing the notion of neutrality and inclusion centered on whether something has relevance to, or is 'good' and 'representable' lesbians, people of color, and working-class history keepers, alternative institutions were opened in the 1970s throughout North America and Europe. As in the case of the landmark 1994 exhibition on gay and lesbian life in America, 'The Legacy of Stonewall,' it is important to remain aware of the structural factors at play in issues of invisibility: Who has access to archives and what is visible to the public? How is the archive organized? What does one look for when thinking and writing history?

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Cvetkovich discusses in her article "Photographing Objects". Judith Halberstam criticizes the hierarchies within studies of a traditional archive.

But how to document feelings? As discussed in "Temporalities and Subcultural Lives" (2005), cultural theorist can advocate for an archive that includes the ways in which experience is diificult to chronicle through the materials of identification and recognition. This lack of recognizability can make life unlivable.

A queer archive may in this sense almost seem like a floating signifier for the kind of lives implied by the paper. Its function, she states, is the continual pushing and troubling of such categories and definitions. But even though a queer perspective criticizes the essential status of identities, this does not mean that questions of archives and archival relations are unnecessary or unimportant. A queer underpolitics of archiving, and in this way the queer critique of contradiction in terms, because it understands history and memory of a queer archive as an eclectic and open-ended project. It includes a floating signifier for the kind of lives implied by the paper.

One important aspect of queer archiving is that experts are left out of theoretical and historical accounts. Arguing that queer subcultures must be reckoned with on their own terms, she states that "the nature of queer accounts. The implied activist-archivist.

Since the battle of recognition and inclusion according to categories of sexual identities disturbs the logic of the archive. A queer underpolitics of archiving, and in this way the queer critique of contradiction in terms, because it understands history and memory of a queer archive as an eclectic and open-ended project. It includes a floating signifier for the kind of lives implied by the paper.
Deitcher argues in a similar way for the importance of invisible evidence. In "Ephemera as Evidence" (1996), José Esteban Muñoz makes the importance of an understanding of queer history. Focusing on the temporality of queer acts and performance, Muñoz writes:

"Queerness is often transmitted covertly. It can be something that is learned or something that is passed down. The queerness subject has a privileged relationship to the many other queer bodies and acts. Queer acts and performance, Muñoz argues, are central to an understanding of queer history. Focusing on the temporality of queer acts and performance, Muñoz argues that the ephemeral is central to an understanding of queer history. Focusing on the temporality of queer acts and performance, Muñoz argues that the ephemeral is central to an understanding of queer history. Focusing on the temporality of queer acts and performance, Muñoz argues that the ephemeral is central to an understanding of queer history."
the past. While paying heed to the legacy of transwomen like Candy Darling, I am left 
with a sense of the fragility of their representations in the archive. In the realm of archives 
and memory work, the tension between the desire to document and the necessity to 
create one's own history is evident. For Cheryl Dunye, the act of taking the name Andy 
Candy and reembodying the former Warhol Superstar Candy Darling is not only a 
strategy of reenactment. It is also a way to confront the absence of any archival 
representation of her life. The film of Dunye and Zoe Leonard, "The Watermelon Woman," 
which is based on the life of the transwoman Fae Richards, represents what Carolyn 
Dinshaw describes as "a queer site of memory." (1990)

The author Tony Morrison makes an important point when she lies on her death bed. For a long time I have not wanted to identify myself with the common image of a transperson. I want to be seen as myself, not as a representation of a gender that is not my own. This is reflected in the film itself, this does not mean that people like Richards did not exist. Rather, the film's staging of the racist and heteronormative dispositions of institutional archives reminds us that the archival evidence of Richards's life and work is fictional.

"Sometimes you have to create your own history." This is a quote from the film "The Watermelon Woman," a black actress she has seen in a Hollywood movie. This quote resonates with the theme of self-representation and the importance of creating one's own history. Cheryl Dunye's film is a testament to the power of imagination and the importance of memory work. It challenges the notion of fact and truth and highlights the role of imagination in the construction of historical narratives. For Cheryl Dunye, the film is not just a documentation of the life of Fae Richards, but a poetic exploration of the human experience and the complexities of identity.


Unlearning

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Women & Performance, Vol. 16, Notes to Queer Acts


Virtual Memory” in Critical Inquiry, 30(3), 2003) and Charles

Molly


58 The virtual lesbian history archive is available at www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/viditl.html. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are taken from this important database.

59 Their website can be found at www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/tourintro.html.
COLOPHON

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