

Queer activism begins at home: situating LGBTQ voices in National Trust historic houses

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I, Sean Curran confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

Despite a growing body of literature and practical examples of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) interventions in museums, there is a dearth of research in equivalent initiatives in historic houses, specifically in those owned and managed by the National Trust. My research aims to address that gap, by using a creative intervention in the form of an exhibition for LGBT History Month.

This queered action research involved curating an intervention, using a crowd-sourced exhibition, at the National Trust's Sutton House in Hackney, London. The exhibition and the process of curation is the primary case study in my thesis. The exhibition *126*, saw 126 LGBTQ identified volunteers submitting smartphone recordings of Shakespeare's Fair Youth Sonnets and short video portraits of themselves as contributors. These were edited into a film, and exhibited at the first ever 'Queer Season' at Sutton House in February and March 2015. While feedback from visitors and contributors was analysed, the video portraits formed the primary data in the thesis. The videos are presented as a means through which LGBTQ people have chosen to represent their queer identities in a National Trust property.

The results are noteworthy for the diversity of ways that LGBTQ people choose to visually signify their queer identities when given autonomy to do so. Evident in the videos were performed gender identities as well as rejections of gender, parallels with 'coming out' video blog tropes, direct responses to the themes of invisibility and representation, and a suggestion of the radical potential of vanity, and of 'selfies', in historic buildings.

My research concludes that queer identities, having been systematically repressed in historic houses, manifest themselves most authentically when the communities themselves are given the autonomy to represent their own queerness. The participants become stakeholders in facing the challenge of presenting LGBTQ identities to audiences unfamiliar with them, and take on a variety of roles, as co-curators, content creators and queer heritage activists.

Impact Statement

Queer encompasses a vast range of identities, and is an evolving and contested identifier. But queer also offers an alternative way of looking at things, of understanding things, and of reimagining things. My thesis offers new ways to conceptualise PhD research, and demonstrates an unwavering commitment to ensuring the construction of the PhD, as well as its content, is queer.

The National Trust was established for poor and working class people to have access to green spaces. The Trust now proudly boasts 'for ever, for everyone' as its mission statement, but questions still remain about who historic buildings are being saved for. Are they being rescued for the historic families that remain in them? Or for the public? And if the latter, who do the Trust consider the public to be? As my relationship with Sutton House developed throughout my research, my thesis became a call to arms of sorts that suggests that the most authentic display of LGBTQ lives and voices is one that situates the community itself at its centre, and advocates for co-production and co-curation of original material for marginalised communities.

In December 2016, the National Trust announced that it was to be running its first National Public Programme in 2017, and the theme would be *Prejudice and Pride*, looking at LGBTQ histories to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Sexual Offense Act, which was a partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales. The National Programming team deferred to us at Sutton House regularly when preparing, given our experience of delivering high quality experiences for LGBTQ audiences. Throughout the year, the programme revealed institutional homophobia and transphobia within the Trust, and while the Prejudice and Pride programme won the Third Sector Equality Award at the Pink News Awards in 2018, it demonstrated that this work was just the beginning, and that further work needed to be done to unpick some of the more subtle institutional problems.

Sutton House could and would not have embarked on a programme as ambitious as *Sutton House Queered* if it were not for the success and scale of *126*. The exhibition

shifted the way in which Sutton House operates. While it has always put community at the centre of its work, *126* has encouraged a move to using Sutton House as a platform, and an amplifier for marginalised voices. The ripple effect of Sutton House's practice is already internally being recognised, as Sutton House is championed as one of the Trust's diversity properties. The exhibition ultimately made it difficult for the National Trust to continue with business as usual when it comes to recognising and including marginalised communities.

As a result of the project, I served as an expert consultant on a number of ground breaking LGBTQ collecting projects and exhibitions, including *Twilight People: Stories of Faith and Gender Beyond the Binary* and *Speak Out! London*. I have shared my research internationally at museum conferences, including in New York, Taipei and Amsterdam, and part of my research has been published in *Museums and Activism* (Sandell & Janes, 2019).

I was also invited to speak about my research on the National Trust podcast series to accompany *Prejudice and Pride*, which had almost 20,000 downloads in its first year. Perhaps the most lasting legacy of the project are the videos created by LGBTQ people, and their lasting visibility beyond the scope of the exhibition. The videos, available to view on Vimeo, have had almost 7000 views.

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Terminology

LGBT(Q)

Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer identities. LGBTQ is my preferred acronym, but I will use alternatives, such as LGBT when referring to projects or writing that use said acronym. The acronym LGBTQ is, in itself, a troubling one, encapsulating a mass of communities not always on the same page 'often allied by very little other than the perceived "otherness" of their sexual desire' (Gabriel, 2010: 71). Avoiding 'simplistic, restrictive trans-historical essentialism' (Winchester, 2012: 143) is a troublesome endeavour, as is the necessary shift away from assumptions, stereotypes and the portrayal of LGBTQ communities as being nothing more nuanced than simply a group who have overcome prejudice. The museum must 'deconstruct its own authorial position' (2012: 145) to avoid endorsing potentially offensive attitudes or condescending the communities reflected, or indeed exhibition visitors who do not identify as LGBTQ.

Lesbian

A woman who is romantically and sexually attracted to women.

Gay

A man or a woman who is romantically and sexually attracted to members of the same sex. When I refer to gay and lesbian people, I will use gay to signify gay men. I avoid the term homosexual, unless quoting someone, as it is an increasingly unfashionable term in LGBTQ communities, due to its legal and medical connotations.

Bisexual

Someone who is attracted romantically and sexually to both men and women. For those who are also attracted to nonbinary people, I would use Queer.

Trans

Encompasses a wide range of transgender and gender nonconforming identities, including binary trans people (i.e.: those assigned male at birth who identify as female and vice versa), and nonbinary/genderqueer people, (i.e.: those who identify outside of and beyond the male/female binary).

Transsexual, like homosexual, is a dated term that I avoid.

Queer

Queer is a many-headed beast. Originally used as a pejorative term for LGBT people, suggesting strangeness, the term has since been reclaimed in academic and activist circles. It is still a problematic term for many in the LGBT community due to its negative origins. I will use queer in this thesis in three ways:

- As an umbrella term for LGBTQ people
- As its own distinct identity: for many the LGBT acronym does not sufficiently describe their identity and to be queer is to question binaries around sexuality and gender
- As a verb: to queer something means to subvert, challenge or make strange.

Matt Cook describes queer as being 'often used to describe people but also the way they did things, what they had around them, or how they looked at the world.... not utterly at odds with a set of presumed norms but not quite in accord either' (2014, 7-8).

They/them/their

When discussing the participants in *126* I use gender neutral pronouns, in respect of the fact that I am unsure of the gender identities of all of the contributors and also to recognise the increasing prevalence of gender neutral pronouns in LGBTQ communities, which I myself prefer.

Cisgender/ Cis

Someone whose gender identity is aligned with the one they were assigned at birth, i.e.: not trans.

Historic house

I will use 'historic house' to mean any building (of any size) that has served as a home, either to a family or an individual, that is now deemed to be of historical importance, be that by its link to a historical figure, its age, its architecture or its contents, and is now open to the public. I explore this definition in the second chapter.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This thesis has come together serendipitously, through chance, and through risking failure. Rather than having an end goal in mind, I have allowed myself to get lost (rattling my ghostly chains), embrace tangents, and to approach, perhaps, a more queer way of thinking about research. If my ambition is to undo some of the problematic structures of heritage interpretation, so too should I aim to undo some of the problematic structures of the Thesis. In *The queer art of failure*, Halberstam urges us to consider ‘the utility of getting lost’ of taking a Walter Benjamin-esque ‘ambulatory journey through the unplanned, the unexpected, the improvised, and the surprising’ (2011: 15-16).

This introductory chapter aims to:

- Orientate the reader by providing a narrative of my research process and the way in which my methodology unfolded
- Address the ways in which I have queered the PhD research process
- Provide a rationale for this approach

The research process

My initial research interests were around the ways in which museums, galleries and historic houses have engaged with LGBTQ histories through exhibitions and interpretation. I began thinking of LGBTQ histories in terms of a deficit or an absence, as something we can always presume to be missing from institutions such as museums. I was inspired by Carla Freccero’s assertion that queer identities are ‘ghostly’ (2007), which captures the challenge of revealing LGBTQ histories more satisfactorily than the word ‘hidden’, which is often used in discourse around marginalised identities. This led me to think about the ways in which queer people occupy and reclaim space.

While much of this research forms part of my literature review, my focus shifted when I became involved with Sutton House and Breaker’s Yard, a National Trust Tudor house in Hackney. Full time funded PhD research afforded me the luxury of pursuing volunteering, and having grown up in a family of National Trust members, I was

particularly drawn to Sutton House, which for me both typified and subverted what a National Trust historic house is. When I began volunteering in the summer of 2013, I was asked to be part of a project to redesign a black history month trail aimed at schools and families. The existing trail was dated and had been reused for many years, and the staff at Sutton House had successfully won some funding to redevelop it. My role entailed working with a black historian to research some black historical figures from London. I also assisted with the writing and mounting of the exhibition.

I was very quickly adopted as part of the team at Sutton House, and established a strong working relationship with the paid staff there. I decided to use this position to propose curating an exhibition to celebrate LGBT History Month in 2014. This would be the first of its type in Sutton House, and as we later discovered, a first for the National Trust. I was given free rein to develop the exhibition, and the result was *Master-Mistress: passion, desire and ambiguities in Shakespeare's sonnets*, which retrospectively, and for the purpose of the thesis, I consider as a pilot exhibition. At this stage I decided to shift the focus of my work to look solely at National Trust historic houses, and to make my own work around addressing these absences I perceived, a central case study in my thesis.

Master-Mistress was an understated intervention that took place in the four Tudor rooms of Sutton House. In each was a mock speaker designed by Judith Brocklehurst, and from them played readings of four of Shakespeare's Fair Youth sonnets read by LGBTQ people¹.

Based on feedback from *Master-Mistress*, I developed the idea further and proposed a follow up exhibition for LGBT History Month in 2015. In *126*, I crowdsourced readings of all of the Fair Youth sonnets from 126 LGBTQ people, accompanied by short ten second video portraits or "moving selfies". I had no distinct aim in mind apart from to address the issues that were identified in *Master-Mistress*, namely the lack of faces, or people, and the disembodied voices making it difficult to connect directly with LGBTQ

¹ I cover this exhibition and its follow up in greater detail in chapter five

people. I edited the films into one half hour film, and it was displayed on loop in the chapel at Sutton House. This was an ambitious experiment in an exhibition shaped completely around crowd-sourced material, all based on historic sonnets. The sonnets later became secondary to my methodology of understanding the impact of the exhibition. While *Master-Mistress* aimed to make audiences think about the ambiguities of Shakespeare's sexuality, *126* shifted the focus to the participants, and became more about creating a space for LGBTQ people to be visible in historic houses than it was about examining historical figures.

I carried out a short survey for participants of the exhibition, and just under half took part. The questions were around the ways in which perceptions of the National Trust had shifted through involvement with the project. It was after a conversation with one of the participants who had opted out of the survey because they did not think it was a sufficiently queer methodology, that I realised that rather than collecting additional data, I should be taking advantage of the data I had already collected- 126 audio files and videos. I decided not to analyse the recordings of the sonnets, and instead to focus on the videos. The short films were timely, just two years after the word 'selfie' was Oxford Dictionary's Word of the Year, and at a time when social media as a platform for building and nurturing queer relationships and communities was blossoming. The films also served as an interesting insight into the ways the participants had chosen (whether consciously or not) to display or perform their LGBTQ identities. After writing transcriptions, or rather descriptions of the things I could observe and infer from the films, I identified themes through which the participants were expressing their identity.

This exhibition, and the volume of participants I engaged with, was undoubtedly a key factor in me later being employed as a full time member of staff at Sutton House. As well as being the beginning of my research, *Master-Mistress* and *126* became the beginning of a shift in approaches to community engagement and interpretation at Sutton House.

Queering the PhD

I began, on the suggestion of my supervisor, by considering my work as action research. This was a logical starting point, given my unique role as researcher *and* volunteer representing the institution. Action research requires a dual role of practitioner and researcher, where the aims are to improve learning and workplace practices and to advance general knowledge and theory. To apply this to my own work I would have to consider a third identity, while I was definitely a practitioner as a volunteer curating an exhibition, and a researcher, I also approached this research as a queer person, for whom this research was both very personal, and highly important.

Action research also requires that the researcher is reflective about their own practice, and also about the practice of others, with a view to the findings of their research influencing others. Action research is distinct from other social science methodologies, as the researcher's gaze is turned on themselves as practitioner, as opposed to being outwards on other practitioners. The researcher, therefore, is never researching a context that they themselves are not part of. Based on McNiff and Whitehead's summary of the process (2011: 8-9), action research consists of the following things:

- assess what already happens
- identify concern/s
- think of potential solution
- try it
- gather data throughout
- establish procedures for making judgements about progress
- test the validity of claims to knowledge
- modify practice in light of the evaluation

The process is not just about finding something out, but about enacting change during, not after the research process. There are two types of action research, 'interpretive action research', in which an external researcher watches and reports on what other practitioners are doing, and 'self study action research', 'first person action research'

or 'living theory action research', which assumes that the practitioner evaluates their own contributions to practice. Perhaps mine is a combination of the two, my role as insider/outsider, is not a clear and distinct binary, but my own experiences of being a queer person visiting historic houses forms an important part of both my interrogation of others' practice as well as my own. I look at both what *I* or *we* are doing, as well as what *others* are doing.

Although a very personal research methodology, action research is naturally collaborative research, relying on the support and expertise of institutions, staff, artists and other contributors and experts. The ultimate aim of my research is to improve practice, to improve my own understanding, to develop my own learning, and to influence and inform others' learning. The researcher in action research is both practitioner and agent, and aims to improve learning with social intent.

While it served an interesting way in to considering methodology, action research, as defined by McNiff and Whitehead, seemed too prescriptive and procedural to accurately, or at least completely, describe my approach. Baker (2011: 35) argues that to reduce a research method to a universally understood definition has the potential to 'codify and limit the range of methodologies and knowledge on which it draws'. In line with the rest of my thesis, my research methodology is intentionally open-ended, developmental and messy. I wanted both the content, and the methodology of my research and my practice to be queer, and in queering the thesis, I found it useful to reject the recognised recipe for a piece of doctoral research. I did not include research questions because I did not start with any, I let the unfolding nature of my relationship with Sutton House and the opportunities I was given, or sought out, dictate the direction of my research. I aimed, at first, to collect data in a way that the academy recognises as valid, through a survey, but rejected this in favour of using the material created by participants in my practice as data. I decided to make mention of this failure to use the survey data I had collected, as it seemed fraudulent to attempt to present a polished piece of research when I had set out to be experimental. Following a traditional route for writing a thesis struck me as inauthentic when dealing with

messy and experimental research, and following a singular methodology would not sufficiently capture the organic evolution of my research.

Urry and Law argue for a review and an overhaul of the social sciences. The social sciences partake of the character of the social world, as the world changes, so too must the practice of the social science researcher, which Urry and Law argue currently still reproduce 'nineteenth century, nation state-based, politics' (2003: 1). Urry and Law argue that research methods in the social sciences are performative: 'they have effects; they make differences; they enact realities; and they can help to bring into being what they also discover' (2003: 3).

What might a queer approach to action research look like? Gloria Filax makes a case for politicising action research through queer theory, and argues that to do so 'makes it possible to for participants to interrogate their own identifications and, as importantly, the significance of these identifications to social hierarchies of oppression' (2006: 144), though what this might actually look like in practice, she does not explore. She notes that queer research is influenced by poststructuralism, which 'rejects the stability or fixedness of categories that are normally assumed in social science research' (2006: 141). Indeed her whole approach to queering action research could be summed up by her reflection as to 'whether one can be queer and scholarly at the same time' (2006: 141).

While not explicitly practice-led, I found it more useful to consider my research as practice-informed. Smith and Dean state that in practice-led research, both the work of art (or in my case, exhibition/s) and the process of creating it are means through which to generate 'insights which might be documented, theorised and generalised' while also acknowledging that it is the process of documentation, writing and theorisation that legitimise the research (2009: 7). In other words, the practice and the product of that practice do not constitute research in and of itself.

In Travis S. K. Kong's research into older gay men in Hong Kong, he notes how his research 'transformed' (2017: 257) into participatory action research (PAR), and

indeed how the research itself was transformative for both researcher and participant. What began as a study of older gay men using oral history interviews, became a community building process with a legacy beyond the scope of the research, in the form of a publication, an exhibition and a regularly meeting community group. Kong notes that:

Queer-informed PAR should centre on the lived and local experiences of queer people, focus on participation and collaboration between researchers and participants, and be reflexive and reflective throughout the process. Such an approach can bring about social transformation through the empowerment of participants, the production of new knowledge and the resulting impact on the LGBTQ community and general public (Kong, 2017: 269).

While this thesis may seem to be lacking in the familiar landmarks of the PhD genre. This introduction has aimed to help rationalize this approach, and indeed to help the reader navigate their way through the research journey.

CHAPTER 2

Hunting for ghosts: navigating and preserving queer spaces

MISS PARKINS: It's so cold in here.
DR RHODES: We've put heaters downstairs but there's no central heating.
MISS PARKINS: I didn't mean that. It feels... I don't know... sad.
DR RHODES: Rooms aren't sad, Miss Parkins. People are.

Woman in Black 2: Angel of Death (2014)

In 2001 I went to the cinema with my then girlfriend to see gothic haunted house film *The Others* (dir. Alejandro Amenábar). This was three years before I came out as queer, and unsurprisingly, the film stuck with me long after the relationship did. For me, *The Others* captures everything I love about the horror genre; the house in which it is set is its principle character, both antagonist and protagonist, yet it is shaped entirely by its intersecting pasts. Forgive the spoiler, but the reveal is that Grace Stewart (Nicole Kidman) and her two children are not being haunted by ghosts from the past, as is inferred, but *they* are haunting new tenants in the house from the present. They are dead, and in turn their three kindly, but unsettling serving staff are not their living contemporaries, but ghosts from a generation before, lost to tuberculosis. The close of the film begs questions about how the layers of generations can negotiate a way to coexist in the house they have all at some point called home. The remote country house in Jersey becomes a sort of purgatory, where ghosts upon ghosts overlap, interfere with and haunt each other. When I think about my tastes in literature and film, it is often the house that I remember most vividly: Manderlay (*Rebecca*); the Overlook Hotel (*The Shining*); Wuthering Heights; Satis House (*Great Expectations*); Eel Marsh House (*Woman in Black*); Hill House (*The Haunting of Hill House*). In each case tiers of the past exist, often discordantly and uneasily, alongside the present.

I begin with talking about ghosts in order to suggest where my interest in historic houses may have come from, but also to draw parallels with identifying lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) narratives in historic houses, which at times often feels like a ghost hunt. When working with the National Trust for the Unravelled project, artist and curator Matt Smith would scour the family trees of aristocratic families "hunting for the hidden homos" (2012). LGBTQ visitors to public history sites are often seeking ghostly remains of identities to which they themselves can relate. Terry Castle observes that lesbian identity is inherently ghostly or apparitional (1995).

Women have, in recent history, been expected to suppress their sexuality, especially so when that sexuality is at odds with heteronormativity. While this is similar for all LGBTQ people, Castle notes that lesbianism and lesbian history is drenched, more thoroughly, in ideas of 'ghostliness' and 'ineffability' (1995: 30) than gay history. Carla Freccero (2007) asserts that queer history allows the possibility of the past existing in, and haunting the present and Oram takes this idea further, observing that queer ghosts of the past are informed by our own contexts, suggesting that 'public history is used as a means of culturally understanding the present' (2011: 203). Baudelaire, rather more poetically, notes that the 'ghostly piquancy' of the past 'will recapture the light and movement of life, and become present' (1972 [1863]: 392). Often LGBTQ figures are present in historic houses, but not their LGBTQ lives or identities. Herbst argues that given the historic house's focus on a single figure or their family, interpretation is prone to the 'tendency to evaluate the individual over his or her context' (1989: 99). How can we begin to understand our place in the present, if there is little or indeed no sign of us in the past? The notion that LGBTQ identities are rendered invisible in official historical records might beg the question as to whether or not LGBTQ people leave a footprint? Do we occupy space as ghosts? Or at least experience different ways of taking up space?

This chapter aims to do two things. 1: *to explore the ways in which LGBTQ people experience spaces, places and the home*, and 2: *to begin looking at the pastime of visiting historic houses*. By the end of it, I hope it will be clear how the two will meet throughout the thesis, and in my curatorial practice at Sutton House, a National Trust property in Hackney, which forms the centrepiece of my research.

I will begin this introductory section with a slightly tongue-in-cheek unpicking of a recent viral fad that graced the gay dating app Grindr from 2011 onwards, as a way of understanding potential queer ways of taking up space that has been denied to LGBTQ people, and to situate my thoughts about how queer people are positioned in, and experience, the heritage and public history world. I will use the lens of 'cruising' to take a sideways glance at what it might mean to claim ownership of or membership in dominant histories. To do so let me take you on a stroll...

... though pretend I'm not here. You're on Clapham Common, it's the mid 1960s and the dusk sky is heavy and slate-grey. You are a man, a bachelor of 40 something, and the route you are taking is not your usual one. You take a circuitous path, turning and ducking, occasionally loitering, anxiously and shiftily stepping into shadows cast by buses passing the beams from streetlights. Your eager stalling pays off, and a chap moving in a similarly tentative way, approaches from the opposite direction. A shirt unbuttoned at the top and a heavy brow, he swaggers confidently between nervous ducks. If it were lighter perhaps you would see the glint from his ring finger. Your eyes linger on each other for a moment, and then dart away. You walk away and turn to see that he turns too. Another brief moment of eye contact, a hint of a knowing smile. Then he's gone.

Cruising for community

In his account of cruising in New York and London, Mark Turner suggests that cruising is not just about looking for nameless and faceless sex, but rather about forging brief and fleeting connections through 'backward glances', which constitute 'an act of mutual recognition amid the otherwise alienating effects of the anonymous crowd' (2003: 9). This approach to cruising; of knowing nods and flickers of queer mutual recognition is echoed by Alison Oram's account of lesbians congregating at historical sites such as Sissinghurst Castle, Kent (home of the bisexual author Vita Sackville-West) where, during the 60s and 70s, radical lesbian groups utilised the claiming of presumed queer historical figures as 'as an important tool in their armoury' (2011: 195) for activism, visibility and community building.

This sort of cruising is not exclusive to the times when same sex desire was frowned upon by both society and the law. Instead it is a timeless, ageless phenomenon that crosses class, race and alternative sexualities; a phenomenon difficult to find appropriate language for, as it is an inherently queer way of experiencing place, and of community building.

Turner notes that cruising is always site specific, primarily in urban spaces², and forms a vital part of sexual and social geographies (2003: 11) that inform a queer present located firmly amongst the ghosts of the queer past. It is the precise moment when a public space becomes, however briefly, a private one; a moment that is at odds with the 'labyrinthine and centreless' city (Wilson, 1992: 2). This reading of cruising opens up a less familiar, less certain line of dialogue and historical inquiry. He asserts that:

Queer approaches to writing and other cultural production seek less to define a specific and agreed upon historical narrative than to offer possible, contingent ways of reading the past in order to engage with the present in ways that do not rely on normative ideas and behaviours. Indeed, to 'queer' history is to challenge, undermine, refute and reconfigure the very notion of norms in 'history' (Turner, 2003: 45-46).

The act of cruising, when exposed to such a reading, is an uncertain one. A harmless double-take, a case of wrongful recognition or lingering glance can all be misconstrued. These are the ambiguities which queer readings allow for, expect and acknowledge. The key in queer critique is the continued disruption of understanding.

Likewise, it is crucial to also echo Turner's distinction between the cruiser and the flâneur. The concept of strolling and observing as part of a crowd in urban spaces, first identified in Walter Benjamin's analysis of Charles Baudelaire's essay *'The painter of modern life'* (1999 (1971): 35-66), originally referred to Paris, but the term 'flâneur' has since been usurped, defining the act in any city. Benjamin identifies the flâneur as one who 'goes botanizing on the asphalt' (1999 [1971]: 36). The flâneur is a man who can 'reap aesthetic meaning and an individual kind of existential security from the spectacle of the teeming crowds' (Tester, 1994: 2), a kind of connoisseur or detective of humanity; the 'personification of contemporary urbanity' (Parkhurst Ferguson, 1994: 22). Elizabeth Wilson describes flâneurs as those who 'relished the kaleidoscope of urban public life and had created from it a new aesthetic, perceiving a novel kind of beauty in streets, factories and urban blight' (1992: 5).

² Of course, cruising does exist outside of urban spaces, but historically LGBTQ people have migrated towards cities where greater anonymity and increased freedoms were possible.

I would argue that the cruiser and the flâneur are only slightly at odds; the cruiser is a less confident, but also less passive flâneur. Flânerie becomes cruising once reciprocated by another. The passionate curiosity, the child-like consumption of the crowd around them, the modesty and humility of the unseen observer and the relishing of being 'incognito' (Baudelaire, 1972 [1863]: 400) are consistent to both. The key difference is of course that to be a flâneur is to be someone who belongs, who has ownership over the spaces of modernity. To cruise however is to exist covertly in a postmodern space; as an outsider. In this regard, the cruiser is akin to a woman in the city. Wilson states that the art of flânerie is a resolutely male one, which has contributed to the rendering of the presence of women in urban spaces problematic³. She notes that women in the city are regarded as out of place or in danger⁴, as for example, the 'fallen woman' (1992: 6). That said, Wilson remarks that the city 'undermines the masculinity of its scale and structure with 'its enclosing embrace' (1992: 7).

Turner's critique of cruising is in turn a critique of the city, where 'spaces of modernity are up for grabs'⁵ (2003: 46), serving as host to a multiplicity of experiences that are always contested. Turner suggests that far from merely being a need to indulge sexual impulses, cruising is a more fleeting experience, where 'the intention is to find in the passing glances in the streets that person whose gaze returns and validates their own' (2003: 59). Essentially, the cruiser is looking for recognition, the suggestion of a community, and for validation.

³ Similarly, the presence of women in museums has been seen as problematic as well. In the US, PT Barnum's American Museum, Lower Manhattan (1841-1865) was 'one of the few places that middle class women could go alone without censure' (Meecham and Sheldon, 2009). Ahead of its time in many ways, the combination of entertainment and education featuring a counter-hierarchical selection of exhibits, including artworks, natural history displays and "fraudulent displays" (such as a mermaid), Phineas Taylor Barnum (1810-1891) rejected class distinctions in his visitors, and had select entry times for non-white visitors, a bold move for the time.

⁴ This critique likely overlooks working class women.

⁵ Modernity is 'the social experience of living in the modern world' (Meecham and Sheldon, 2005: 15), an experience, as defined by Marshall Berman as being 'of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities and perils' (1993: 15). Modernity is a condition that has resulted from capitalism, the movements defined as modernist are the thoughts and practices within the physical parameters of modernity.



Figure 1.1 Wristbands from the Sexuality Late 2013, used with permission of the Science Museum, London

The Science Museum, London, held a Sexuality-themed 'Late' in May 2013, in which they introduced a tangible element of cruising. Upon entering, visitors could choose to pick up and wear one of four different wristbands (or a combination of more than one), each a different colour, and each with a label relating to sexual preference ('likes girls', 'likes boys', 'likes both', 'prefers not to say'). The vast majority of visitors chose to identify themselves with these wristbands, and the result was one of people literally wearing their sexuality on their sleeves. It was a surreal experience of eyes flickering between faces and wrists, friends nudging friends and pointing out other people's wristbands, humans becoming museum objects to be admired, cruised, but not touched.

The idea of a museum as a site for being *seen* is not a new idea. The original plans for the Millbank Penitentiary, which became Tate Britain, was based on the principles of Jeremy Bentham's Panoptican principle. The Panopticon, originally conceived by Jeremy Bentham in the late 1700s as a proposed architectural structure for prisons, comprised a circular space containing a series of isolated compartments that surround a central raised column topped by an authority figure who can see all inmates, while

inmates cannot see one another. This was later applied to schools, hospitals, asylums and other institutions based around a hierarchy of power, including libraries, museums and art galleries. The Panopticon, a 'marvellous machine' (Foucault, 1986 [1977]: 202), enforces power structures by separating the inmates, patients, pupils and visitors around an all seeing nucleus, the desired effect being 'to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power' (1986 [1977]: 201). Foucault notes that the 'crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities' (1986 [1977]: 201). This renders the observed and incarcerated an 'object of information, never a subject in communication' (1986 [1977]: 200).

In Bentham's proposal for the Panopticon principle in an education context, he uses language not unlike that used to describe prison and prisoners, stating that the structure 'facilitates the constant inspection of pupils by the master' (1983 [1817]: 442) thus ensuring fewer "offences" committed by pupils, allowing punishment to be lighter. The other benefits he identified have an Orwellian ring to them, some 200 years prior to the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, including the heightening of security, stealthy surveillance of pupils who believe they are unseen, and time-saving for the master (1983 [1817]: 106).

When Millbank Penitentiary opened in 1817, a room containing various instruments of torture was set aside as a museum, Bennett argues that 'the exhibition of past regimes of punishment became, and remains, a major museological trope' (Bennett, 1997: 95). Brandon Taylor highlights parallels between the prison and the gallery, which offer 'a Foucauldian reading of the art museum that underscores the interpellation of an unsuspecting mass in regimes of surveillance and social control' (1994: 21). If the queer museum is one that allows and invites interaction (and dare I say *cruising*) between visitors, then the balance from surveillance (the Panopticon) to spectacle must be restored.

Cruising for Art took place in the Institute of Sexology exhibition at the Wellcome

Collection, London, in December 2014. In a more overt form of museum cruising than the aforementioned wrist bands at the Science Museum, visitors could opt in to be cruised for art with intimate one on one performances by taking and displaying a handkerchief, as a nod to the hanky code⁶.

Eight performance artists occupied the exhibition space, and made connections with the consenting strangers through eye contact, and took some to a private space for one-on-one performances. Some of the artists were dressed extravagantly, others looked like other museum visitors. The handkerchief became a currency of sort to exchange for experiences with the performance artists. The performances would be varied, according to curator Brian Lobel, 'some will be funny, some provocative, some personal, some sexual, some simple, some meditative' (Lobel, 2015). The "rules" outlined at the beginning of the experience were as follows:

- #1 Cruise with your eyes, not with your voice.
- #2 You may be and most certainly will be touched.
- #3 If you see people already engaged, you may watch from a distance, but it's impolite to join them without invitation.
- #4 The order which the Cruisers choose for their participants is based on eye contact and their personal desires. Do not form a queue.
- #5 Don't let the official Cruisers have all the fun. Try it by yourself with a punter of your choice.
- #6 You may leave empty-handed. Try to take that pent up excitement somewhere else constructive, and with someone that you met in #5.

In *Sex Museums: The Politics and Performance of Display*, Tyburczy positions display as a choreography of spectators' bodies and addresses the ways in which museums are theatrical spaces. She argues that museums become contact zones between bodies and objects, and unpicks the ways in which the navigating of bodies in spaces has the potential to make meaning. The spectator in turn is positioned as a performer, undoing notions of passive spectatorship, and challenging the assumption that the

⁶ The motif of the handkerchief was developed as part of a "sexual semiotic" (Fischer, 1977: 15) for gay men, which allowed a visibility within the covert parameters of *those in the know*. The colour, and placement of the handkerchief either in the left or right pocket, all indicated preferred sexual practices, as a way of gay men determining 'who to cruise' (1977: 20). Hal Fischer, who undertook a photographic study of so called *Gay Semiotics* in the late 70s, was also sure to point out that sometimes people carried handkerchiefs to treat 'nasal congestion' (1977: 8), highlighting a rather obvious flaw in the nature of such signifiers.

benchmark for a museum spectator is a white heterosexual male, that any depictions of bodies or sex are outside of *his* frame of reference are in some way 'other'.

Tyburczy's work attempts to unsettle the ways in which museums "participate in the production of emotions and ideas about the people who inhabit the margins of citizenship and about the parameters of acceptable speech" (2016: xvii).

Due to my own awkwardness, I declined an invitation to the event, but my friend Emma shared her experience:

I took the handkerchief and wore it around my wrist. It was difficult to identify who was cruising, who was being cruised, and who had opted out of the experience and was purely visiting the exhibition, or were otherwise oblivious to the performances taking place around them. I took a seat in front of Recherche Three (2013) a looped film made by Sharon Hayes, in which trans and lesbian students from an all-women's college in western Massachusetts discuss their attitudes to sex. I was more focused on the film than I might have otherwise been, but still very conscious of a beautiful woman in a cat suit and tall heels who was trying to catch my gaze. I looked at her briefly and she came and sat by my side so I tried to refocus on the film, as her eyes bore into me and she rested on her hand, which was as close to my bum as it could be without touching. Perhaps because I didn't reciprocate she moved on after watching the film with me for a short while.

The purpose of the performances was not clear, but the whole experience was not prescriptive, and perhaps I found it easy to interact with because I am familiar with performance art. I recognised the artist who cruised me. I did engage with the space in a different way than I might have done without the handkerchief around my wrist. It allowed for something more intimate in the moment. The space seemed darker than usual exhibitions, and as such the glass cases became semi-reflective, so half of the time I was looking at the contents of the case, and the other half I was looking to see who was behind me. There were cases I might have revisited, but once I had followed the circuit of the exhibition, I felt unable to go back.

We know quite plainly why cruising has been a necessary facet of queer life in the past: The colour coded pocket handkerchiefs and green carnations⁷ have served as physical flashes of mutual recognition in times when covertness and stealth were paramount, but why is cruising still necessary in a post-Wolfenden⁸ UK? What happens in the 21st century when cruising increasingly takes place not in the physical world but in digital spaces?

The digital cruiser

Let me propose to you a second scenario. Again you are a man, though this time you are perhaps a little younger. It is the present day and you are in a coffee shop. It is lunchtime and your reading is disturbed by a distinct trill from your iPhone, a sound quite familiar to those in the know. You open up the Grindr app to the usual matrix of faces and torsos, one of them has acknowledged you (or at least your profile picture) with a simple 'hot'. Apparently he is just 244 metres away (you have a furtive glance around you) and his photograph is of a handsome face, it's self-taken – you can see his arm holding up his smartphone. You respond with a 'you too' and a 'how are you?'. You never hear back, but then you didn't expect to.

If the digital flâneur is someone who passively looks through Facebook pictures of friends of friends, or scrolls through reams of tweets from strangers, the digital cruiser is a Grindr user, or a user of any number of similar websites and apps in which your involvement is determined by your identity, or by what (or who) you hope to find.

The Grindr app was launched in 2009. Aimed at gay, bisexual, and bicurious men who

⁷ The wearing of a green carnation to symbolise being gay was popularised by Oscar Wilde and a 1894 novel based loosely on the life of Wilde by Robert Hichens called *The Green Carnation* was later used in the prosecution for his “gross indecency” trial. It continues to be used as an LGBTQ signifier. Artist Matt Smith used the motif of the green carnation in his *Queering the museum* interventions at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (Horn, Winchester and Smith, 2010) to signify where he had inserted art works or identified queer themes, including Jacob Epstein's *The Archangel Lucifer* sculpture (1944-1945), which has the body of a man and the face of a woman, which Smith draped with a cloak of carnations.

⁸ The Wolfenden Report, named after Lord Wolfenden, chair of the committee, or the Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, was published in September 1957 and recommended that homosexual behaviour between consenting adults should be legalised. The act became law in 1967.

are looking to meet up with or chat to others, the app is a geo-social networking tool that uses GPS technology to display other users according to their proximity. The user profile is sparse, consisting of a single user-uploaded image, a display name, a short blurb of up to 120 characters and details such as age, height, weight and ethnicity. Users can chat with other users, and send further images and a map of their exact location. The undertone of Grindr is that it is an app one uses to find sex, and that users looking to establish more serious relationships should perhaps look elsewhere. My argument is that having a presence on Grindr parallels the knowing glances of cruising; that Grindr too is about recognition, community building, and validation.

I will look now at an uncomfortable phenomenon where Grindr intersects with heritage display: the recent trend of Grindr profile images featuring the *Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* (inaugurated in 2005) in Friedrichstadt, Berlin. I argue that rather than being an offensive trend, it is emblematic of a desire for queer people to locate themselves, in this case physically, within broader historical narratives; for their backward glances to be returned by a wider audience.

In late 2011 a blog called 'Totem and Taboo' (Afuta and Cukierman, 2011) went viral by highlighting the disproportionate amount of users whose profile image included themselves against the backdrop of the *Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*⁹. The composition of these images vary; some users are simply standing in front of the monument, others sitting or leaning against it with a pensive look on their faces. Other users pose more seductively; topless or in muscle vests, flexing and pouting. Was this flood of potentially contentious images an unusual coincidence that has since been mimicked by other users? To what extent are these users appropriating images of suffering in order to "hook up"? Is this an act of defiance or indignation in the often overlooked persecution of gay people in the Holocaust?

Grindr founder Joel Simkhai responded to this trend positively, saying that 'as a Jew and an Israeli, I'm deeply moved by how users are coming together as a community on

⁹ The memorial was completed in late 2004 and was designed by Peter Eisenman and Buro Happold.

Grindr to share and inspire others to take part in the memory of the Holocaust'. He goes on to claim that this demonstrates the potential for Grindr to be a 'platform for mobilizing others to promote positive messages for the gay community' (AbbaNibi.com, 2011). Likewise, the founders of the blog, both Israelis, Zion Afuta and Boris Cukierman expressed delight that 'this unexpected tribute came from our own kind – gay people' (AbbaNibi.com, 2011).

However, early in 2013, Grindr press representatives distanced themselves from this phenomenon by issuing a statement that read 'what started as users expressing themselves on a topic not often discussed in social networking profiles, has now become disrespectful. We strongly encourage our users to engage in a respectful manner and honor the memory of those who perished in other ways outside of the app' (D'Addario, 2013).

Is this movement a plea for queer voices not to be forgotten? The intention of genocide, after all, is to silence and to erase, as noted in Martin Sherman's 1979 play *Bent*, in which Greta the drag queen sings: 'Streets of Berlin/ Will you miss me?/ Streets of Berlin/ Do you care?/ Streets of Berlin/ Will you cry out/ If I vanish/ Into thin air?' (1979: 18-19) before the inevitable raid on the Berlin gay scene and mass arrests of men who had sex with men.

Perhaps the vast bleak structures of the memorial echo the facelessness and anonymity of modern-day cottaging in the digital age. I argue that these Grindr pictures represent a desire to populate public history with a queer presence and to be seen and be situated within a historical framework, seeking ownership of shared experiences. Visibility for queer people is, after all, still absolutely political.

The profile picture in gay online culture is valuable currency, a 'membership card' of sorts (Mowlabocus, 2010: 206). In his dissection of the role of images on gay dating site Gaydar, Mowlabocus highlights their power in identity formation and how they allow users to confirm an 'investment in gay online culture' (2010: 201). Gay digital visibility echoes the nature of being seen in actual queer venues: simply being seen

within them ‘confers a queer status upon the subject without further verbal or non-verbal cues’ (2010: 203). It is an act of “coming out” to be seen in these physical and virtual spaces.

While photography at tourist sites has the potential to prevent visitors from being truly *present*, or an obstruction that stops the visitor from directly engaging with the space, so too, according to Urry and Larsen, does it involve ‘the democratisation of many forms of human experience, both by turning everything into photographic images and enabling anyone to photograph them’ (2011: 177) and, I would add, enabling anyone to insert themselves physically into them. While Sontag (1979) asserts that tourists put the camera between themselves and whatever it is they photograph, this queer intervention into non-queer spaces is a case of putting oneself between the camera and the monument: a bit of amateur, corrective doctoring, a way of saying ‘look, I am here’. The subject of the picture occupies a space from which others have vanished into thin air, as Greta the drag queen foretold.

Binnie and Klesse describe how the ‘conceptual distinction between tourism and activism has become blurred’ (2011: 158), they challenge the assumption that tourist practices are apolitical. I propose that queer pilgrimages are embedded in queer culture, but furthermore that the presence and visibility of queer people in non typical queer places may actually be a form of activism.

Queer people are rightly no longer content with this stealth-like appropriation of spaces, and instead take to new media such as Grindr to insert themselves into a more mainstream understanding of culture and history. Perhaps this is a new form of cultural cruising, in which the cruiser engages a moment of recognition and validation, not with another person, but with a space. Perhaps this is a new form of activism, a new way of saying “we’re here and we’re queer”. Digital culture has allowed a voice for queer people in ways not seen before; LGBTQ people are sharing their experiences more candidly than ever. I will explore this in greater depth in the analysis of my Sutton House project in chapter 4.

Mapping moments

When I was in my early teens, I visited London with my parents and my sister. We spent a day in Camden, which was and is a far cry from my hometown of Sunderland. I remember little about the day, except for one fleeting moment. I spotted someone crossing the road near Camden Lock, and was struck with a very unfamiliar feeling. I couldn't determine this person's gender, they were tall and statuesque, dressed outrageously, with rips in their jeans just below their buttocks. Their hair was large and bleached and they looked content. They spotted me too, an awkward, skinny boy. A car passed between us and they were gone. This brief encounter has stuck with me as a real moment of hopefulness. I saw someone that I instantly identified with, I recognised myself as much as I recognised their contentedness. Since most LGBTQ people are raised in heterosexual families, or by heterosexual people, queerness is a culture that must be learnt after fleeing the nest. This familiarity, this recognition I experienced in Camden in the late 1990s is one that is potentially life-saving for people who feel like they have no hope, or no cultural context to situate themselves in. Even after living in London for seven years, when I think of Camden, I think of that mysterious stranger, and that millisecond of community that we built together in a single glance. E.G. Crichton, who works with artists to uncover queer stories in the archive notes that:

Queer people seem to wander in particular ways. We find each other through underground routes of site and recognition. Sometimes we migrate to strange cities, looking for signs; sometimes we are free, sometimes in grave danger. We might nestle into safe zones, with others or alone; we might live publicly, and risk everything, or we might create elaborate masks. We have nothing to declare, yet everything. We look for references, we look for a past; sometimes we invent one (Crichton, 2013: 51).

Imagine, if you will, a room full of things. There is more to it than this of course, but essentially it is just a room full of stuff. The room itself is important. It has been conferred with a sacred status, a status of authority, knowledge and truth. The things are important too. Each is assumed to be significant because of its being in the room. How the things are arranged is important too, both in relation to the room, and in how they converse with the other things. We also know, by being in the room, that these

things have been carefully considered, and purposefully arranged, by someone we presume to be an expert. When we begin to trouble the existence of this room, we see that the things within it are all competing. We also notice the presence of things that are not even in the room, but contest their absence. We notice ghosts of humans, bickering to be heard above the din of the hallowed silence in the room. To talk about space is to talk about the things in that space, the things that are not in that space, and to talk about the people who encounter, or do not encounter that space. Foucault argues that 'the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space' (2006 [1967]: 203).

Foucault's notion of the heterotopia, or 'other space', is a frustrating and tantalisingly underdeveloped one (Hetherington, 2011; Johnson, 2006), and as such the territory and definition of heterotopias becomes a contested one too. Foucault claims that heritage sites are 'heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time' (2006 [1967]: 234). He identifies a heterotopia as a counter-site which is 'simultaneously represented, contested and inverted' (2006 [1967]: 231). The heritage site is constructed of layers of histories, of generations of people, bickering narratives and varying socio-political contexts. Who chooses which time or voice to capture in a single freeze frame? Is it ethical to overlook competing narratives rather than acknowledging that all heritage sites are a postmodern tangle of footprints; a cacophony of voices, tastes and ideals that never necessarily overlapped? And what of the more indefinite heterotopias, the fleeting meetings, the finite events, the marches and the protests whose ephemera have long since become vague memory? Only a wilful misinterpretation of Foucault assumes that a heterotopia could be reduced to a space full of things. Instead, it is precisely the conflicting ideas, narratives, voices and time frames that allow and invite contestation. Questions and debate are the intangible element of the space that is decidedly heterotopic. The strangeness of things is made apparent by removal from the context of their natural habitat. Lord summarises the museum as heterotopia into a triptych of factors:

its juxtaposition of temporally discontinuous objects, its attempt to present the totality of time, and its isolation, as an entire space, from normal temporal continuity (Lord, 2006: 3-4).

If the role of Heterotopias 'is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled' (Foucault, 2006 [1967]: 235) are Lord's assertions not fraudulent? Don't the interpreters of heritage sites have a responsibility to move away from ideals to echo this messiness, to be honest about flawed constructs and jumbled spaces? Museum heterotopias, these so called "other spaces" are not other at all, but uphold some sense of nostalgia and order, even within clumsily blurred time frames. They are only "other" to the extent that they are isolated spaces with thresholds. Heterotopias are barriers that cordon off spaces (if only metaphorically) from those who are excluded and from those who are not welcome. Gorman-Murray notes that:

Making sense of 'being different' is essentially a spatial matter: how one should behave in certain spaces, and where can one 'be himself' [...] Coping with a stigmatised sexuality involves concealment in certain places, and seeking out those sites where one can meet other same-sex-attracted men and explore homosexual desire (Gorman-Murray, 2007: 15).

To what extent is this anxiety of space heightened when the community you belong to is one that necessarily only continues to thrive when it is invisible to the unknowing eye, as the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans communities pre-1967 (and other subsequent legislative milestones) did? Space is 'a contested and uneasy concept, characterized by intersubjective relationships and social divisions' (Pritchard et al, 2002: 118). How do these marginalised and silenced communities wrestle for space, for visibility, in a seemingly more enlightened time?

In Philips' study of literary tourist guides, she refers to writer Susan Hill's assertion that literary greatness is easier to market to tourists in 'pretty places' (2011: 25). The queer pilgrim will happily acknowledge that for every country house formerly occupied by an LGBTQ figure, there is a public toilet that was notoriously used for cottaging; that for every picturesque landscape that inspired an artwork by a queer person, there is a nail-bombed gay bar or dark back alley in Soho. The queer pilgrimage, perhaps controversially, is more akin to the religious pilgrimage than to more general heritage consumption; a journey of spiritual significance with affirmative powers. However, the queer pilgrimage differs from the religious pilgrimage, which have a definite end point

on well-trodden soil. It is also unlike the literary pilgrimage, which relies on nostalgia, canonicity, a distaste of modernity, a rejection of the urban and an expectation of a cultivated and elite tourist (Philips, 2011). Instead, I would argue that the queer pilgrimage is a more fluid and messy affair that would not benefit from a guide book nor a preordained route. It is neither helpful, nor at the heart of what queerness is about, to extract a list of places tenuously linked to LGBTQ history and map its progress. Queer pilgrimages have been taking place since at least the 1960s with or without the approval of heritage sites. What I instead argue is that heritage sites must embrace their own queerness, however minor, to appease and welcome the queer visitors that experience it.

I've already briefly mentioned Oram's notion that lesbian groups were beginning to identify (and perhaps *claim*) historic houses and other sites with queer links, such as Sissinghurst, Kent and Shibden Hall, West Yorkshire, as an activist movement in the 60s and 70s. Informal pilgrimages to queer sites and a presumed ownership of historical figures allow queer people a compass by which to situate themselves within historical canons; to find continuities, affirmation and to establish historical communities and an ancestral group identity.

Oram suggests that all country houses are heterotopias (2011), with heteronormative traditions and ideals perpetuated and upheld by curators and descendants of former residents. In houses formally occupied by presumed or confirmed queer people, narratives relating to family and marriage 'compete for attention' (Oram, 2012: 538) with alternative narratives about sexuality and relationships. Idealised renditions of the past within these heterotopias indicate that same-sex relationships and desire are *not* ideal. This sends a troubling message to young queer visitors. If any deviance from heterosexuality is presented within idealised heterotopias that 'proffer an illusion of coherence' (2012: 547), history is likely to be oversimplified. The complexity and amorphous nature of human relationships and identities are being overlooked.

If queer visitors consume heritage as pilgrims and ghost hunters, how can heritage sites accommodate this? How can they begin to embrace their own queerness in order

to include themselves in these informal queer pilgrimages, how can they give life to the ghostly remains of non-heteronormative voices and ideas that have been erased? How can the exclusionary barriers and thresholds become enticing welcome mats to those visitors who are seeking voices other than that of the white, heterosexual, cisgender able-bodied man?

Cottaging¹⁰ is perhaps an obvious example of Mowlabocus' aforementioned assertion that queer people have occupied low status spaces, though Turner's approach to cruising suggest that the spaces queer people occupy need not be physical ones. Queer people are rightly no longer content with this stealth like appropriation of spaces, and instead take to new media such as Grindr to insert themselves into a more mainstream understanding of culture and history. Perhaps this is a new form of cultural cruising, in which the cruiser engages a moment of recognition and validation, not with another person, but with a space. Perhaps this is a new form of activism, a new way of saying "we're here and we're queer". The internet has allowed a voice for queer people in ways not seen before; LGBTQ people are sharing their experiences more candidly than ever, including vloggers on YouTube, initiatives such as the *It Gets Better* project (which I will discuss further in the next section) and twitter hashtags for the micro-sharing of queer experiences such as #transdocfail which highlighted the difficulties and abuse many trans people have experienced from GPs and other medical professionals.

If we are to accept that queer people experience and access space in alternative ways to heterosexual people, then alternative modes of facilitating and documenting these spatial encounters must be explored. Gorman-Murray notes that queer people 'carve out alternative sites of identity-affirmation, relationship-building and community-formation' (2007: 3). Historic England, formerly English Heritage, in partnership with Leeds Beckett University's Centre for Culture and the Arts, attempted to address this

¹⁰ Cottaging is the act of men having sex with men, or cruising, in 'cottages' ie: public toilets. Named so because of their resemblance to small country cottages, the term became prevalent at the beginning of the 20th century (Baker, 2004: 22). Cottages were the place where gay men were most vulnerable to the law, as police engaged in entrapment in known cottaging spots. For a series of oral history accounts about cottaging and the police, see Clare Summerskill (2012: 149-176).

through their project *Pride of Place*. The aims of the project were to ‘uncover new locations associated with England’s LGBTQ past, and to revisit existing heritage sites to consider their LGBTQ significance’ (Historic England, 2016). *Pride of Place* centred around an online map, upon which users could drop pins denoting places of LGBTQ importance and provide information and images relating to the sites. The project was dictated entirely by the experiences of the LGBTQ communities who contributed to the map, and revealed the potential power of crowdsourcing as well as the challenges.

Workshops relating to the project held at the London Metropolitan Archives in May 2015 ‘revealed tensions created by crowdsourcing and collaboration between members of the public, and heritage and academic institutions’ (Hayward, 2015: 264) as opinions were divided about whether anecdotal and personal memories should be allowed and encouraged on the map. The decision was to allow this, but to ensure, where possible, that dates and locations were double checked by the *Pride of Place* team. The contributions on the map helped to inform an online exhibition.

The *Speak Out London* LGBTQ+ History exhibition at London Metropolitan Archives (May- August 2016), for which I was a consultant, also recognised the ways in which LGBTQ people engaged with space, by having a large interactive magnetic map of London as its centre piece. The exhibition was built around approximately 40 oral histories and a variety of ephemera and scanned images from the collections. Most of the stories related to spaces that would otherwise go under the radar as LGBTQ sites, and the items in the archive were mostly flyers, posters or business cards for events or venues. This helped to inform the map, and facsimiles of the ephemeral items were pinned to the corresponding locations on the maps. Visitors were also invited to pin their own memories on the map, revealing often overlooked and rarely documented spaces of cruising and personal recollections.

The power of storytelling

That oral histories so heavily informed *Speak Out London* is not surprising. Given the ephemeral, fleeting and unrecorded nature of so much of LGBTQ history, storytelling in queer communities has become an important apparatus for preserving a sense of

queer heritage. Oral histories (or more appropriately; *herstories*) are rooted in feminism and allow marginalised groups to be heard. Queer oral histories sprung from the foundations of second wave feminism from the 1970s onwards (Boyd and Roque Ramirez, 2012:2) and acknowledge the inexorable links and disharmony between sociological and political histories and personal histories. While LGBTQ oral histories are often the domain of grass-roots community groups or academics, the museum has a responsibility to listen and give platform to these voices, not only for social justice, but for exploring challenging and *queered* modes of storytelling.

Oral histories are an exploration of subjectivity, more open in their biases than other forms of history. There is a dual truth in oral histories; the addition of new information to social historical records (Lapovsky Kennedy, 2006) *and* subjectivity, queer memory and fantasy. Oral histories can challenge and correct official, “legitimate” narratives or myths. Lapovsky Kennedy uses the example of post-Stonewall oral histories which reveal that, although Stonewall was very much about visibility, many LGBT people were out and un-closeted long before that (Lapovsky Kennedy, 2006:279). Oral histories also serve preservation functions: recording the dying AIDS generation and disputing widespread denial of the significance of AIDS, as well as shedding light on the transgender experience. In this sense, oral histories have the power to retrospectively correct injustices and serve an ‘overtly political function’ (Boyd and Roque Ramirez, 2012:1).

Oral histories are in many ways not vastly different from other sources of social history such as letters, photographs and diaries. Even newspaper accounts are often constructed around subjective interviews (Lapovsky Kennedy, 2006:272), so to dismiss oral histories as too subjective is to falsely imbue other forms of documentation with an authoritative, objective voice. Photographs, for example, often only document the good times (or indeed the very bad times) and endorse popular or mainstream narratives (Green, 1997:58). However, they can be a trigger to help narrators recall memories and reflect on or challenge their content. The discrepancies between photographs and the oral histories must be acknowledged in the interpretation process. So while it is important to acknowledge the flaws in oral histories, it is also

important to be aware of the subjective and constructed nature of other types of evidence.

On Tuesday 5th February 2013 during the Second Reading of the Marriage (Same-sex Couples) Bill, the MP for Bristol West, Stephen Williams of the Liberal Democrats made reference to the exhibition *Revealing Stories* during his speech in favour of the bill. *Revealing Stories*, an exhibition by *OutStories Bristol* at M Shed to mark LGBT history month, was built around over 40 interviews, objects, ephemera, artworks, and loans from national collections. Williams stated 'Like all exhibitions, *OutStories* is not interested only in the abstract; it makes one think about one's own place in history' (Williams, 2013b). While the statement was meant to highlight how legal changes can lead to a legitimisation of queer experience and the important need and desire for LGBTQ people to feel their stories are part of a wider historical narrative, Williams inadvertently stated that museum exhibitions can also have this power.

Oral histories and storytelling can help to fill gaps left by underpopulated collections, bring to life static material and deepen understanding. Professor David A. Reichard's use of queer campus ephemera (2012) parallels the curatorial methodology of the *Speak Out London* exhibition. His research highlights how 'queer campus ephemera' can be understood through the use of oral histories (2012) and how storytelling can 'animate' this transient and disposable evidence that was never designed to be preserved. The two in conjunction –ephemera and oral histories- can help to create a deeper and more rounded understanding of queer experience. Ephemera is often loaded with challenges of its own for researchers, archivists and museum professionals, such as 'determining who created it, how it was used, and what impact it had in its particular context' (2012:38). Where this information is impossible to track down, ephemera can, instead, be used to trigger memories, responses and reactions. Oral histories can add research value to ephemera by filling the gaps between isolated and limited material (2012:44). It is this 'interplay' (2012:51) between ephemeral evidence and oral histories that created a richness and a triangulation – between memories, archival material and "official" records (2012:29) – that proved so valuable to Reichard's research about queer campus experience, and likewise I would argue,

were one of the great strengths of *Speak Out London*.

Spatial displacement and blurred lines

Andrew Gorman-Murray echoes the importance of storytelling in queer communities from the field of geography. His research looks at the ways in which gay, lesbian and bisexual (GLB) Australians '(re)make, (re)design and use their homes in ways to resist heteronormativity and affirm sexual difference' (2007: 3). He looks at existing autobiographies of LGB people to study the ways in which the authors describe places which enable sexual difference, and those which do not (2007: 4), and furthermore 'the ways in which they encountered imagined and locally embedded GLB communities, and how they experienced private and public environments'. This methodology of combining personal histories through autobiography and geographical experience reveal the 'inherent spatial outcomes' and 'territorial restriction' (2007: 10) of heterosexist oppression, and how queer people overcome or fight against this to find spaces of belonging.

Most interestingly, he frames the metaphor 'coming out of the closet' as a spatial one, which has implications for the form and content of GLB autobiographies and storytelling. Space and identity are intertwined in the idea of 'coming out', which implies not only a change in sexual identity, but also spatial repositioning, from *inside* 'the closet' to *outside* (2007: 11). He describes this as spatial mobility, and claims that narratives of displacement and movement underpin lesbian, gay and bi identities (2007:11). Such transient relationships with spaces indicates 'personal repositioning into spaces of sexual openness, freedom, acceptance and support. Consequently, geographies of concealment, erasure, resistance and open acceptance patently underpin Western GLB autobiographies' (2007: 11).

Gorman-Murray notes the blurred binaries of public and private for queer people:

In these stories, the men described in detail their experiences of self-concealment in everyday space, and the way they used their homes as *both* 'private' *and* 'community' spaces to experiment with same-sex desire and behaviour. At the same time they discuss how these identity affirming uses 'stretched' home into certain public spaces

[bars/clubs/cruising sites] of homosexual desire and belonging
(Gorman-Murray, 2007: 12).

The blurred lines of public and private are a recurring theme in queer histories and storytelling. Historian Matt Cook notes that it is the public bars, clubs, toilets, cruising grounds, courtrooms, and protest and pride marches that have drawn attention rather than behind closed doors (2014: 3). For some queer people, simply stepping outside of the home is an act of activism. This blurring can also be seen as an opportunity for subversiveness, or of queering the notions of what public and private means. In his account of playwright Joe Orton's domestic life, Cook notes that his diaries revealed stories of 'going out pivoted [...] on sex and cottaging, suggesting the ways in which non-domestic spaces in the city provided scope for something that was increasingly seen to belong at home' (2014: 181), while his home life with partner Kenneth Halliwell grew increasingly platonic and sterile.

In order to gain a better understanding of the way LGBTQ people experience the home, I ran a workshop at the London Metropolitan Archives' 12th Annual LGBTQ+ History and Archives conference 'Lines of Dissent' (Curran, 2014d). The workshop was called 'Queer Houses, Queer Homes', and aimed to document personal histories using floor-plans and maps of former or current homes of the participants. I asked them, instead of labelling rooms, to label memories or moments they related to those domestic spaces. The results were all attached together using treasury tags to create a large curtain of memories of home, which I exhibited to the other conference delegates. Many of the participants highlighted where they kept collections of LGBTQ books, records and ephemera, and in a few cases, stashes of porn. One participant highlighted where they kept their *'carving of Virginia Woolf'*. These markers of queerness and queer taste were amongst the very few objects that were highlighted in favour of more narrative, or anecdotal labels.

One of the contributors said, *'no matter how light you make this, you always end up reliving painful memories'*, and this is reflected by many of the sad memories revealed through the floor plans and maps: *'my one solace after being suspended- even though I was the one being homophobicly bullied'*, *'seeing my dad holding my sister against a*

wall during an argument'. One of the bleaker moments came when a participant said, 'this is making me realise that nothing has happened in my house', and only illustrated their barren floor plan with the location of a fish tank, and where it was later moved to. There was lightness evident however, as many recalled humorous moments, or at least revisited moments with retrospective humour: 'being bitten by the parrot', 'the dresser where I found my stepdad's weed', on some maps, the participants used images to capture humour, including one of a large stick person lying on a very small bed labelled 'inconveniently tall boyfriend'.

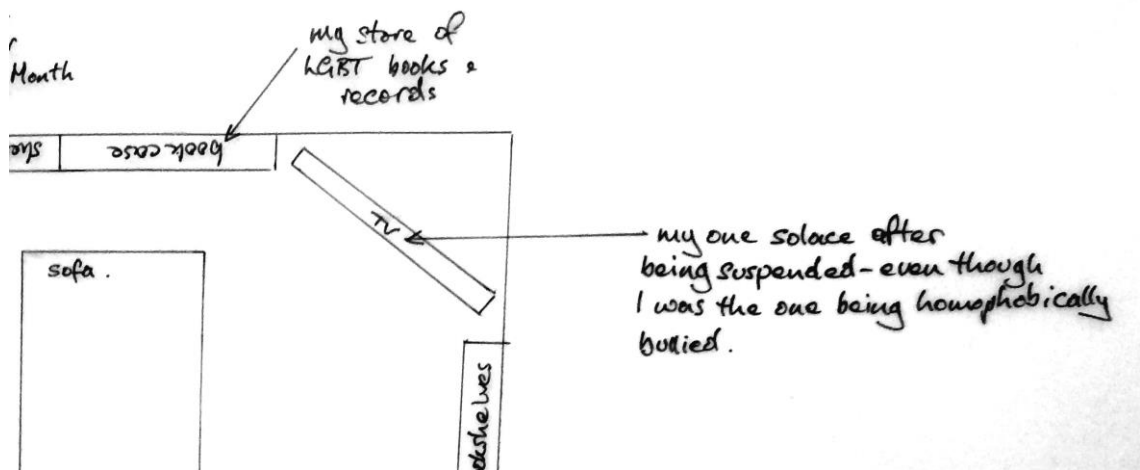


Figure 1.2 Detail of map from participant of Queer Houses, Queer Homes workshop at the LMA

Some maps also featured indicators of class, one house had two separate display cases of 'miner's objects/ brass', another noted that the double bed was 'borrowed- who had furniture?'. Another features two rooms, one labelled 'Past' (with the staircase alluringly labelled 'come upstairs to see me sometime') and the other 'Present/Future' with the commentary 'How a middleclass single gay man might spend his money!'.

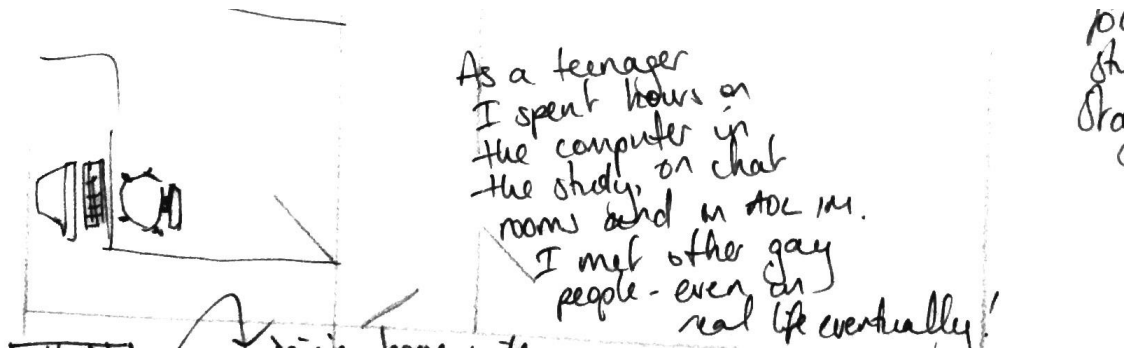


Figure 1.3 Detail of map from participant of Queer Houses, Queer Homes workshop at the LMA

The variety of layouts of the maps, and the ways in which people chose to recall their memories of home was particularly noteworthy. Some labelled with precision almost architectural drawings, while another presented simply a matrix of box rooms with beds in, and chose to focus on all of their former bedrooms. Another offers a childlike front view of a house, showing only glimpses through windows, with the loft bedroom window labelled with three hearts with an arrow through them. One map featured a particularly interesting use of scale, where an ashtray was half the size of a sofa, perhaps an indicator of its importance rather than its relative size.

Some of the most interesting revelations from the maps were those that did not document specific moments or conversations, but that documented half-remembered thoughts or dreams: *'why do I have dreams of murder set in my childhood kitchen?', 'I once had a terrifying dream that a witch came down these stairs and I could tell she was a witch because she wore one glove on her foot (instead of a shoe) it is still a weird uncanny private feeling of horror'*.

Movement and concealment feature heavily on the maps too, echoing Gorman-Murray's notions of spatial displacement being inherent to queer storytelling. One participant labelled with arrows how they *'paced up and down with worry-frequently!'* another recalled *'sneaking quietly back home after a late night with some guys I went back with from a club'* and many labelled hidden porn collections. One map featured self-censoring, as a name had been written but then fiercely scribble out, and also self doubt about the reliability of the recollection *'here [name erased] threw a pile of books downstairs as I went out of the door to see another woman – for a moment I thought*

she had thrown herself downstairs. (As I write this I think I may be mingling the memory of two separate events, forty years ago now...)' Movement beyond the confines of domestic walls was alluded to on some of the maps as well, namely an indication of a move to London, or another large city in order to be more free. Matt Cook describes those who move from small towns to larger cities as 'provincial exiles' (2014: 149), and suggests that such migrations could be about finding safety in spaces beyond the home.

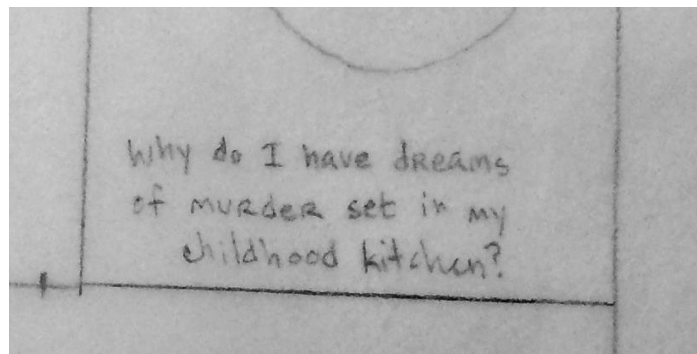


Figure 1.4 Detail of map from participant of Queer Houses, Queer Homes workshop at the LMA

The aforementioned blurring of public and private was evident in many of the maps too, as some homes became sites for activism (*'visiting space for so many women's group meetings' 'window with "support the miners" poster'*) and for performance or resistance. One map showed the layout of a space in a communal squat that was originally a Welsh Presbyterian church, then in the 1970s and 1980s the Limelight Club *'full of club kids and new romantics'* and then a Walkabout (a chain of Australian themed clubs). The map is dominated by a dance floor, and is annotated with *'we ran queer cabaret and spoken word events and expos to erase the heteronormativity of the interim Walkabout years!'*

'This is like therapy' said one of the participants as they labelled their map.

It may be that the workshop may have yielded similar results with a heterosexual audience, but either way, it revealed creative and personal responses to memories and histories, especially in how we locate and navigate these recollections in relation to

domestic spaces.

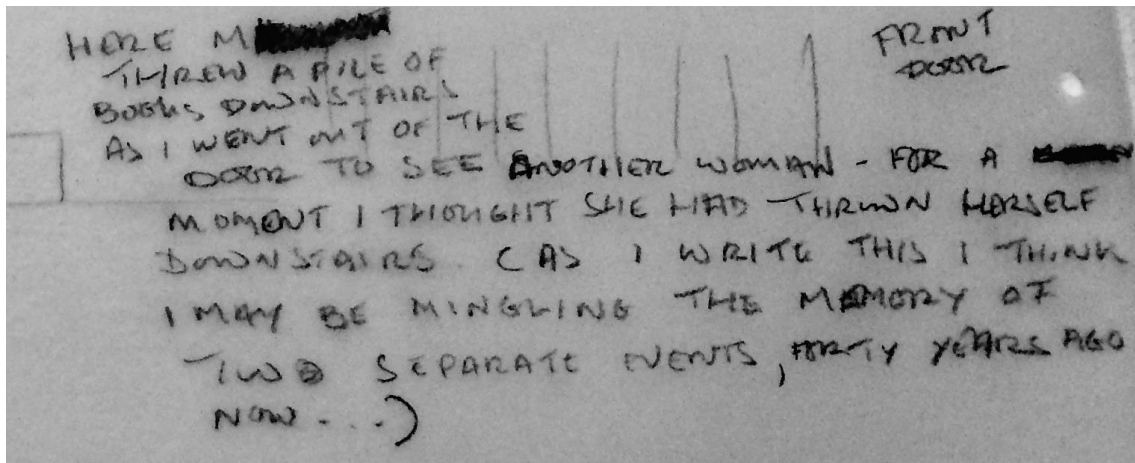


Figure 1.5 Detail of map from participant of Queer Houses, Queer Homes workshop at the LMA

A visit to a historic house

Now imagine this scenario. You are a woman in her mid thirties, it's the early 1990s, and you and your partner, another woman, are standing on tiptoes at the fence by the gatehouse of Menabilly, the house that was occupied and restored by Daphne du Maurier between 1943 and the late 60s. Under your arm is a dog-eared paperback of Rebecca. Your partner climbs up on to one of the slats and leans forward, craning her head to catch a glimpse of the house that inspired Manderley. It was she who introduced you to du Maurier, who told you about her apparent bisexuality and who pointed out to you the lesbian undertones of Mrs Danvers' infatuation with the departed Rebecca. She turns to you and smiles and kisses you lightly on the cheek, and you know what she is going to do before she does it; she hops over the fence in one swift move and disappears into the shrubbery. You look about anxiously and notice a lone figure approaching at the road side. It is a woman and she looks younger than you, slightly windswept and out of breath. She stops just metres from you and regards the gatehouse, she winds on the film in her camera and takes a photograph. She looks to you and smiles and continues on her journey. Just then your lover returns. In her hand is the head of a rhododendron which she hands to you as she mounts the fence.

By identifying the queerness of sites and being present in them, however briefly, one engages in a collective cruising of sorts, in which one recognises others identifying with a space, and that recognition encourages validation and community building. To this

space you bring your own values, and your own relation to it, as represented here by the dog-eared book. You capture it to take it with you, like the woman with the camera. And since your queer reading of the space is outside of mainstream narratives, you have to invite yourself in- become a fence-hopper- and interact queerly with the space, gifting a stolen flower. Coleman and Elsner note that pilgrimages help to construct a 'mythologised vision of the past' (1995: 217) which builds temporary communities (1995: 205) whilst also allowing people the chance to explore contemporary forms of subjectivity and individualism. They also identify a key function of the (specifically *religious*) pilgrimage as giving 'religious traditions concrete, tangible referents' (1995: 208). In other words, one goes on a pilgrimage to find oneself, to locate oneself within a community and to affirm one's world view. This echoes Turner's earlier definition of cruising.

As mentioned, Sutton House forms the central case study of my thesis. But before discussing the ways in which Sutton House, and my work there, betrays the typical practices of the historic house, let me take you on one final stroll. Come with me on a highlights tour of Wallington, near Morpeth in Northumberland. I hope you don't mind, but I've brought my mother with me. My invitation to you has an ulterior motive. Wallington, a house and estate lived in by generations of the Trevelyan family and owned by the National Trust since 1942, presents a more typical historic house experience than Sutton House. Our visit will serve as a useful way to begin framing some of the problems faced by historic houses.

Figure 1.6 The East Front of Wallington, Northumberland ©National Trust Images/Andrew Butler

We've parked. As we walk towards the Palladian Clock Tower, mother reminds us that the area is renowned for red squirrels. I spot one almost immediately, in the trees lining the path to the house, sitting on a feeder. I take a number of blurry photographs, before I realise that the squirrel is not moving at all. My mother feels sure she can see its tail blow in the wind, but I am adamant that it is fake. I laugh and say, 'I have to remind myself that these places are all fiction'. This is emblematic of my suspicion of heritage sites such as this. I comment that the National Trust should be rebranded the National (dis)Trust. Funnily enough, when we pass the same spot later, we notice that the squirrel has gone from the feeder in the tree. It must have been real.



Figure 1.7 A red squirrel in the grounds of Wallington, Northumberland

The large kitchen is one of the first rooms we visit, which was in use until 1967. Aside from the beautiful coal-fire stoves and the impressive roof girder, what strikes me most is a cluster of objects in the far corner. Hanging by the door are replicas of dead rabbits, ducks and a pheasant. The tail feathers of the pheasant softly brush against a wooden chair, next to which is a fire extinguisher, and a double plug socket in the wall. “Visiting with the cynicism that comes only with age and a degree focused on the unpicking of heritage spaces,” I say to you with a nudge “this assemblage of discordant things strikes me not only as a huge distraction, but as something that could easily have been an artist’s installation, mocking the way that the National Trust presents its houses”. On the table to the right of the door is a stack of artificial vegetables: “presumably for those of us who cannot readily bring to mind the image of a cabbage or a bunch of carrots” I say. You roll your eyes. I didn’t promise to be good company.



Figure 1.8 Hanging birds in the kitchen of Wallington, Northumberland

Mother is particularly taken with the kitchen. Perhaps there's something in Young's claim that in the historic house 'there is always a direct personal connection to the modern-day visitor' (2007: 75). She goes on, 'for everyone lives in a dwelling, and exploring its similarities and differences from the historic example is a sure means of engagement.' This perhaps is less the case when a working-class visitor is in a room such as a ball room, or a drawing room. Young claims that visitors 'cast themselves as equal agents in the history of taste' (2007: 76) in drawing judgements on upholstery, and making parallels with their own.

Figure 1.9 The interior of the Kitchen at Wallington, Northumberland ©National Trust Images/Andreas von Einsiedel

The North Corridor leading from the kitchen is lined with photographs of former staff from the house and gardens. The collection is called 'Wallington People- silent voices', and this pride-of-place positioning reflects the more recent amplification of those silent (or silenced) voices in history, both in historic house settings and beyond. Next is the Servants' Hall, now a tea room, the walls of which have open suitcases hanging from them containing enlarged photographs inside of evacuees who had lived at Wallington

Hall. A kindly volunteer explains this to us amidst trying to convince us to take tea and cake there. We decline.

Figure 1.10 Rooms on one side of the Hammond Dolls House at Wallington, Northumberland ©National Trust Images/Andreas von Einsiedel

The Servants' Common Room is filled with dolls houses. Its centre-piece is particularly impressive; the huge 'Hammond House'. It features 36 rooms, each lit by electricity, and is occupied by 77 dolls. The laminated guide sheet explains that it represents life in such a house in the 1880s, and includes all original furniture, wallpaper and floor coverings. This and most of the other houses were purchased by or for the Trust, rather than by the former inhabitants of Wallington. Hammond House was purchased from a charity shop in York, but had experienced minor cosmetic adjustments to the exterior, such as the addition of brick-effect paper and replacement glass screens. "In many ways, Hammond House seems to be a more straight forwardly authentic house than Wallington Hall itself," I remark. In Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums, Vagnone and Ryan note that visitors often experience historic houses 'like dollhouses, as they move along the length of a room or hallway while voyeuristically peering into

the stage-set of a furnishings plan’ (2016: 41) and furthermore ‘where the detachment of the Houses’ interiors from their exteriors is rarely resolved’ (2016:173).

Billed as the most complete survivor from 18th Century Wallington, the Needlework Room is lined with needlework panels that were the result of three years of work by Julia, Lady Claverley in the 1710s. A notable addition to the room is a detail of a painting showing how vibrant and vivid the colours in the needlework panels would have looked when they were first made. This is in stark contrast to the rather grey and drab, albeit impressive, actual panels.



Figure 1.11 A puffer fish in the cabinet of curiosities at Wallington, Northumberland

Standing alone at the top of the house, with two grand staircases leading to its single door is Lady Wilson’s Cabinet of Curiosities (“not a euphemism,” I assure mother). The collection, formed by Dame Jane Wilson of Charlton House (1749-1818) was later set up as a museum in 1827. While much of the collection has since been dispersed, the room still features much of the original content, including many taxidermy birds, shells,

fossils, a puffer fish and two narwhal tusks. The room was restored and rearranged in the 1970s, when the backgrounds to the stuffed birds' cases were painted by Pauline Dower (who also painted the needlework panel detail in the Needlework Room). Briefly, we are no longer in a historic house, we are in a museum. There are glass cases, object labels: it is an explicitly curated space. There are dust sheets covering some of the exhibits, which puts me in mind of a visit to Cragside (a National Trust property in Northumberland) where visitors could peek into a room whose furniture was entirely swathed in white sheets. Like a ghostly bric-a-brac shop, it appeared much as it would during the closed season of the house. A docent remarked that this snowy vista was one of the most popular rooms in the house. Interesting that such effort is placed into describing the significance and uniqueness of the furniture, yet visitors preferred to see them covered up. Vagnone and Ryan describe this access to what is usually unseen as 'tactile snooping' (2016: 122)

We discuss that it is difficult to forget that the strongest presence of all at Wallington Hall is that of the Trust. Upon the large desk in the study, is a typed document entitled 'The Bequest of Wallington' in which Sir Charles Philips Trevelyan outlines his reasons for leaving Wallington to the National Trust, with the provision that the Trevelyans must be able to continue to occupy it (which they did until 1966). Trevelyan states 'Now I do not mean to say that in every case where this [country houses no longer being occupied by their owners] is occurring throughout England that there is great public loss. In some cases it is only a misfortune for the owner that his family home is gone and a tradition ended which he cherishes; but in others the community loses as much in the long run as the private owner; where treasures of national interest are dissipated, and fine architectural or historic mansions are doomed to decay.'

A printed message on a closed blind upstairs reminds us once again of who owns the house now, it reads: 'Lower light means a longer life for everything here. For ever for everyone.' The Trust continues to inform us of its noble attempts at ensuring that these treasures are retained for the community in the Needlework Room, where a chair shrouded in a white cloth is accompanied by a sign that informs us that differing light levels in the room has led to the need for 'Preventative Conservation', and explains that the blue dosimeter that is faintly visible through the shroud is in order to identify if the light on the chair has been reduced.



Figure 1.12 Conservation blinds at Wallington, Northumberland

The proliferation of branded signage at properties owned by the National Trust particularly irked Vita Sackville-West when faced with the prospect of leaving Sissinghurst to the Trust:

I said, Never, never, never! Au grand jamais, jamais. Never, never, never! Not that hard little metal plate at my door! Nigel can do what he likes when I am dead, but so long as I live, no National Trust or any other foreign body shall have my darling. No, no. Over my corpse or my ashes, not otherwise. No, no. I felt myself flush with rage. It is bad enough to have lost my Knole, but they shan't take Sissinghurst from me. That at least is my own (29th November 1954, in Sackville-West, 2010: 249).

A notable shift from earlier visits is the removal of red ropes from the ground floor of

historic rooms, which formerly had necessitated only a sweeping glance around the periphery of the rooms, gazing inwards like spectators at a zoo. The newfound freedom of visitors to wander the rooms as if they were actually rooms is only hindered by the odd overzealous room steward who lingers around you like an eager and knowledgeable fruit fly. John Goodall, architectural critic of Country Life magazine, dismisses moves such as the removal of barriers as a 'cuddly approach'. He goes on, 'If you go into a National Trust house there are usually pretty good reasons why there are barriers in place, or no fire lit, or bottles not on a surface' (Adams, 2010). Mother and I agree that the shift is a good thing "I can't imagine many have tried to half-inch the silverware just because a flimsy rope has been removed" she says. Young claims this creates an 'overwhelming and immediate experience' (2007: 75).

In many ways this visit typified both what the historic house was and what it is becoming. Wallington is truly a celebration of the eccentric. It is laced with a knowing, almost Disney-esque artificiality, stuffed rabbits and plastic vegetables. There is a tea room, and not only that, it is one of the first rooms you encounter, having already passed the gift shop and the cafe before even entering the house. Even on a weekday during school term time, as our visit was, there is a flurry of room stewards and volunteers. The lines of authenticity are continuously blurred and challenged, without ever being acknowledged, and the house's synchronicities with today are hidden.

Within what is essentially a museum, a giant cabinet of curiosities, exist smaller assemblages of curios that are named as such: dolls houses, stuffed birds, fossils, bones and artworks. These objects are granted a separate, dare I say hallowed status, compared to more domestic objects such as pans and tools and furniture. We are consistently reminded about the importance of conservation, and that this work is being carried out for us. In spite of these uncertainties and ambiguities, we are allowed to feel more at home, in the most superficial sense, in these houses than we were just ten or fifteen years ago. The red ropes are slowly being removed. Likewise, we are now allowed to use cameras, providing there is no flash, a development that allows us to create our own souvenirs and interact with the Trust through social media or perhaps a development that bows to the ubiquity of the smart phone.

When walking back to the carpark I comment to mother that the map had misleadingly implied that visitors could take in the view from the clock tower, when in fact, there wasn't (and never had been) any access to it at all. A Julie Walters lookalike, bedecked in walking boots with a weary looking husband in tow, overhears and says to us that this is outrageous, especially (she says, pointing to us) if you have paid the entrance fee of £11 each. The sticker on their car announced that they were National Trust members, so what was it about us that suggested that we weren't? Was it our regional accents? Was it my pink hair, or my (relative to National Trust members) youth? Was it because we laughed and joked as we absorbed the experience? Because we weren't wearing walking boots?

Historic houses, particularly those owned by the National Trust formed an important part of my childhood. A National Trust membership in the early 1990s was a notable middleclass luxury for a Sunderland family. To my knowledge, none of my peers at school visited historic houses regularly, but for us, it was a regular Sunday pursuit. I enjoyed these visits more than my sisters and brother did. Perhaps I identified with the campery, the artifice, the theatre.

In recent years, my occasional visits home have included trips to National Trust properties with my mother, who, now having a generation of grandchildren has reinvested in a membership which had previously become too expensive to justify. My passion for exploring these spaces has not dulled. With renewed vigour my mother and I visit properties that have opened recently, such as Seaton Delaval, a country house in Northumberland, which opened in 2010. We revisit old and half-forgotten favourites such as Craggside, the first house in the world to be lit by hydroelectric power, also in Northumberland, and Gibside, an estate formerly owned by the Bowes-Lyons.

When did visiting historic houses become a recognised pastime? In *A History of Country House Visiting*, Adrian Tinniswood documents the growth of 'architectural tourism' that has seen the visiting of historic houses become one of the most popular

leisure activities in the UK. He traces the roots of country house visiting as far back as the 14th century times, using texts such as those of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and Gawain's arrival at a moated palace as an example. Tinniswood is clear about the distinction between this sort of visit and tourism, as travelling in medieval times was for religious, commercial or social purposes, rather than purely for leisure (1989: 6). By the 18th century, Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill welcomed around 300 visitors a year from May until September between 1784 and 1797 (1989: 89). Tinniswood argues that throughout the history of county house visiting, the taste of the tourist has remained constant:

ever since his visit to a country house or a royal palace ceased to be a merely social event, ever since he began to be motivated by curiosity, he has been interested not so much in the architecture of a building as in what it contained, whether it be portraits or porcelain, books or bedsteads (Tinniswood, 1989: 45).

Now, arguably, the stories most sought after in historic houses are those of the people who lived in them. The National Trust has begun to appreciate this in its interpretation, which will be covered in the following chapter.

In this introductory chapter I have attempted to outline the potential ways in which queer people might experience and document cultural or historic spaces, by exploring cruising as a metaphor for building fleeting communities in spaces designed for heterosexual people. Queer people are perhaps always displaced, always at odds. I then looked at how cruising can be facilitated and encouraged in museum spaces. Queer people's engagement with new technologies like Grindr can help to stake a claim on heritage sites that overlook LGBTQ histories. LGBTQ storytelling and mapping helps to repopulate sites where such narratives have been suppressed.

As a segue into the next chapter, I took you on a trip to a historic house. In the following section, I will define the historic house, and the National Trust, and begin to critically analyse how the latter has recently attempted to bring alternative histories and modes of storytelling to its public and beyond.

CHAPTER 3

Crumbling piles: historic houses and the National Trust

The Destruction of the Country House...

Contemporary interest in the fate of country houses could be argued to be in response to the exhibition *The Destruction of the Country House 1875-1975* (V&A, October-December 1974), curated by Marcus Binney and then V&A director Roy Strong. The exhibition documented the losses, and estimated losses, of country houses in the 100 years preceding the exhibition. Many have since credited the exhibition for drastically recasting discourse around the preservation of historic houses. Ruth Adams describes *Destruction* as a 'watershed in heritage politics' (2013: 1), which arguably shifted the V&A's role, albeit temporarily, from a mausoleum of design, to a pressure lobby. The success of *Destruction* shows that an exhibition which strikes a chord and highlights a problem can effect change.

Ruth Adams claims that *Destruction's* success in terms of shifting the political landscape for historic houses came in part from it being a response to the wealth tax proposals, a tax levied on the transfer of capital by gift or bequest (2013: 6). Littlejohn posits that legislation and regulations that followed, and were perhaps directly influenced by *Destruction*, halted the spiralling demolitions of historic houses (1997: 42). Similarly, Mandler (1997: 404) argued that the exhibition's main victory was in instilling confidence in the country house pressure lobby because of its role in the 1975 formation of the conservation group 'SAVE Britain's Heritage'.

As well as instilling confidence in pressure lobbies, *Destruction* also aimed to inspire guilt and a shared sense of responsibility for historic houses amongst its visitors. Adams notes that the notion of 'threat' has become a defining characteristic in heritage discourse and that 'all 'heritage' has either been saved, or is in need of saving' (Adams, 2013: 3). This notion was surely strengthened by *Destruction*. A preparatory document written a month before the exhibition opened reads, 'If you leave this hall of destruction feeling grieved and shameful, then we who have prepared this exhibition will be confident that people and government will not allow it to happen again' (1974, held in V&A archives, quoted in Adams, 2013:8).

Although the National Trust was established in 1895, country houses were a relatively late concern for them. Their portfolio of crumbling piles began to grow in the late 1930s following a change in the law that allowed ownership of houses to be transferred to the Trust while the former owners remained as tenants. This, as well as the later V&A exhibition, served to make a wider public concerned with an issue that could be argued to only directly affect the aristocracy and a tiny minority of decaying heritage families. By the close of the *Destruction* exhibition, the Trust held a total of 90 country houses, and had 463,000 paying members (Littlejohn, 1997: 59). In his foreword to the exhibition catalogue, National Trust stalwart James Lees-Milne¹¹, who organised the acquisition of many of the Trust's historic houses, makes evident this desired audience guilt-effect of *Destruction*, and the exhibition's bias, with a claim suggesting that we as visitors are complicit in the destruction of country houses and in the fate of their owners:

the illogical and sentimental English are wonderfully hypocritical about the things they destroy. They shed crocodile tears while dissecting the corpses of their victims (in Strong, Binney and Harris, 1974: 11).

Destruction was a "multi-media' affair' (Adams, 2013: 7) that combined paintings, photographs, furniture and audio-visual elements, the centrepiece of which was 'the Hall of Lost Houses', designed by museum designer Robin Wade, which 'resembled a neo-classical portico crumbling under the impact of a wrecker's ball. On each piece of 'falling' masonry was a photograph of one of the thousand or so country houses destroyed during the twentieth century, while in the background a tape played sounds of burning timbers and collapsing buildings with the voice of John Harris reading the names of lost seats 'like a litany'" (2013: 7).

Littlejohn highlights the urgency of *Destruction*, and how one 'could not be blamed for believing that the end, in fact, was very near' (Littlejohn, 1997: 41) due to the 'bleak

¹¹ James Lees-Milne (1908-1997) was the secretary to the National Trust's Country Houses (later Historic Buildings Committee), and in his published diaries recounts visits to country houses to pass judgement on whether or not they are National Trust worthy. Quentin Letts described him as 'networker to the gentry' (Letts, 2014). A man of 'ambiguous sexuality', an obituary claims he was 'more or less single-handedly responsible for beguiling suspicious, desperate and sometimes mediocrally old-fashioned owners into handing their priceless family properties entire into the care of the trust' (Fergusson, 1997).

rhetoric' and 'unrelievedly grim' tone of the exhibition. In spite of this, he claims that the isolated figures of lost houses in the century up to 1974 used by Binney and Strong were potentially misleading, and that the history of the country house before that had *always* been one of demolition. The period before 1875 boasted an even more eye-wateringly high figure of country house losses, suggesting it is only awareness of and concern about these losses that had grown in any significant way (Littlejohn, 1997: 42-43). Lees-Milne shares this idea that the interest spiked by the exhibition had more to do with greater visibility, rather than any sense of intervening in the doomed fate of the country house: 'the quicker they are rendered obsolete, the greater is their popularity' (in Strong et al, 1975: 11).

The exhibition also shifted perceptions of the country house owner, from the privileged elite to burdened keepers of some notion of heritage and national identity. This encourages the preservation of a way of life that really wasn't a way of life for the vast majority of people, and increasingly not even for the owners themselves. The narratives told in many historic houses today tend to recognise this slightly more, and the Downton Abbey-esque¹² upstairs-downstairs history is more ubiquitous. In 1891, for example, the servant class was among the largest groups of the working population. Almost 1.5 million women and over 58,000 men were indoor servants in private homes, out of a population of 29 million in England and Wales (Dawes, 1990 [1973]: 15). *This* was the British way of life. Butler notes this shift in his essay about the future of house museums: 'while society still values great men and women, it also places value on all those who participated in the past. No longer is it sufficient to speak of the one great figure associated with the structure' (2002: 36). Vagnone and Ryan regretfully assert that the implied message in many historic houses is that 'the people who once lived here were important. You are not' (2016: 102). This is both condescending to the visitor, and also out of line with contemporary thinking, which does not ascribe the high and mighty with such reverence.

¹² Downton Abbey (2010-2015) is a period drama based around a fictional country estate in Yorkshire and the contrasting and intertwining lives of the domestic staff and the aristocratic family who work and live there.

Destruction curator Roy Strong tugs at the heartstrings with his musings about the struggles faced by country house owners in his impassioned introduction to the 'country house dilemma' in the exhibition catalogue. They are, he claims, 'hereditary custodians of what was one of the most vital forces of cultural creation in our history. They deserve consideration and justice as much as any other group within our society as they struggle to preserve and share with us the creative richness of our heritage' (Strong, 1975: 10). He claims that country houses ceased to be a practical place to live with the decline of domestic and live-in staff (1975: 8). Lees-Milne also cites the 'dearth of domestic helpers' (in Strong et al, 1975: 11) as one of the key factors contributing to the country house's decline. In spite of the class divide embedded in its history, Strong boldly states that 'the historic houses of this country belong to *everybody*', (my italics) with the caveat 'or at least everybody who cares about this country and its traditions' (1975: 7).

The National Trust could be considered a charity aimed to ease the burden of the landed gentry who could no longer afford the tax and death duties on the houses they called homes, let alone the lifestyles to which they had become accustomed. Young notes that:

'the country house concept is deeply connected to the presence of a hereditary aristocracy in which property inheritance was by primogeniture, where generation after generation occupied the same house and developed it, its contents and the estate' (Young, 2007: 61).

This preservation of the aristocracy, as well as houses, while deeply troubling, perhaps indicates that people's lifestyles are a conservation issue as much as the vessels in which they live them. So, while it's concerning that this endorses a less ethically sound version of the benefits system, at least the shift began to recognise that people and lifestyles were as much a part of British heritage as buildings and "stuff". Regardless of how it was framed, perhaps this is the biggest victory of *Destruction*: helping to shift the definition of heritage to include people and their voices.

Historic houses

The lack of literature about historic houses in comparison to museum studies perhaps suggests that museum studies research is always directly applicable to historic houses. While the two types of institutions have a lot in common, and have a lot to learn from each other, managing and interpreting the historic house presents a series of challenges that museum studies texts and practices do not address. Before the rise of the field of Heritage Studies, which better encompasses the historic house, they had largely been the domain of architectural historians.

The literature on historic houses which does exist tends to be historical, or non-academic coffee table tomes. In terms of inclusion, education and outreach, the historic house is still under-theorised. Consequently the sites themselves are often held under less scrutiny and the staff held less accountable for issues that museums are increasingly addressing. The historic house, by its very nature of having once been a home, presents very different challenges and opportunities than are faced by museum professionals. This thesis aims to fill some of the gaps identified above, namely the paucity of literature dealing with LGBTQ narratives, interpretation and community engagement in historic houses. It will also contribute to discussions around interventions in heritage sites, with a particular focus on how this blends with queer activism, as well as providing a practical example of a creative intervention, and demonstrating the impact such a project can have.

In September 2014, the 'The Period Room: Museum, Material, Experience' conference took place at the Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle. Jointly organised by the University of Leeds and Bowes Museum, and supported by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, the conference aim was to invite delegates to 'consider the Period Room, and the historic interior, from a wide variety of perspectives in order to address some key questions about the history and practice of Period Room displays in Museums' (Curran, 2014b). The conference raised many questions about how domestic spaces can be displayed outside the context of a house, and staff from the National Trust, English Heritage and various privately owned historic house were often foregrounded as experts on the matter. While thought provoking, the conference missed an

opportunity for museum professionals and historic house professionals to share in important joint challenges such as ‘peopling’ seemingly domestic spaces, interpreting stories of people associated with the space, issues around authenticity and the ways in which artists can interpret the space.

Before launching into a more in depth look at some of these issues, I should attempt to define the historic house.

A house may simply be a building in which people live, a building filled with functional rooms to facilitate the daily tasks associated with and necessary for living; sleeping, keeping warm, cooking and eating, cleaning, and using the toilet. These functional aspects can all be crammed into a small bedsit, or sprawled across many storeys in a mansion and peppered with more superfluous rooms associated with pleasure: a library, a drawing room, games rooms, nurseries, spaces to display art and collections. These spaces can be occupied by just one, or many: by families, both traditional and alternative, strangers, friends and various other communities. Perhaps a defining characteristic of the home is heteronormativity. Matt Cook notes that the idea of domesticity:

embraced both home and family, and perhaps more specifically the things that were done to service and to protect them. If men were meant to work to sustain homes, it was often women who did the less visible domestic tasks that kept them and the people that lived there going (2014: 9).

So, what then is a historic house? Is it simply all of the above, but *old*? I spent the first 18 years of my life living in an Edwardian house; three storeys, five bedrooms. Still home to my parents, the house is older than some properties owned by the National Trust. It was built in 1906, likely planned by local architects William and Thomas R Milburn (Kidson McKenzies and Kidson Solicitors ,1905: 7). The house survived two world wars and later the front gardens were reduced in size to accommodate the growth of Ryhope Road, a dual carriageway which stretches between Sunderland city centre and Ryhope Village, which is known for its farming history, picturesque beaches

and a colliery which closed in 1966. Today Rowlandson Terrace is part of an area called The Cedars which is protected for preservation. A conservation document from 2008 notes that the street boasts an 'impressive range of timber features, including fine panelled doors, delicately carved door canopies and decorative sash windows' (Sunderland City Council, 2008: 38), and the uniformity of the houses is in striking contrast to the council houses and towering residential blocks just streets behind in notoriously impoverished Hendon.

In spite of its rich history, my former home is not a 'historic house'. Why not? Is it because it is still occupied? Is it because after decades of redecorating and modernising (the house was divided into three flats when my parents bought it) the interior is no longer recognisably or 'authentically' Edwardian? Is it because none of its inhabitants are well known, or deemed to be of great importance? Is it because its contents are largely mass produced? Is it because as part of a long terrace, it is not unique? Is it because it is in Sunderland, a place known for shipbuilding, coal mining and glass making rather than for its beautiful houses? What would the National Trust, for example, do with the house if they were to acquire it tomorrow? Whose story would they tell? Whose would they overlook? In many family homes, including my own, as children grow up and fly the nest, bedrooms are either repurposed (studies, gyms) or preserved as museum spaces, silently commemorating the former occupier with the detritus they did not take with them. In the case of my bedroom, which is now a very cramped study, would the National Trust leave it as such, or try and recreate it as my bedroom? If they did recreate it, which of the many incarnations of my room would they choose? The garish clown wallpaper from my childhood? The more minimalist and self conscious approach of my adolescence? Would they go further back than me?

The term 'historic house' is often used interchangeably with 'country house'. In Littlejohn's *The Fate of the English Country House*, the definition of the 'undefineable' country house is relegated to the appendix, suggesting that in spite of its indefinability, we (and by we, I include the English speaking world beyond the UK, as Littlejohn himself is from the US) all have a shared understanding of what the country house is,

based largely, Littlejohn argues, on Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (published 1945) and its subsequent television series adaptation in 1981.

In his definition, Littlejohn discounts town houses, cottages, farmhouses, vicarages and houses with 20 rooms or less (1997: 309), although the latter figure seems arbitrary. Instead Littlejohn defines the country house as:

a large private residence originally intended to serve as one family's home for at least several generations [...] that, ideally, still contains furniture and artworks handed down in the family, and contributes to the support of the local church, village, and countryside; a house that is set in its own surrounding parkland and is (or at least was) in part supported by its own agricultural estate of a thousand or more acres (Littlejohn, 1997: 309-310).

According to Littlejohn's definition, my childhood home could not be considered a country house. While three generations of us have, at some point, lived in the house, this has only spanned a 30 year period. There is no land of note, unless a modest front garden and a back yard full of cars and wheelie bins counts. And of course, it is a town house. Littlejohn's definition also falls short of describing some of the houses I discuss in this thesis, and indeed many of the houses owned and managed by the National Trust. I follow others who have defined the country house more inclusively. Young's work hints at a simpler definition: a dwelling repurposed as a museum, but presented as a dwelling (2007: 60), while Kanawati focuses on the repurposing of the house in her definition, which specifies: 'a former residential structure whose significance as an artifact and a setting is so great that it has been protected as an important resource for the benefit and enjoyment of society' (2006: 2). She goes on to state that the mission of the historic house encapsulates the maintenance, documentation, and exhibition of both the building and its collections for the purpose of educating the public (2006: 3); thus by their very nature as both receptacle and artifact, historic house museums perform a dual role as protector and protected.

Given the difficulties in defining the country house, I prefer the term 'historic house' which I will use throughout my research. Both the National Trust and English Heritage have moved towards the terminology of 'historic buildings', noting perhaps, the

inadequacy of the term country houses and all of the baggage that comes with it (outlined by Littlejohn), that it does not sufficiently describe the varied houses and other buildings that are in their ownership. Perhaps there is hope yet for my family home becoming part of the National Trust's portfolio.

Another often used term is the 'house museum' which seems to be a predominantly American term. It is less vague than 'historic house' but it is nonetheless quite misleading, as the typical historic house in the UK is not presented as a museum (though the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow is one of a number of exceptions to this rule), but offers a distorted illusion that the residents have just nipped out while you explore their 'lived-in' space. The difficulty in succinctly defining such a varying range of buildings and interpretative styles is captured best by Young, who notes that 'a house may *contain* a museum but also *constitute* it' Young (2007: 59). Interestingly, the word 'home' is not used in the context of these buildings, 'country home' suggests a cosy and twee feature in a lifestyle magazine rather than a vessel of history, architecture, and design. The word home also conveys an intimacy that house does not. Even though I have not lived there for over ten years, when I see Rowlandson Terrace, I do not think 'house'; I think 'home'. Does a house cease to be a home when it is no longer lived in? If a house is constantly shaped by the stories of those within it, does this include the National Trust (or whoever) and the visitors? The curators and artists who have since interpreted, shaped it?

For the sake of my research, I will use 'historic houses' to mean any building (of any size) that has served as a home, either to a family or an individual, that is now deemed to be of historical importance, be that by its link to a historical figure, its age, its architecture or its contents, and is now open to the public.

While I was thinking about how difficult it was to succinctly define a historic house I was struck by an article in a free London paper on the underground 'For sale: a place in history, unassuming house hides a Cambodian loft, Edwardian hall and much more' (Radnedge, 2014). John Trevillian's three-bedroom former council house in Dunmow, Essex, has been the site of a painstaking, 24 year project to create a 'wonderland'

containing over 1650 objects from 27 countries. Each room is themed according to an era or a national style, including an Edwardian hall and bedroom, a 1950s New Orleans kitchen, a New York style office and a Victorian dining room. The article detailed Trevillian's attempt to sell the house as a complete piece, including contents, following his recent loss of employment (2014: 3). I wonder if the National Trust could have been a potential investor in its unabashedly fraudulent, conjectural and palimpsestic aesthetic. Although the interior of Trevillian's house looks like a lavish pastiche of a Wes Anderson film set, it is easy to draw a parallel with historic houses that are too overambitious in their reach, capturing a cacophony of conflicting and unrelated styles, periods, and influences under one roof. Like Dennis Severs' House in London, which is a 'meticulously crafted' journey of a family of Huguenot silkweavers from 1724 to the 20th century, Trevillian's creation is a 'mix of history, conjecture, and outright lies' (Vagnone and Ryan, 2016: 36).

Preserving historic houses

On Lees-Milne's first visit to Sutton House, he dismissed it as 'no more important than hundreds of other Georgian houses' (1984: 35). Is there a limit to how many historic houses need to be preserved or opened to the public? What is the purpose of doing so?

The historic house is not just a place in which people have lived. Sophia Cross, writing specifically about Irish country houses, draws parallels between country houses and national flags. Both, she argues, fulfil a cultural function as well as an aesthetic one. They are symbolic and affirmative of both a certain level of taste, and of power, and national identity (2004: 53-55). Young echoes this in regards to English country houses, noting that the 'museumization' of houses is largely about 'memorialization and identity politics' (2004: 59) that constitute 'the essence of a certain kind of Englishness' (2004: 65). In this reading, the historic house has become a symbol for Englishness itself. Littlejohn's aforementioned claim that *Brideshead Revisited* helped to shape the recognizable house, may now have been replaced by the international success of *Downton Abbey*.

Kanawati also lists patriotism amongst the reasons for preserving historic houses. She notes that historic houses can be used as political and moral tools; that they both sever and establish connections with the old world and that they build on nostalgia and myth (2006: 9-21). Young more cynically suggests that opening historic houses to the public might just be a means through which to avoid the wrecking ball:

Saving houses by turning them into museums overcomes demons from development profiteering and urban blight, to the destruction or disrespect of art. However, like many beneficent interventions, the act of saving often peters out after the moment of rescue, leaving the saved house to make its own way as an effective museum (Young, 2007: 59).

If Young is correct in her assertion that once 'saved' the house is in a constant state of struggle, how can the house remain relevant? What is its purpose? She goes on to note that the question those marketing the historic house have to ask themselves is 'who wants house museums?' (2007: 75). Young argues that the survival and relevance of historic houses relies on 'vigorous' programs of events, suggesting that the house as a static interpretive site is, in itself, not enough. The program of events and modes of interpretation will vary vastly depending on the story the house is telling. More often than not, this is linked with why the house was deemed worthy of preservation in the first place. Young classifies the basic narratives of historic houses in six categories:

- **Hero:** someone important lived here (or sometimes merely passed through)
- **Collection:** A collection of furnishings intrinsic to the house, or a collection formed by the inhabitants that is worth conserving in its original location
- **Design:** Especially important form, fabric, decoration, technique or innovation; may be aesthetic or technical
- **Historic event or process:** Something historically significant happened here, once or regularly; may be particular or generic
- **Sentiment:** Positive spiritual or communal feeling for the place, usually focusing on non-specific antiquity (contrasted to history)
- **Country house museum:** Product of multi-generational development of the house, furnishings, collections, and gardens.

(Young: 2007: 62-63)

A nice day out

The roots of historic houses being open to the public lie in the preservation of a space, before the preservation of things, or of a family line. William Morris' founding of the

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, or SPAB, was spurred on by witnessing Burford Church being pulled down in September 1876 and the protest against the demolition of part of Hampstead parish church two years earlier. In its first meeting in June 1878, SPAB concentrated specifically on the preservation of ecclesiastical buildings. Tinniswood argues that the formation of SPAB was significant for two main reasons, the first being in conceiving a notion of a 'commonly held national architectural heritage' (1989: 168) and the second being a shift in the views of ownership, in that in the cases of historic buildings, a "collective good" was favoured over individual rights of owners.

Following many failed attempts, Sir John Lubbock's proposed Ancient Monuments Protection Act was passed in 1882. The legislation initially covered 68 sites, favouring pre-historic monuments and castles. The Act still allowed a great deal of autonomy for the owner, who retained the right to do whatever they wished with their property. The Act was expanded in 1990 to include historic buildings, providing they were uninhabited (1989: 169).

The National Trust beginnings

The National Trust (formerly the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty) was formally constituted under the Companies Act on January 12th 1895 (Waterson, 1997: 10). Originally conceived as a body 'to act as a corporation for the holding of lands of natural beauty and sites and houses of historic interest to be preserved for the nation's use and enjoyment' (1997: 14), its remit was initially to preserve areas of open spaces, or 'open-air sitting rooms for the poor' (Littlejohn, 1997: 57). In its first ten years, the Trust had only acquired 10 historic buildings: the first of which was Alfriston Clergy House, a 14th century thatched house in Sussex. The Trust acquired a small country house in Somerset in 1907, and began restoration work, but it was not until 1920 that they were able to find a tenant willing to complete the restoration. The experience deterred the Trust from acquiring any further houses for many years (1997: 57). Kanawati claims that the first house museum (notably not a National Trust property) was Sir John Soane's Museum in London (2006: 60), which began operating as such within Soane's lifetime, in the early 1830s.

Merlin Waterson, former National Trust Regional Director in East Anglia, stated that the Trust was founded due to the 'shared sense of loss' (1997: 260) of founders Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley at having witnessed the disappearance of a number of great historic houses due to the cost of death duties and inheritance taxes. In the early 1900s, many country houses were pulled down: 'their staircases and panelling and plaster ceilings were sold to dealers; their walls were reduced to rubble' (1997: 175). This 'wholesale architectural carnage' (1997: 175) saw a coming together of conservatives and radicals, those who saw the country house as a symbol of the past, and of particular cultural values, and those who fought for social change. It soon became clear that in order for the Trust to support historic houses, both occupied and unoccupied, they needed to take advantage of their potential for generating income. In July 1937 came the beginning of the Country Houses Scheme, which allowed owners to gift or bequeath their homes to the National Trust. This was widely seen as an initiative that was advantageous both to the families who might otherwise have lost their homes, and to the general public, who would have access to many of these for the first time.

...if an owner donated his house to the Trust, preferably together with its estate and valuable contents, he would no longer have to face death duties on it, and he and his heirs could continue living in it as tenants paying a nominal rent. There were two further conditions. First, the Trust insisted on public access. This generally caused few problems, as many owners were already opening their houses to the public. Second, having no general funds out of which to maintain its properties, the Trust required that an owner donating his house also hand over an 'endowment', often amounting to a substantial fortune, to provide for future upkeep (Bloch, 2009: 1-2).

The scheme also allowed the National Trust to earn income for its properties, which impacted heavily on the accessibility of properties to the public, although many owners were able to negotiate deals that restricted access (Littlejohn, 1997: 64). Those who were able to negotiate retaining ownership of furniture, decoration and collections, could effectively hold the Trust to ransom. One example of this is Buscot Park, Oxfordshire, which was bequeathed to the Trust in 1956. Nevertheless, its contents, including impressive collections of Burne-Jones and Rembrandt artworks are

owned by the Faringdon Collection Trust. The present Lord Faringdon and his family occupy the house, and only a small part of it is accessible to visitors, during limited and irregular opening hours. Nicholas le Provost who played Mr Lumsden in Alan Bennett's *People*, voiced discomfort about still-lived-in National Trust properties, where one feels they are 'bowing and scraping as his lordship walks past the window' (in Letts, 2014).

Alan Bennett's *People*, first performed at the Lyttelton auditorium of the National Theatre in October 2012, offers a critique, not only of the National Trust, but of people's resistance to allow things to decay. The play was motivated by a 'sense of unease' (Bennett, 2012: v) that Bennett had when visiting National Trust houses, and discomfort with being 'required to buy into the role of reverential visitor'. Bennett's play offers an interesting starting point for looking at the National Trust, a stalwart British icon that has become an easy target for derision, both from the left and the right. The play centres around Dorothy Stacpoole's (originally played by Frances de la Tour) anxieties about the Trust taking ownership of her crumbling stately house in South Yorkshire, and the inevitable invasion of visitors into her home. Ultimately the house becomes a set for a 'periodesque' (2012: 45) pornographic film.

The play's satirical and scathing comment on the National Trust was challenged by chairman Simon Jenkins, who took particular chagrin at Bennett's preface, which waxed lyrical about the joys of visiting places where there are no other visitors:

While such access and experiences may seem ersatz to the gilded of Primrose Hill, the enjoyment is real and hardly merits contempt. Not everyone can visit Penshurst or the National Gallery or Fountains Abbey "out of hours" (Jenkins, 2012).

He also challenges Bennett's seeming disdain for National Trust visitors. Jenkins argues that not all visitors are 'blessed with a Courtauld degree and a mental catalogue of English artists and craftsmen. For many people, visiting an old house is a puzzling introduction to an alien world; a voluntary, paid-for act of self-education. They appreciate being helped across the barrier dividing modern audiences from England's aesthetic and social history' (2012).

In the play, Dorothy Stacpoole compares the Trust to a church; 'in the piety and devotion of its members [a church] that would rival the Anglicans were their membership not virtually the same. The cars boast their pilgrim badge, the stickers the holy houses where they have paid homage and the sacrament they have received of coffee and walnut cake' (Bennett, 2012: 68). Bevan, a character who represents competition to the National Trust, bemoans their reliance on and treatment of volunteers:

All those fervent dishwashers and painstaking cleaners of tapestry, that vast volunteer army doing the job for love, or company, or just to get out of the house. The Trust's actual wage bill must be minute. Those worthy women and occasional men, sitting sentinel in every room... and for what? A cup of tea and a flapjack. The Trust has found a way of capitalising on good will: service to the big house. It's the new feudalism (Bennett, 2012: 9).

The Trust's 60,000+ Volunteers have done the equivalent work of approximately 1500 full time staff (National Trust, 'Fascinating facts and figures'). *People* also satirises the notion that the more salubrious sides of history are exploited to entice visitors (as evident with the array of chamber pots in the fictional house filled with the urine of historical figures such as Rudyard Kipling and Thomas Hardy). Ironically, the Trust has both been criticised for encouraging interest in these aspects of history (Kay, 2012) as well as challenged for avoiding them (Monbiot, 2009). Even ITV's 'Inside the National Trust' series, which sets out to 'meet some of the people who safeguard our heritage' (ITV) is approached with some cynicism and a wry tone from the presenter Michael Buerk. In spite of this, the Trust now owns and manages over 250,000 hectares of land, over 300 historic houses and almost 750 miles of coastline (National Trust, 'Our Cause'), and boasts a membership of around 5 million (National Trust, 'Fascinating facts and figures').

Peopling historic houses

The remit of the Trust has since evolved to incorporate a more direct engagement with the people that Dorothy Stacpoole so fervently wishes to avoid. Ruth Taylor emphasises the Trust's role in providing 'life-enhancing' experiences to its visitors

(2006: 98). The Trust's current mantra 'for ever, for everyone' captures not just the idea of preserving and conserving, but also the importance of access and of engaging with people. Taylor recognises that in order to prosper, the Trust must continue its shift into taking an audience-focused, rather than an object-focused approach to interpretation. With the increased numbers of visitors and members in the 1970s, people began to demand and expect more from their visits than purely *access* (2006: 99). This saw the beginning of a shift in priorities in how the Trust engaged with visitors. This commitment, at least in theory, is not only to the Trust's established (and still relatively homogeneous) membership, but also to *potential* visitors, as the Trust aims to 'actively seek to establish sustained relationships with new or excluded user groups' (2006: 101).

This approach has seen a reconsideration of how narratives are formed and relayed in National Trust properties. The relationships that have been built between properties and their audiences have resulted in the Trust beginning to acknowledge that 'there is no one objective narrative, more a number of subjective ones' (2006: 102). Part of the new 'interpretive philosophy' is that interpretation of sites must '*resonate* with people's lives' (Taylor's italics) (2006: 102). The idea that this should be addressed in a bespoke way to each property, while noble in its aims, is problematic in that it requires the varying staff structures within each site to tackle the issue, meaning that overlooked audiences, such as LGBTQ communities, may get lost due to staff feeling under qualified, or perhaps not being aware of the need for visibility for those particular communities. In the build-up to the 'Challenging histories' event at Sutton House, which I will discuss later in more detail, staff from other National Trust properties contacted Sutton House staff to ask if they could do something similar at their properties, rather than asking for support to help them to deliver their own, unique LGBTQ event (Curran, 2014a).

Writing in 1994 to mark the centenary of the National Trust, Waterson acknowledges that there is a 'fashionable argument that this continuing commitment to preservation is mere nostalgia, a perennial preoccupation with the past as a way of avoiding the realities of the present' (1994: 265). The Trust's new interpretation initiatives

challenge this, by using these sites of nostalgia to address and confront the realities of the present, and of the synchronicities of these realities with the past.

This evolution is far from unanimously celebrated. One disappointed TripAdvisor commenter, who appears to have visited Sutton House in Hackney on the day of a craft fair, said: 'If your community centre turned out to be a Tudor building, that would be a delightful surprise. But if the National Trust property you've crossed London to see turns out to be a community centre that happens to be housed in a Tudor building, that's something of a disappointment. I am surprised other reviewers are so enthusiastic about this building'. Others saw these aspects to be positive, especially those with children: 'Children are well provided for and the whole site has a feeling of "community" about it'. Another helpfully recommended avoiding specific days if you were looking for a more typical National Trust visit: 'An excellent afternoon out! (Perhaps a phone call in advance will ensure you avoid a day of children's activities or a community event, if that is your wish. It's good that the house is being used in this way)'. One commenter replied directly to the original reviewer saying 'what is wrong with you!' before defending the community feel that they found so offensive (Trip Advisor).

In Emma Waterton's case study 'Promoting a People-less Heritage', she looks at promotional material used by the English Heritage. She is critical of the romanticised and hyperbolic language and the 'unchallenging imagery' (2010: 159) used and the representation of a 'world full of resonant iconic images: devoid of people' (2010: 159). Waterton observes that the promotional brochures, in their rejection of human presence, 'draw heavily on ideas of disconnection, which is profoundly at odds with ideas of belonging and identity' (2010: 163) which should be key ideas to focus on when establishing or promoting a site as a piece of relevant heritage.

Young identifies the link between trends of historiography and of how narratives in historic houses have evolved. In the 1970s, she notes a 'social history revolution' (2007: 65) that saw historians move away from the story of Great Men, and the legacy left by the rich and powerful towards 'material expressions' of working class life.

Tinniswood dates this shift in approach to the 1920s, where the emphasis of historic house preservation was on the house as *home*. Specifically, as home to whoever currently resided there as the public visited. Questions about the existing lifestyles of the house's occupants, such as 'who does the cleaning?', and wondering how it must feel to have ones' home filled with tourists and strangers replace awe at the aesthetics, and the architecture (1989: 191-192). After all, 'the breath of a house' according to Vagnone and Ryan, 'is the living that takes place within it, not the structure or its contents' (2016: 21).

Critiques of historic houses

The Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums by Franklin D. Vagnone and Deborah E. Ryan is as much a call to arms or a manifesto as it is an unpicking of everything that is wrong with historic houses. The book was inspired in part by Vagnone's experience visiting a house museum where his daughter was publically chastised by a docent for taking a picture on her iPhone. Or, as he puts it, 'such cardinal sins as levity and digital photography' which resulted in her being ordered to spend the rest of the tour at the front with the guide to ensure no further wrong doing (2016: 18). The incident created a 'shared experience and a momentary feeling of humanity' amongst the other incredulous visitors on the tour (2016: 18). This feeling of humanity, *Anarchist* argues, is an uncommon one when visiting historic house museums.

Anarchist addresses the problems with historic house museums, but also offers practical advice about how to overcome these. Here I will outline some of the key criticisms inferred from *Anarchist*:

- Interpretation in house museums typically lend themselves to passive and unengaging experiences

Some historic houses give the impression that they are 'doing us a service by simply allowing us to visit in the first place' (2016: 16). This 'keeper of the flame' approach does not allow much room for engaging and active interactions and experiences with the house, its collections, or with people, past or present.

Vagnone and Ryan describe the typical experience in historic houses; guided tours, domestic spaces 'in frozen tableaux', barriers cordoning off set-piece period rooms- as the 'traditional passive operational model' (2016: 13) for historic houses. This model has become so familiar that it is perhaps not challenged enough, as such unengaging and passive interpretation does not lend itself to repeat visits, and certainly does not lend itself to the non-traditional historic house visitor. In short, this model is unsustainable.

The purpose of interpretation in historic houses is not to merely present the documented past, but to creatively interpret the gaps between documents. Often the most interesting part of human experience is that which most often goes undocumented. Peter Burke suggests that interpretation is always a literary act (as opposed, perhaps, to the science of historical sources?), and in some sense speculative and intuitive (2012: 244). If the current interpreting model is failing to engage, invite the visitors to co-interpret to find possible deeper meanings, and to facilitate and excite more engaging conversations.

It is worth considering how visitors can help to enrich the interpretation of the historic houses as an attempt to undo this. Vagnone and Ryan advocate for allowing and inviting visitors to 'leave a mark' (2016: 146) at the historic house. This could arguably include digital interventions, such as sharing their photography on social media. They argue that when visitors are forbidden to use smartphones or photography that 'their relationship with the site is so limited by what the [historic house] wants them to feel and see that there will be no room for their thoughts and tactile integration with the narrative or the environment' (2016: 147), suggesting rather than detracting from an experience that the historic house dictates, that tactile, visual and participatory engagements such as photography could indeed enrich the experience for the visitor, and therefore enrich their engagement with the house.

Vagnone and Ryan draw parallels between urban 'fingerprinting' and potential guerrilla ways of interacting with the historic house. Fingerprinting, such as street art,

tagging, leaflets and flyers glued to walls and posts are a means of ‘marking a territory by making it personal’ (2016:148).

- There is little sign of humanity in historic house museums

As Vagnone’s anecdote of smart phone admonishment attests, valuable moments can be made through shared embarrassment, laughter and eye rolling. In line with my earlier assertion that cruising leads to the temporary building of communities, and of an intangible space, so can shared (or even conflicting) reactions and emotions between strangers in the historic house museum. Vagnone states that many historic house museum visitor experiences would ‘benefit from a far greater degree of intimacy and humanity’ (2016: 16).

In the spring of 2015 I visited the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, New York City. As visitors, we weren’t just expected to cry, we were actively encouraged to by the dispensers of tissues stationed in front of the particularly affecting videos on show. One such video, of those who jumped from the burning towers, was in a very small angular room, that enforced a closeness between the few who could fit in. There was something quite powerful, regardless of how contrived the moment was, about crying alongside a complete stranger, hearing the melodrama of the nose-blow echoing around the walls of the claustrophobic sermon of grief. We didn’t speak, but we looked at each other as we balled up our tissues on the way out; a shared grief, and shared embarrassment. Both as memorable as the harrowing film itself.

The history of the home is always a history of happiness and sadness, life and death, love and loss. Vagnone and Ryan advocate for the creation of a methodology that ‘encourages the transference of that experience’ (2016: 25), much as I experienced in the footprint of the World Trade Centres.

Much like the earlier point about historic house museums’ disconnection from today, they also fail, ‘at least in part, by their inability to draw connections between the real-

life, quirky, and emotional experiences from the House's past and the same sorts of feelings in the visitors' own homes' (2016: 35). Vagnone and Ryan describe the possibility of this shared experience as "poetic preservation' (2016: 35).

- There is too much of a focus on the Narcissism of Details and no nuance. Historic house museums rely too heavily on precise and rigorous history. Time is frozen to a particular point in history in historic house museums.

Earlier I alluded to a paradigm shift in focus towards history from below. While social history approaches of the 1960s and 70s have encouraged a broadened focus on servants, and the working and domestic life of the house as home, rather than a narrow focus on the owners, interpretation within historic houses still has not caught up with developments in historiography since then, such as feminist, postmodern, cultural approaches of the 1970s and 80s which emphasise the diversity, as well as the breadth, of voices in history.

This could largely be attributed to the fact that many historic houses are keepers of the flame, and are tightly wedded to the documented, tangible history of the house, and its own significance and uniqueness as a site (2016: 99).

Vagnone and Ryan refer to this as the 'Narcissism of Details' and offer a number of ways to overcome or challenge this:

- Offer overlapping narratives from a variety of eras, rather than one frozen period. This should include the lives and world of the visitors to the house (2016: 44).
- Understand that the importance of any historic house is that 'because it was built, lived in, and loved by people who were ill-defined, messy, complex, and far from perfect' (2016: 100).
- Embrace the fragility of history and of historical sources, acknowledge the gaps in records and explore '*rumour, gossip and conjecture*' (2016: 44). They call for

a selective combination of so called rigorous and precise history, and “fuzzy” histories, including the literary; the picturesque, the speculative, the anecdotal

Peter Burke defines fuzzy histories as those assembled with ‘self-conscious antiprecision’ (2012: 240). He notes that historians that claim to present “hard facts” ‘operate within the predominantly anglophone culture of empiricism’ (2016: 240), and thus cannot be reflective of wider experience. As such he argues that ‘definite conclusions’ should be avoided (2012: 246).

Vagnone and Ryan also argue that this narcissism of detail does not suffice in a world that has shifted into ‘quicker, more concise, chatty forms of communication’ (2016: 78). Historic houses would do better to master these methodologies in their presentation rather than resist them. They argue that visitors should be allowed to skim (2016:107), but also that the basic narrative of the house should be able to be accessed by both those who value brevity, and those who require more detail (2016:105).

The main criticism this thesis attempts to overcome, is this:

- The narratives represented in historic house museums rarely capture or reflect the diversity of the community that surrounds it.

Much like the earlier criticism about historic houses failing to make connections with their immediate community, often historic houses fail to regard their visitorship, or indeed the cast who make up the multifarious layers of history in the house, as anything but homogenous. Vagnone and Ryan encourage Historic houses and their staff to ensure that ‘the historic site *communicates on multiple levels* its openness to represent the diversity of the world around it’ (2016: 44).

Vagnone and Ryan argue that often in historic houses, the visitor experience is secondary to the conservation of architecture and objects, and that the local community around the house is an even later concern (2016:41). They note that ‘in our

desire to deify museums and historic sites, we risk alienating those very people we feel should flock to appreciate us' (2016: 19). They offer two starting points to address this, first, to '*Acknowledge a disconnect* between the house and its neighbourhood' and to shift its mission to community engagement (2016: 44) and to begin to consider its constituents as important as its collections (2016: 12).

The question from museum professionals, and specifically historic house professionals that I have been regularly asked throughout my research has been along the lines of 'how can you talk about LGBTQ identities in a historic house where the narratives are all heterosexual?' The answer is manifold, but a good starting point for research is to broaden the reach of the characters and stories you investigate and interpret.

Vagnone and Ryan describe this as *expanding the guestlist* (2016: 45). There's a strong possibility that by expanding the guestlist of subjects to be more diverse and far reaching, you can also expand audiences. If your house was once occupied by a white Englishman involved with the East India company (to use James Deane who occupied Sutton House in the early 1600s as an example), use it as a platform to discuss international trade, or as a starting point to explore narratives of migration from Asia to the UK. These links need not be tenuous, and can in fact use the site as a venue to use history to engage in conversations around contemporary issues.

Some sites are well known and well visited because their narrative revolves around a handful of 'lead characters' (Vagnone and Ryan, 2016: 104). During a visit to Kelmscott house in Oxfordshire, I encountered a bound folder in the final room that addressed the 'ensemble cast' (2016: 104) beyond William, Jane and May Morris, and was surprised to see a glaringly obvious omission. Mary Lobb, who lived with May Morris at the house for around 20 years was nowhere to be seen (Curran, 2015b). My assumption (which I was assured in later correspondence was incorrect) was that the narrative of a larger, masculine attired woman who may have been involved romantically with May Morris, was too challenging for the interpretation staff to even bother with a footnote.

Figure 2.1 'William John Bankes (1786-1855)' by Sir George Hayter (1792-1871) at Kingston Lacy, Dorset
©National Trust Images/Angelo Hornak

I was faced with a similar experience when visiting Kingston Lacy, a National Trust house in Dorset built between 1663 and 1665. This time, I did not know of the queer history of the house until after my visit. As I sat in the back of the car as we drove away I read the guidebook that I had purchased. William Bankes, who inherited the house in the 1830s, was arrested in Green Park in 1841 for 'indecently exposing himself with a soldier' (National Trust, 1994: 31). Bankes tried to run away from the police, but was hindered by his still unbuttoned 'small clothes' (Sebba, 2009: 176). In order to escape what could have potentially been a hanging, Bankes became an outlaw and fled to Venice. He continued to travel for the rest of his life, and remotely collected furnishings and artworks from around the world for his beloved Kingston Lacy, which he would instruct his sister Lady Falmouth to exhibit in the house. Family folklore suggests that Bankes found occasion to sneak back into the country to approve of his sister's response to his long distance curatorial demands. I was alarmed that in spite having diligently read all of the laminated text panels in each of the rooms, I had not encountered any of this information while in the house. This relegation to a single line in the guidebook struck me as cowardly, and indeed, irresponsible. There was only one

suggestion of a more playful piece of in-house interpretation, which proclaimed that the Dining Room was ‘dominated by William’s giant organ’. I could be clutching at straws as reading this as a euphemism, it could well have been just a poorly worded sentence. If only they had deigned to let us know exactly what he got up to with his giant organ.



Figure 2.2 Kingston Lacey

No longer is ‘service to the big house’, as Dorothy in *People* puts it, sufficient. As historic house staff we must ensure that the house is serving the people who surround it, the people who visit it. Otherwise what is it for? This challenge must be embraced if historic houses are to remain relevant (2016: 141). ‘Embrace rather than ignore the changing demographics around your site’, say Vagnone and Ryan, ‘and seek diverse perspectives on how your [historic house] can evolve into a more widely welcoming [and I would add, exciting] site’ (2016:141).

“Not quite as boring as you thought” the National Trust’s London Project

The London Project was a way through which the Trust acknowledged that its appeal to young urban dwellers was eclipsed by its core audience of families and those aged 50+ (National Trust London Project, 2014: 4). The project report (entitled ‘Never Mind the Oakleaf, here’s the London Project’ and echoing the graphics from the Sex Pistol’s

1977 'Never Mind the Bollocks' album art) claimed its aim was to 'unearth some pointers as to how a faster-on-its-feet, less bureaucratic, even less consensual Trust might evolve in the future' (2014: 2). The objectives of the project were threefold:

- To offer more for the 'traditional' Trust member to do in the capital
- To create new events for the younger, 25-40 Liberal Opinions audience, and
- To make a big media impact that would get us noticed

(2014: 4)

Interestingly, in spite of the project aiming to appeal to young, liberal, urbane and 'seen-it-all' (2014: 7) audiences, the small London Project team was led by Ivo Dawney, the brother-in-law of Boris Johnson and descendent of William Dawney, 7th Viscount Downe. The report is also quite transparent about potential income being a driving factor behind the project too; 'our goal thus became to 'detoxify' the Trust brand to these groups and thereby bring forward the moment when they might consider membership' (2014: 4). Over three years, the London Project led events, exhibitions, dining events, talks, lectures, digital projects, trips and tours. Here I unpick four of those endeavours.

Hedonistic whispers...

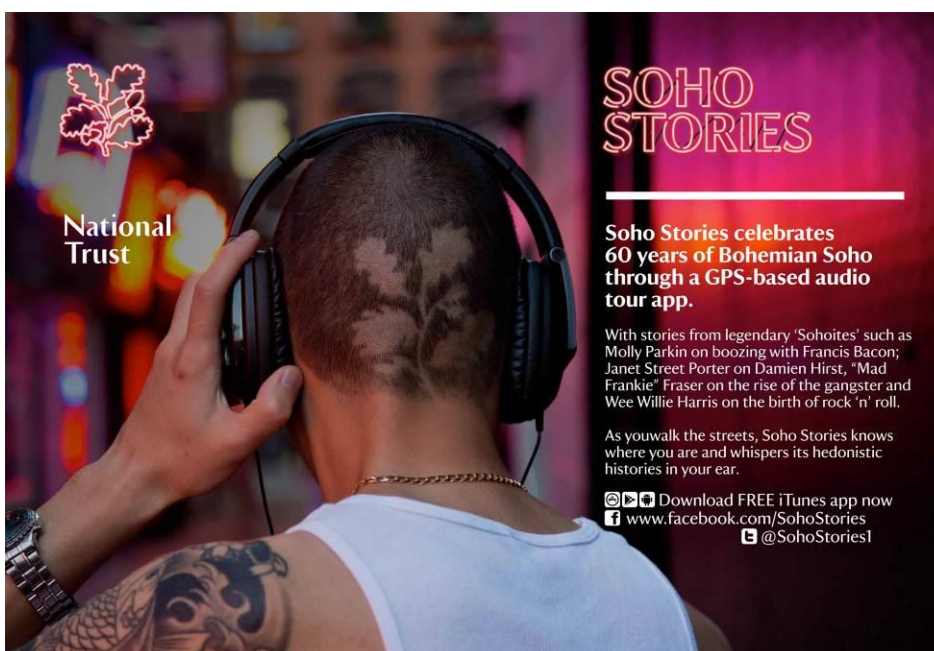


Figure 2.3 *Soho Stories* poster, used with kind permission of the London Project/ National Trust

The first initiative was the creation of a free app for smartphones called 'Soho Stories'

developed by Phantom Productions, in which anecdotes, songs, and interviews play according to GPS around a virtual map of Soho in London, that could be listened to on-the-go in situ, or remotely anywhere in the world. The app 'whispers its hedonistic history in your ear' (National Trust, 2012) and recognizes the multi-layered history of Soho, embracing intangible heritage through memory and recollection. 'Soho Stories' intentionally targeted a younger audience by its focus on music, nightlife, crime, and sex. As of 2014, the app had 13,000 downloads. Upon its launch, critics of the Trust, including Ann Widdecombe (Daily Mail, 2012), questioned the National Trust's motivations for the app, suggesting that the definition of heritage was being misused, and that the Trust's values, and crucially those of its members, were being undermined or ignored. While it is still possible to download the app, it has, like many of the other initiatives of the London Project, gone under-researched and under-evaluated: no attempts have been made to understand the successes and failures of the initiative. The overriding critique of the venture questions why the Trust engaged with the preservation, or retelling of, intangible heritage, and about how this intersected with the tangible preservation of green spaces, coastlines and historic buildings.

The Old Compton Street entry of the app hails Soho as an area of 'flamboyance, liberalism and socialising', and focuses on the gay scene that has become established there since the legalisation of gay male sex in 1967. One youthful voice recounts a Pride weekend where they remember 'snogging five people in one night' and an older voice recalls the day the Admiral Duncan pub was nail bombed in 1999, and another mistakenly states that a number of gay people were killed that day. Whether an oversight or otherwise, this is an interesting mistake, as the three people that were killed by the bombing were heterosexual, which raises questions around truth and authenticity in anecdotal musings being presented as fact, and about queer memory.

The 'Francis Bacon' entry on Great Pulteney Street informs us that the jarring figurative painter had a taste for older men and liked to be whipped. The opening to 'the strip clubs of Soho' entry on Charing Cross Road begins with: 'why else would you be here? Ah yes, the history' a statement which, contrary to Anne Widdecombe's objections: 'I fail to understand how getting young people to listen to these stories of Soho relates

in any way to the important and historic work of the National Trust' (Kay, 2012), acknowledges that the edgier approach to history may indeed be Soho Stories' biggest selling point.

The aristocracy of today...



Figure 2.4 Big Brother house interior, used with kind permission of the London Project/National Trust

Alan Bennett claims that his aforementioned 2012 play *People* was 'mildly prophetic' (Bennett, 2013) in relation to perhaps the most controversial of the National Trust's more radical ventures. This came in the form of the London Project's two-day takeover of the Big Brother house in Elstree studios, Borehamwood, in 2013. Big Brother is a reality television show which began in 1997 based on a Dutch series of the same name. At its peak during its time on Channel 4, Big Brother had an average of 5.8 million viewers. The format of the show challenges upwards of ten housemates who compete in weekly challenges to earn money for food, while gradually nominating each other to be evicted, until a winner remains. The show's peak has now passed, following a decline in viewers and its move to Channel 5 in 2011. Whilst not an overtly queer event, I would argue that this initiative showed a more radical challenge to the National Trust's image than the aforementioned project, and furthermore that it celebrated a platform that has served as a positive one for educating people about non-normative identities. Queer performance art historian Gavin Butt describes Big

Brother as ‘heir to Waters and the trashy underground’¹³ and declares that ‘most people who watch this stuff know it’s shit, but watch it idly and distractedly nevertheless. It’s car crash telly’ (in Butt and Rogoff, 2013: 29).

Ivo Dawnay, London Director of the Trust, anticipated disgruntled responses to the collaboration, and in the guidebook states that the Trust ‘likes important houses’ (Dawnay, 2013: 1). He goes on to say that the Big Brother house, like other houses associated with the National Trust, has helped to inform and reflect the tastes of its contemporaries, and that the stories of its residents are an important aspect of the house itself. The overly defensive tone of the guidebook, in which Dawnay states ‘let’s confess, we are opening the Big Brother House as a bit of a joke’ (2013: 1), could perhaps be alienating to those who did support the project. Although Dawnay admits that the butt of the joke is the National Trust, the guidebook betrays an underlying cynicism about the show itself and perhaps those who watch it. The guidebook continues in a tongue in cheek way, comparing the rooms and garden of the house to equivalent spaces in more typical National Trust houses; the beds, for example, are compared to the Ambassador’s bed at Knole, a 15th century property in Kent (where the original manuscript of Woolf’s genderqueer classic *Orlando* is displayed).

According to the end of project report, 79% of UK adults heard about the opening of the house an average of 12.2 times, such was the breadth of the media coverage (National Trust London Project, 2014: 11). Vitriol about the collaboration between Big Brother and the National Trust was not reserved for the usual Daily Mail reading public, a comment on an article on the usually pop-culture loving Guardian’s website said: ‘Dear God, even the National Trust is at the vanguard of dumbed-down Britain these days. It’s pathetic and tragic in equal measure’ (Addley, 2013) with others rather melodramatically claiming that they would be shredding their membership.

While the mean age of visitors for the tours seemed to be slightly younger than the

¹³ John Waters (1946-) is a queer underground filmmaker who rose to prominence in the 1970s as a breakout of the underground scene, and became a mainstream figure in 1988 thanks to the success of musical *Hairspray*.

audience of traditional and permanent National Trust properties, the largest demographic was not of the young, but rather older women, often with their less enthusiastic husbands in tow, and often from a working-class background. From the conversations I had with those in my tour groups, the older working-class visitors were less likely to visit Trust properties than the younger, university educated Londoners, who treated the day with more irony.

The problem with the project was largely timing. Had the Trust given tours of the house in the early to mid 2000s, the crowd would have been in the age range they anticipated. Unfortunately, by 2013, Big Brother was no longer relevant, and enjoyed a much smaller viewership than it had ten years previously. Reality TV has evolved a great deal since the fly-on-the-wall “social experiment” style of the early Big Brother series, and as such, it seems dated, already a part of television history that has been and gone. A tour of the X-Factor or Strictly Come Dancing studios, or even a stroll around the streets of Essex taking in the sights of scripted reality show ‘The Only Way is Essex’ could have attracted the demographic they were hoping for. On tour days, one of the housemates from the series that had finished just weeks before was on hand in the house to answer questions about their time there. Most of those on the tour seemed unsure as to who these people were, suggesting that even though they had been willing to pay £15 for the experience, they had not actually watched the recent series.



Figure 2.5 London Project Big Brother Launch Party balloons, used with kind permission of the London Project/National Trust

The house was opened to paying visitors on the 27th and 28th of September 2013, just a fortnight after the last residents checked out of the house following the 12th series of the Celebrity installment of the show. The tours led the visitors past studios famed for television such as *Strictly Come Dancing* and films including *Star Wars Episode III*, *The Shining* and *Moby Dick*, and then into the camera runs of the house. Next, the tour entered the house itself, then offered a look into the production gallery of the programme, and ended in the studio for the magazine style spin off show 'Big Brother's Bit on the Side'. Visitors were then offered a chance to purchase a guidebook for £5.

The tour groups were unusual in that visitors knew more about the former residents of the house than many of the tour guides. The guide notes suggested that tours should be conducted in a 'tongue in cheek and enthusiastic manner'. I decided to ignore the instruction, and instead tried to share the passion and interest of the visitors by stressing what an important part of television history Big Brother had been, how much

work went into creating a show where contestants are filmed for 24 hours a day, and the variety of designs, furniture and fixtures that gave the house its unique look.

The tours were all led by volunteers, some of whom worked or volunteered at National Trust properties across London, and others who were drama students. Of the volunteer tour guides, there were only two of us who had watched the television show in recent years, so many of the guides conducted dispassionate tours from information they had learnt from one day of training. On the day of training, which involved a very brief example tour and a copy of the guidebook, the focus was on ensuring the house was ready for the press launch party. Volunteers were briefed on who the invited celebrities were, all but confirming the concerns of many that the tours were a media stunt rather than a thoughtful reframing of heritage. At the launch event, which was invitation only, and consisted of former Big Brother contestants and media figures, Ivo Dawney joked that the housemates from Big Brother were the 'aristocracy of today' (a line later reused in the London Project report), and the guidebook comments that past housemates 'have included humankind in all its glorious diversity' (Dawney, 2013:12).

House proud?

A project that failed to capture the public's imagination, or to set the press alight quite like the previous two was the doomed '#NTHouseproud' (launched September 2014). In collaboration with students and graduates from the Royal College of Art and online designer furniture retailer MADE.COM, the project aimed to capture a snap shot of how Londoners live today. Billed as a 'social media experiment', the London Project invited Londoners to upload pictures of the interiors of their homes to Twitter or Instagram using the hashtag #NTHouseproud, with winners in a variety of categories receiving MADE.COM vouchers. An overall winner would be announced with the opportunity to have their home temporarily become one of London's National Trust properties, with the red velvet rope treatment, room stewards and a guidebook produced. The report of the project fails to mention the latter prize, which never came to fruition due to underwhelming engagement with the project, in spite of the British Library considering 'the idea sufficiently sociologically interesting to keep the results in

a digital social history archive' (2014: 14). At the launch event, one of the London Project team remarked that if there weren't at least 1000 entries, the project would be considered a failure, so the fact that 'around 500' (2014: 14) photographs were uploaded and entered would indicate why the project seemed to disappear in a puff of smoke, with no house being opened to the public.

The brutalist tower



Figure 2.6 Balfron Tower

A year later I was invited to be involved as a tour guide for the pop-up opening of Flat 130 of the Balfron Tower in Poplar, East London. I had, unknowingly, known about Balfron Tower before the initial two week run of the tours, and not just because of its iconic silhouette. In the film *28 Days Later* (dir. Danny Boyle 2002) the main character (played by Cillian Murphy) and other survivors take refuge there from the rest of the London population who are infected with 'rage', rendering them zombie-like. A building originally envisioned as a socialist utopia is depicted as refuge from complete nightmarish dystopia.

These tours were more challenging for a number of reasons. Firstly, they required a lot more preparation and research about a much larger context, about East London, social housing, architecture and Ernő and Ursula Goldfinger. The second large challenge was that I felt quite uncomfortable giving the tours, as during my research, I had read about some of the debates around the gentrification of social housing blocks, and could not help but feel that being a National Trust tour guide was contributing to that problem considerably. The building was about to be developed and sold as luxury apartments, the original social housing residents having, mostly, been "decanted" since 2010. The other concern was around the voyeuristic nature of the tour, which began at Langdon Park station, and went to Crisp Street Market, passing through social housing estates before arriving at the tower and travelling up the lift to the 24th floor. The groups were largely white, middle class people unlikely to live in the sort of social housing estates we passed through on the tours. I was also conscious of the potential for disturbances that could be caused to the current residents (a few remaining social housing tenants, property guardians and artists from Bow Arts Trust),



Figure 2.7 Balfron Tower

The Balfron tours attracted a younger demographic than the Big Brother takeover, though once again most of the visitors were university educated. There were large groups of architecture students, staff members from social housing groups, activist groups and charities. We were briefed about potential 'problem' visitors before each shift, with some names highlighted who had been discussing the problems of gentrification, and raising issues about the various arts projects taking place at Balfron and the National Trust on social media platforms. There was, however, no trouble. Those who attended who had been ear-marked as potential troublemakers were interested in what could be the last chance to see a building they felt strongly about before it was developed into luxury flats for city workers. Others wanted to share their own recollections of the building before the social housing tenants were evicted. In order to address my own anxieties about the delicate nature of the tours, and to pre-empt any complaints that could be raised, I made sure to begin the tours by addressing my discomfort, and to make it clear that I wanted to avoid fetishising brutalist social housing as design over function. The enthusiastic visitors on the tours, and the other volunteers I worked with shared my discomfort with the direction the building was being taken in, and by being reflective about that in our conversations, it became clear that everyone was there out of an interest in modernist architecture and the socialist values imbued in it by Ernő Goldfinger. The conversations we had on the tours about our own experiences of social housing, high rise living and East London meant that the tours were more self aware and critical than perhaps your average National Trust tour. I tried to make sure that the tone of the tours was not one of fetishising the building as an icon, but instead getting to the core of the social values that Goldfinger intended to be enacted by such a building, and how it has been, and is being, undone. I was transparent in my biases against gentrification, a luxury that would perhaps not have been afforded to the tour guides if they were paid.



Figure 2.8 Balfron Tower, Flat 130 interior

The tours ran initially for two weeks, and sold out quickly, so the project was extended for a further two weeks, during which free tours were offered to local school and community groups, though very few of these were taken up. The initial 600 tickets for the tours sold out in less than 48 hours, and the further 400 tickets released also sold out rapidly (National Trust London Project, 2014: 15). From the National Trust's perspectives, one of the most interesting things about the Balfron Tower project was the way in which volunteers were recruited. In many National Trust properties, including in the Goldfingers' own home Willow Road (built in 1939) in Hampstead, volunteers must have been room stewarding or welcoming visitors for four years before being able to give tours of the house. This not only suggests an unusual hierarchy of people who are giving up their time for free, but also fails to recognise that those who are able to volunteer consistently for four years are likely to be the most privileged, or the retired, meaning the variety of people having access to those opportunities is limited. Such a system also overlooks the fact that many volunteers

are doing so in order to progress into a career in heritage, and thus cannot spare (or indeed afford) four years of unpaid work to be able to give a tour.



Figure 2.9 Balfron Tower, Flat 130 interior

The Balfron Tower project was advertised as a ‘mystery volunteering opportunity’ for those interested in the 1960s. Thirty volunteers were recruited, including experienced guides from Willow Road, certified tour guides with decades of experience, those with an interest in the 1960s with time to spare, and young people who had never led tours before. There was one day of training for the volunteers, and relevant reading provided. Tours were conducted in twos, and where timetabling and availability allowed, experienced tour guides were paired with novices. This created a vibrancy of approaches and a valuable exchange of interpretations, and also, from my own experience of working alongside both time-worn guides, and newcomers, led me to believe that when it comes to constructing engaging and interactive tours, experience is not necessarily a good, or necessary, thing. The London Project report claims that the Balfron experience ‘changed volunteers’ perception of the National Trust’ (2014: 15) whose adjectives to describe the Trust differed from before the project (‘limited’ ‘grey’ ‘chintzy’) to after the tours (‘young’ ‘daring’ ‘innovative’).

Flat 130 was the centrepiece, not least because it boasted impressive triple aspect views of the Thames, Canary Wharf and beyond, but because in 1968, the flat was occupied by Ernő and Ursula Goldfinger for a few brief months, as an exercise in solidarity with those living in high rise towers, for “empirical” research to inform Balfron’s eventual taller and younger sister Trellick Tower in North Kensington and to demonstrate Balfron’s desirability. Some dismiss their stint there as a ‘condescending publicity stunt’ (Hanley, 2012: 112), and stills of Goldfinger in the flat depict a barren and unfurnished room, suggesting that the brevity of their stay was planned. Ruth Oldham looks more favourably on their time at Balfron, owing to the notes and diary of Ursula documenting her interactions with Balfron residents and careful critiquing of the tower (‘Entrance doors- heavy and difficult to manage with prams and children, especially in SW gale’ (Oldham, 2010: 22)). The couple hosted champagne parties for the tenants to find out their thoughts about Balfron, but Ursula’s notes also reveal a hint of condescension and snobbery directed at the long term dwellers of the tower, she is surprised that all tenants held open the doors for each other, that no door mats had been stolen and at that there was ‘surprisingly little hooliganism’ (2010: 22-23).

The couple only occupied the flat for two months, so the Trust decided to go down a more fantastical route rather than trying to recreate what would have been a very sparse flat. Instead, artists Wayne and Tilly Hemingway were invited to create a 1968 flat for the *imagined* family that moved in *after* the Goldfingers. The idea was that all furniture was from 1968 or earlier, assuming that families would have inherited furniture from earlier to bring with them. There were, however, a few anachronisms, and perhaps the furniture would not have been reflective of a family in social housing. One can assume Ursula would not have taken kindly to the garish and pastichey imagined décor given her response to the taste level of the tenants in 1968 (‘people are going to a lot of trouble to install [their flats] with outrageously terrible carpets, curtains and ornaments’ (2010: 23)). My doubts about the logic of presenting well researched fiction rather than, say, the empty flat, were soon challenged when I saw how much visitors enjoyed it, mostly because of the nostalgia it triggered. One woman said it was strange seeing somewhere that looked so much like an old flat of hers being

presented as a museum piece. These positive responses were reflected in the visitor survey results, with 99% of those surveyed judging their experience as ‘very enjoyable’ or ‘enjoyable’, a figure that is ‘significantly above the national average’ (2014: 15).

While the report, I suggest, overestimates the impact the London Project had and the way it ‘pioneered approaches to new and existing audiences’ (2014: 16), the bold shift in the way volunteers were recruited and the Trust’s own reconsideration of what constituted as heritage will perhaps be the lasting legacy of the project, not least on the Trust itself.

Collapsing Time: the *Unravelled* project

From 2010-2014, the artist group *Unravelled* led by Polly Harknett, Caitlin Heffernan and Matt Smith, quietly subverted the National Trust’s approach to heritage outside of the capital. *Unravelled* was a project to display contemporary art and craft in historical settings and to inspire artists, makers and heritage professionals ‘to explore new contexts, new challenges and new audiences’ (*Unravelled*, ‘About us’). The project received funding from Arts Council England and the Headley Trust, with each National Trust property used supporting the project with £12,500 each year.

At Nymans House in West Sussex, it fell to ceramicist Matt Smith (who also curated the groundbreaking *Queering the Museum* at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, which I will explore in the following chapter) to tease out the hidden queer narratives of former resident Oliver Messel (1904-1978) whose relationship of almost 30 years with Vagn Riss-Hansen was emphatically *not* hidden in his lifetime. The second venue for ‘*Unravelled*’ and known primarily for its garden, the Nymans estate was developed by three generations of the Messel family from the late 19th century, coming into ownership of the National Trust in 1953. Matt Smith was one of the ten artists involved with the project, and at Nymans he explored the theatricality of stage and costume designer Oliver Messel.



Figure 2.10 'Piccadilly 1830' by Matt Smith, © Unravelled arts/photography by Sussie Ahlberg used with kind permission of Matt Smith

The artwork, *Piccadilly 1830* (turkey and ostrich feathers, ceramic, wool, linen, mirror-backed beads) was based on a costume designed by Messel for a 1930 play of the same name, and was placed on a Roman sculpture *The Antique Youth*. Following the production, Messel adapted the costume to wear himself at a party in Paris given by Daisy Fellowes, the editor-in-chief of French *Harper's Bazaar* (Smith, 2012c). Smith highlights the theatricality of the artwork and of Messel himself in the interpretive text to accompany the piece:

Military dress is one of the few occasions for men to wear feathers without raising eyebrows. Oliver took this one stage further by incorporating ostrich plumes, more commonly associated with showgirls than soldiers. Contrary to Oliver's original design, and counter to his utilisation of the cheap materials for the maximum effect, I hand-beaded the jacket with thousands of individual mirror-backed glass bugle beads (Smith, 2012c).

The Antique Youth sculpture upon which the artwork was draped has lost both its nose and genitals adding a 'sense of macabre' turning a celebratory garment into a memento mori (Smith, 2012a: 77). Amanda Selvedge notes that the placement on the

sculpture 'quell[s] the fanfare' of the costume and 'replace[s]it with the empty silence of times gone by, long lost friends and lovers, conversations never finished, time moved on' (Selvedge, 2012: 90).

The absent genitalia of the sculpture highlights the 'de-sexing of the original designer' (Smith, 2012a: 77) that was apparent in the lack of interpretation mentioning his long-lasting same sex relationship. Unlike his siblings, whose two marriages each are documented in the Nyman's family tree and guidebook, Oliver's narrative is shaped around his career and his relationship to other family members (2012a: 76). Smith highlights the poignancy, and I would add the *irony*, of the omission of same sex relationships from domestic spaces, since before decriminalisation, those spaces were amongst the few where same sex desire could be lived safely (2012a: 76). Following the exhibition, the National Trust decided to recognise Oliver Messel's relationship with Vagn Riss-Hansen by adding him to the family tree (Vincent, 2014: 113).

In a subsequent 'Unravelled' project at The Vyne, Basingstoke, Smith used the relationship between John Chute and Horace Walpole and their "committee of taste" to inform ceramics draped in pearls to explore taste and the 'magpie-like search for beauty' amongst collectors (Smith, 2013).

Smith states that visitors to historic houses are often led to believe that the history of the house has been captured in a single freeze frame, and that the interpretation throughout tends to overlook that the houses were in a state of 'constant flux and change' (2012a: 75). Because of this, dominant narratives are prioritised, with the 'ubiquitous' (2012a: 76) family tree as the foundation. Smith notes that family trees 'privilege not only the male line through which title and ownership passes, but also relationships of those in society who can, or choose to, get married and have children' (2012a: 76). Artistic intervention can make the necessary selectivity of the stories told more apparent and open to scrutiny (2012a: 75), and can explore some of the less apparent or competing stories, and help to 'collapse time' (2012a: 74) which is otherwise portrayed as static.

In this chapter I have traced contemporary interest in historic houses, and their preservation, to *The Destruction of the Country House 1875-1975* exhibition at the V&A and offered a working definition of 'historic houses' for the purpose of this thesis. I looked briefly at the history of preserving and visiting historic houses, and at the history of the National Trust, and how its aims and engagement with the public has evolved, especially in London. I also aimed to outline some critiques of historic houses, to further explain why the case study I explore in chapter 4 is so necessary and important in reshaping how historic houses interact with contemporary issues and communities.

In the following chapter I will review literature around LGBTQ focused exhibitions in museums, galleries and archives and attempt to trace a history of the successes and failures of each, in order to inform and shape my contribution to the, as yet, slight history of LGBTQ exhibitions and interventions in National Trust historic houses.

CHAPTER 4

Queer people and museums

The notion of the potential for museums to be more than just a space full of things is no new idea. The so called *Age of Reason* that occurred throughout Europe and America in the late 17th and 18th century favoured rationalism and individualism over tradition, and embedded a secular and scientific approach to culture and politics that heavily impacted on the evolution of the museum. In the early 1900s, the American museum pioneer and librarian John Cotton Dana observed that in order for museum spaces to more positively contribute to the taste and manners of those who visited them, the collections and physical spaces of the museum must be complemented by activities, innovative approaches to education and collaboration with people and institutions beyond the walls of the museum (1999 [1917]). He also acknowledged the importance of museum staff taking a more fluid role in the interpretation of the museum contents, he challenged the notion of museum as authority and believed that staff should claim 'only such authority to teach as their learning and experience gives them' (1999 [1917]: 91).

Social justice, and more broadly, human rights, are not universally shared values. While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that education should 'promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace' and that 'everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits' (United Nations), many of the member states interpret this differently, with access to both formal and cultural education varying vastly across the globe. UNESCO's Education 2030 agenda is a vision drawn up in 2015 to address educational inequalities and opportunities for life long learning over the following 15 years. The framework suggest that 'inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda' (UNESCO, 2015: 7) and that at its core, education 'facilitated dialogue and fosters respect for cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, which are vital for achieving social cohesion and justice' (2015: 26). While reading with Western or UK eyes we might conclude these statements to cover LGBTQ people, the cultural importance, or even the legality of LGBTQ lives varies hugely globally, and as

such, my work on social justice covers a UK perspective only, with occasional reference to museum practice in North America.

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the development of social justice in museums, looking particularly at examples that include LGBTQ narratives in exhibitions and the disrupting of museum narratives through artist interventions.

Richard Sandell claims that the paradigmatic shift away from museums focusing primarily on 'acquiring, preserving and researching objects' (2011: 130) to enabling a more accessible and diverse visitor experience has developed vastly in the last few decades. Sandell notes that the key to this movement is in the creation of a climate in which some museums:

...have begun to move away from a passive approach to their audiences ('the doors are open and everyone is welcome') to one in which greater responsibility is taken for identifying and dismantling the wide-ranging barriers which have operated (with considerable effectiveness) to exclude many groups from participation (Sandell, 2011: 131).

This approach shifts the onus of inclusion away from the visitor, which is the realm of Heumann Gurian's notion of *threshold fear*, in which she notes that the 'uninitiated' (2005: 203) are intimidated by, or wary of the 'physical and programmatic barriers' (2005: 203) that museums present. Sandell identifies that it is the institutions themselves that are wary of their audiences and are hesitant to completely engage with more marginal or "difficult" narratives. While some museums have admirably made transformations to their priorities and to the allocation of resources (Sandell, 2011: 131), the changes made by others have been more 'cosmetic' and short-term, and the responsibility of inclusion has fallen solely on the education teams (2011: 131). It is unfathomable, to me, that initiatives to challenge museums as authoritative spaces 'associated with reinforcing social inequalities' (Lang, 2006: 29) should be met with criticism, but some fervently believe that any move towards engaging with social issues or matters of wellbeing, equality and inclusion, contributes to the "dumbing-down" of museums.

Many critics reduce the argument around social justice in museums to a Left versus Right binary. Josie Appleton, of the think tank Institute of Ideas, for example, asserts that any claims that museums are elitist, exclusionary and irrelevant to the “ordinary visitor” are an ‘assault from the cultural Left’ (2004). She challenges the paradigmatic shift as pressure for museums to ‘reinvent themselves as social missionaries, getting involved in building communities, improving mental health and educating children’ and is one of many critics (Appleton, 2004; Jenkins, 2001; 2009; Travis, 2007) who suggest that ‘outreach’ is directly at odds with scholarly rigour and collections being at the core of the museum. As well as critics pitting education and collections as competitors, some museums too have been hesitant to engage with social justice out of fear ‘that they would have to divert resources from other (and perhaps in their view, higher) priorities’ (Anderson, 2012: 216). CEO of the J. Paul Getty Trust and former director of the Courtauld Institute, James Cuno shares similar views about the importance of objects being at the centre of museum practice. Cuno argues that above empowering people and providing a sense of space or spectacle, objects are the purpose of the museum, and that acquiring, preserving and giving access to works of art is the ‘art museum’s contract with the public’ (2004: 52). While he acknowledges that the museum also equips the visitor with ‘access to knowledge about a deeper appreciation of the object’ (2004: 52), he infers that there is a fixed way in which to engage with objects, and that ultimately research and teaching in the museum are always object based. The museum experience, according to Cuno, should involve repeated and sustained engagements with art works and objects from the collection and nothing more (2004: 55). However, museums that best practice ethical and social concerns are perhaps those whose inclusion initiatives are underpinned by scholarly research and collection expertise. Director of Liverpool Museums David Fleming claims that the socially responsible museum regards collecting, preserving and research as ‘techniques and means, rather than as ends in themselves’ (2010: 3). Sandell argues that claims that museums should ‘stick to what they do best’ overlook the ‘historical roots of public institutions in the nineteenth century’ (2011: 134).

Colin Trodd notes that education is still often built around that which is “historic” or “scientific”, a mind-set where ‘the discipline of cultural management is articulated as

an agency of cultural authority whose legitimation is secured by the discipline and order of history' (1994: 40). Indeed it might be that more social aspects of education might actually be obscured by the *discipline and order of history*, as competing or silenced narratives and experiences are excluded or suppressed further.

While concerns about broadening audiences and widening participation are often shouldered by education departments, it is a promising sign that said departments are beginning to emerge from their underground basement levels to ground or upper floors (Rees Leahy, 2005: 115) in both a physical and a symbolic evolution. In spite of criticisms, concerns for equality, diversity and social justice have moved from the fringes of museum practice, at least in theory, to the core (Sandell and Nightingale, 2012: 1). In addition, the museum is increasingly viewed as a platform for activism, and a measure for engaging directly with human rights.

The museum, according to Fleming, has become less inward-looking and more extrovert (2010: 1) and approachable (2012: 77), which has led to a more socially responsible outlook that departs from a collection-based focus. This is in part due to financial pressures to engage wider audiences, and a more diverse and professionalised museum workforce driving for change. He argues that publicly funded museums in particular need to '*achieve something for society, rather than act simply as self-perpetuating institutions*' (2010: 2). He describes social justice as:

a notion based upon the premise that *all* people should be able to derive benefit from museums, that they have an *entitlement* to access to museums, and to see themselves *represented* in museums. Furthermore, museums have a responsibility to *fight* for social justice, not simply through ensuring access for all, but even in some instances through acting as forums for debate about basic human rights (Fleming's emphasis in italics) (Fleming, 2010: 1).

Arguably, the first step towards social justice is the free admission to public museums, and those private museums which choose not to charge for entry. The National Trust is often hindered by its being a membership organisation, made clear by the previously mentioned threat of membership withdrawal by those who do not approve of the

direction the Trust takes. In terms of addressing class based inequalities, the removal of admission may not be enough, the lifting of entrance fees at the V&A saw no substantial shift in the socio-economic makeup of the visitors (Nightingale and Mahal, 2012: 31). This, therefore, is only a start, museums must also 'show an appetite for *risk* and innovation' (Fleming, 2010: 5-6); act as agents of social change; and try to affect these changes in a deliberate way, not as an incidental bonus.

There is no easily definable structure in place for museums to become more socially responsible, due to the diverse nature of how museums operate, and because for 'many (not all) education officials in government, museums and other cultural bodies lie beyond the known world of formal education' (Anderson, 2012: 223). As well as this, cultural rights, unlike other human rights, are not considered a priority (2012: 221). Anderson identifies that cultural education is not just about gaining knowledge or learning to do something or make something, but is something that underpins the rights of people to access such opportunities in a public space:

Through education and participation in cultural activities, children and adults can learn not just how to understand design, or to make a bowl, painting or film. By practicing these activities in a public space, they can also learn that it is their right to participate in cultural activities. A model of learning, and of museums, which fails to encourage wider participation by the public in cultural activities, is antithetical to the development of a strong and healthy democracy as well as contrary to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Anderson, 2012: 223).

Museums 2020

Museums have begun to adopt ideas about social justice, not just rhetorically, but as a cornerstone of essential practice. The Museums Association have adopted this line of thinking in their vision for the future. Museums 2020 was a consultation throughout 2012 with museum staff, funders, policy makers and other stakeholders to rethink the role of museums and to project how museums should look and operate in 2020. This spawned 'Museums Change Lives' which aims to aid museums in considering their contribution to contemporary life and to develop a keener social conscience. In the US, the American Alliance of Museums has an equivalent initiative called 'the Future of

Museums'. While the approach for thinking primarily about impact was welcomed by many, some contributors to Museums 2020 were hesitant or outright dismissive of a dialogue that they interpreted as a neglect of the importance of collections. Others identified that bespoke approaches to social justice were the way forward, acknowledging a variety of needs and audiences across different institutions.

The main message of the consultation document is that 'every museum can do more to improve people's lives and play a part in meeting society's needs' (Museums Association, 2012: 4) and that museums cannot contribute positively to a 'civil and civilised society' merely by existing. Rather, the respect and trust that people have in museums should be used constructively to engage with new people, build new relationships and collaborate with individuals, groups and organisations with varying skill sets. The document offers a bleak view for the future financially and asserts that new and creative approaches must be taken in order to address a variety of social issues faced by its visitors and potential visitors. Countering the arguments that collections are the unique selling point of museums and must remain so is the fact that 'no 21st-century museum could be satisfied with simply opening its doors and waiting for people to visit, however good its collections and displays' (2012: 6), museums should not seek only to educate and entertain, but to supplement this by stimulating change, affecting the activities, opportunities and aspirations of its visitors and facilitating skill-building¹⁴.

Museums 2020 claims that local museums have an obligation to serve their community, including the smaller diverse communities within it. This includes acknowledging world cultures, encouraging participation, enhancing understanding between communities and acting as a physical forum for disaffected groups or marginalised people to come together.

¹⁴ Another branch of Museums 2020 is something that sits comfortably alongside Social Justice, but is equally contested: Wellbeing and Happiness. Wellbeing in this case means both in terms of mental health and general health, and implies that museums have the capacity, and are well placed, to contribute to the individual and collective wellbeing of its visitors. The Happy Museum Project, funded initially by an award to Tony Butler of the Museum of East Anglian Life by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Breakthrough Fund, operates as a leadership framework for tackling wellbeing, as well as green and sustainability issues.

The consultation document includes many sweeping statements that need to be unpacked more fully including that museums should ‘promote the values of a fair and just society’ (2012: 14), of course, what this ‘fair and just’ society looks like will be a source of continued debate, but Museums 2020 defines this as a museum that recognises the dignity of every human being and a vision of an equal society, promoting diversity and human rights. They also acknowledge that some museums are explicitly activist in this regard, and that human rights work in museums is a potentially risky undertaking in which complex and contested rights will also be a source of continued debate. One of these contentious areas of human rights may well be the inclusion of LGBTQ narratives within museums.

Janet Marstine’s concept of the ethical museum has similarities to the Museum 2020 vision. Ethics in museums are ‘ostensibly self-regulating’ (2011: xxiii), and no generic ethical model could suitably serve a range of institutions. Rather, museum ethics is founded on the moral agency of institutions, asserted through three strands; social inclusion, radical transparency and shared guardianship of heritage (2011: 5). Marstine remarks that the ethical museum must continually communicate the public value of the museum, and take care to nurture the trust of the public in such institutions; trust based on democracy, transparency and relevance. Echoing the idea raised in the Museums 2020 consultation document regarding the importance of collections, Marstine notes that the ethical museum does not value the object above all else (2011: 7).

Chaotic desire: museums and LGBTQ people

Although sexuality has always been very visible in museums, albeit through classical nudes and dominant narratives of beauty, the uncovering of alternative sexualities is a relatively new area for museums (Winchester, 2012, p. 143). Attempts to address the silences have been varied in their levels of success. It is an unquestionably challenging subject to approach, as it is, for all intents and purposes, invisible in real terms. One can never assume to understand anyone else’s sexual or gender identity, or indeed

one's own. Queerness, desire and gender identities are all abstract concepts that are impossible to abridge into the neat text panels that exhibitions often rely on.

Desire is chaotic and cannot be confined to neat binaries and tidy labels. How can radical queer, anti-assimilationist desire be translated into the museum without a tacit acknowledgement of the gaps, disruptions, geographical discrepancies and exceptions that such desires inflict upon the objective museum system? (Winchester, 2012, p. 143)

Owing to a paucity of literature scrutinizing the lack of queer narratives in historic houses, this section aims to look critically at progress made in museums in addressing LGBTQ themes and audiences. Sanders argues that museum staff, including curators, educators and administrators are involved in the 'construction and maintenance of mandatory heterosexuality' (Sanders III, 2007). This section seeks to trace the root of this, and to name, celebrate and critique those institutions in which staff have attempted to redress this. In order to take an overview of those institutions that have addressed these issues, I have divided this section into five areas, that represent the barriers or challenges faced by museums; legal barriers, the presumed innocence of children, the lack of material culture linked with LGBTQ experience, the problems around taking an object-centred focus, and the problems around taking a biographical focus.

Legal barriers

Male Homosexuality was illegal in England for over 430 years since the Buggery Act of 1533. It was legalised in 1967 following recommendations made in the Wolfenden report (or The Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution), published in 1957. The legislation was controversial, as in 1965 93% of people polled considered homosexuality a 'form of illness requiring medical attention' (Weeks, 1977: 30) and thought it 'a behaviour disturbance and therefore curable' (1977: 31). While the law was specifically referring to sexual acts between men, and lesbian acts have never been illegal, nor has an age of consent ever existed between women, the legislation was the beginning of a very slow shift in attitudes to both gay and lesbian relationships. Legal progress for trans people has been slower still, with

The Gender Recognition Act 2004, which came into effect in 2005, being the first time trans people could be recognized by law as the gender with which they identify, albeit after having jumped through hoops, including having to have transitioned at least two years before a Gender Recognition certificate is issued, a lengthy process that involves mandatory meetings with mental health professionals.

Of course it is not simply museums that have overlooked LGBTQ history, but history itself has suppressed and silenced the story of LGBTQ people. Holocaust museums and memorials, for example, 'have the potential to mislead as well as enlighten' (Short and Reed, 2004: 104) and up until recently this has been the case with regards to the suffering of Hitler's non-Jewish victims (2004: 104). In a survey conducted in the early 1990s by the American Jewish Committee 'only about half of the adults in Britain, and a mere quarter of adults in the United States, know that gays were victims of the Nazi Holocaust' (Heger and Müller, 1994: 15). Gay men, marked in the concentration camps with pink triangles, were just one group of 'forgotten victims' (1994: 8) in the Holocaust, but unlike the others, such as the mentally and physically disabled and victims of forced sterilisation, 'the post-war German government [...] actively continued to persecute' (1994: 8) those persecuted for being gay, and they were 'never legally acknowledged as victims of the Nazi regime' (1994: 8). On its opening in 1993, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum became 'the first major Holocaust institution to conscientiously integrate the experience of homosexuals into its exhibits and educational programs' (1994: 8). Since then, the men in the pink triangles of the Holocaust are more widely acknowledged, though through fear few came forward to tell their stories. The Imperial War Museum in London includes narratives of gay men throughout the Holocaust exhibition and in May 2008 the *Memorial to Homosexuals persecuted under Nazism* was unveiled in Berlin. Despite this emergence of acknowledgement, the 'damage inflicted by fifty years of official, scholarly and social neglect' (1994: 15) has not been completely undone.

Due to the battles that the LGBT community have fought in order to be recognised as an important audience worth recognising, the danger is that museums do not look

beyond this and portray gay men, lesbians and trans people as victims, and their stories merely as a chronicling of prejudices and hate.

Twenty years following the legalisation of gay male sex in the UK, another piece of legislation loomed on the horizon, set to hinder and halt any progression of LGBTQ rights. Museums, like other public-funded institutions still hold prejudices towards the LGBTQ community that are rooted and 'preserved in the formaldehyde of Section 28' (Hari, 2008), a clause launched by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative party in 1988 that forbade local authorities to 'intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality' (Waites, 2001: 497). It also prohibited the teaching of 'the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship' (2001: 497). In the build up to the legislation, politicians and the right-wing media attempted to normalise homophobia through staunch misguided support of Section 28. One particularly worrying publication by Rachel Tingle (which she claims single-handedly led to Section 28) claims that gay people wrongly believe themselves to be 'a legitimate minority who have suffered oppression' (1986: 4) and enforces stereotypes that 'some [gay people] openly support the legalisation of paedophilia' (1986: 1). One of the biggest barriers for those against the clause both then and now was the use of the word 'promote', which suggests that homosexuality is an assumed trait, a learned behaviour, and that queer people are some sort of recruiting bloc, preying on the young. The legislation, and publications such as Tingle's, served only to increase fear and ignorance of the gay community, particularly in a time where AIDS was at the forefront of public conscience.

Since its overdue repeal by the Labour government in 2003, the very language used in the legislation sounds alien, hateful and dangerous, but never the less, a whole generation of lesbians, bisexuals and gay men have been 'scarred and infected' (Hari, 2008) by the consequences, and a cloud of doubt still hangs heavily over the museum sector. There were never any convictions made under Section 28, but it remained a 'convenient tool' (Vanegas, 2002: 105) to mask institutional homophobia and protect curators and other museum staff from addressing the issue. In spite of Section 28 being an ineffective piece of legislation, the lasting effects can still be felt both in

schools and in museums, as Jeffrey Weeks asserts; 'Law does not create public opinion but it does shape and reinforce it' (Weeks, 1977: 9). I can only imagine how my own school years might have been different if I had not been (unknowingly at the time) educated under the cloak of Section 28. Following the repeal, there is no excuse to ignore LGBTQ communities, and the pressure is now on, not only to acknowledge them, but to actively address them in museum practice.

While public attitudes were slow to catch up, there was a 20 year period between the legalisation of homosexuality and Section 28, a time in which museums could have undone the violence through silence they had been complicit in, without fear of prosecution. In spite of this, I am unable to find any evidence of exhibitions addressing non-heterosexual experience during that period, and the first wave of exhibitions began slowly, quietly and bravely in the early 1990s, while Section 28 still loomed heavy, including *Love Stories* at Islington Museum in 1992, three V&A exhibitions (*Streetstyle from Sidewalk to Catwalk, 1940 to Tomorrow* November 1994- February 1995, *Graphic responses to AIDs* June- October 1996, *Dressing the male: men in fashion plates* June 1999- January 2000) and the first exhibition dedicated entirely to queer experience, *Pride and Prejudice: Lesbian and Gay London* at the Museum of London from July to August in 1999, just months after the homophobic motivated nail bomb attack at the Admiral Duncan pub on Old Compton Street in London's Soho.

Protecting innocent eyes

As demonstrated by Section 28, the presumed innocence of children is often used as a counterargument to exposure to queerness. Bond Stockton troubles this idea by asserting that no child is allowed to be considered 'straight' until they are of an age for adults to consider them old enough to be sexual (2009: 7), therefore, as non-straight beings, children, and the state of "innocence" are inherently queer. Judith Levine (2002) notes that to turn children away from honest and challenging discussions about sex, sexualities and relationships is to turn them toward more potentially damaging sources, such as online pornography, which raises issues around degrading and sexist language, expectations, representations of the body, the treatment of women and

consent. The censorship of “sex” when it comes to children, in real terms means the censorship of men in sex, and of alternative sexualities, favouring instead consistent exposure to problematic portrayals of women as sex objects and unhealthily unchallenged enforcements of gender stereotypes. Levine identifies “clean sex” as the kind that is deemed appropriate for children, clean sex is scientific, based around heteronormative reproductive ideals (2002: 9). This is usually taught using scientific language, and anatomical drawings, ‘without pictures of fleshly, hairy genitals’ (2002: 9), the people involved presented as un-nuanced biological apparatus for the purpose of teaching. She goes on to say that to forbid children from accessing alternative and varied portrayals of sex and relationships, is to encourage them to find their own means of trying to understand it, and moreover the secrecy surrounding the subject only serves to make it a topic of discomfort and shame; ‘all sexual knowledge is out of place and therefore dirty’ (2002). She makes the case for the need for “desire education” (2002) to supplement sex education, as well as more wide critique around the subject of gendered behaviour, as the enforcement of the ideologies of masculinity and femininity leads to ‘bad and unsafe sexual relations’ (2002). Some might argue that to expose children to queerness is damaging, but as illustrated by J. Jack Halberstam, to expose them to the troubling world of straight identities might be all the more dangerous:

The excessive training that we give to boys and girls to transform them from anarchic, ungendered blobs into gender automatons, [...] is (a) dangerous, and (b) not necessary, and (c) not actually consistent with lived reality. And as some girls grow up to become anorexics and some boys grow up to become bullies, many girls grow up to be overachieving micromanagers, and many boys grow up to be underachieving slackers, yet we still refuse to give up on the models of masculinity and femininity that have been established as ordinary and normal and good. And we spend very little time, relatively speaking, attending to the problems with this model of heterosexuality and figuring out how to fix them (Halberstam, 2012: 10).

Bond Stockton argues that growth is not necessarily an upward trajectory, and that queerness is about ‘growing sideways’ (2009), Halberstam furthers this by suggesting that queer people’s approach to cultural activities such as clubbing; and subcultural movements such as punk, goth, cyber-goth and so forth, is at odds with how

heterosexuals are presumed to interact with them. Halberstam claims that queer people do not “outgrow” these activities and that queer spaces are multigenerational, not subscribing to the ‘notion of one generation always giving way to the next’ (2012: 2). The notions of innocence and the child take on a very different meaning in a queer context.

The argument about protecting children from positive portrayals of same sex relationships and transgender identities often exist within more evangelically-inclined members of various faith groups. To use but one example, a questionable survey carried out by Gallup found that ‘literally no British Muslims would say that homosexuality is “morally acceptable” [and that] younger Muslims had more stridently anti-gay views than older Muslims’ (Hari, 2011). Hari suggests that homophobia from those of Muslim faith is overlooked, accepted or forgiven due to the fact that they themselves are ‘frequently the victims of bigotry’ (2011). To think that the views of those who justify their hatred with religion can be changed is perhaps idealistic, but museums could use their position to educate people, regardless of their views on the nature of same sex love, about ‘the legal and moral right of LGBT people to live and grow up experiencing affirmation and respect’ (Renee and Elizabeth A in Atkinson, DePalma and No Outsiders Project Team, 2010: 71).

Worrying statistics aside, it would be misleading to suggest that all those of Muslim faith who find queer relationships morally unacceptable would endorse and support homophobic or transphobic discrimination. In an initiative in primary schools called the ‘No Outsiders’ Project, aimed at combating prejudices by introducing children to picture books involving alternative families, including those with same-sex parents, one teacher observed that while ‘Muslim parents were against the idea of their children being given the message that it was OK to be gay’ (Sue K in Atkinson, DePalma and No Outsiders Project Team, 2010: 26), they still ‘didn’t want their children to be homophobic and call others names’ (2010: 26). Solutions to prejudices, regardless of how they are justified or the motivations behind them, could be found ‘in terms of education, training and other interventions’ (Sandell, 2007: 30) rather than ignoring or excusing them. The conclusion to the ‘No Outsiders’ project is that prejudices and

ignorance towards the LGBTQ community cannot be tackled without 'talking positively about LGBT identities and relationships' (Mark in Atkinson, DePalma and No Outsiders Project Team, 2010: 77), which allows stereotypes and prejudices to be challenged 'before they become firmly established' (Reeve, 2006: 48).

Mad about the boy Hidden Histories

Just one year after the repeal of Section 28, artist and curator Michael Petry encountered the anxieties and prejudices left in its wake. When overseeing a curatorial project at the New Art Gallery Walsall called *Hidden Histories*, he experienced institutional homophobia that manifested itself in the form of extreme censorship. Whether or not it is done purposely, if curators 'exclude, or make invisible, lesbians and gay men' (Vanegas, 2002: 106) from their collections and displays then they are guilty of enforcing institutional homophobia. Institutional homophobia 'refers to ways in which government, business, churches and other organisations discriminate against people on the basis of sexual orientation' (NSW Department of Education and Training).

The exhibition looked at the lives and works of male artists in the 20th century who were same sex lovers (Petry, 2007: 119). Although the museum 'gave institutional backing to what might otherwise be seen as a marginal history' (2007: 123) the curator and other museum staff experienced adversity from the local council, who demanded a postponement of the original opening in order for them to vet and censor those parts they deemed inappropriate, and continuing throughout the project with threats to close the exhibition if not allowed to exercise complete censorship (2007: 124). This included the clumsy censorship of all of the captions, the exclusion of works (one of which was excluded due to the fear that it would 'encourage paedophilia' (2007: 124)), a change of name for the exhibition from *Mad About the Boy* due to similar fears (2007: 125) and the creation of 15+ and 18+ rooms to prevent children being 'damaged' (2007: 127) by what they saw. Tyburczy claims that warning signs alongside material deemed to be explicit are performative, they 'construct and theatricalize divisions between the display of normalcy (eg. Traditional nudes) and

sexual perversity' (2016: 106), she goes on to state that they allow museums to indicate implicit norms and values, without coding them as rules, and that they manage the public's consumption of 'controversial' material (2016: 105).

The landscape has changed dramatically since then, and while local authorities might be more hesitant to voice such concerns about *unsuitable* content, the cry of 'what about the children' can still be heard in relation to LGBTQ exhibitions, including in my own *126*, which I will discuss at length later.

No material culture?

A problem identified by both an object based approach and a biography based approach is in the lack of material culture directly relating to LGBTQ experience. The reasons for this are many, primarily that it is difficult to identify objects that are obviously imbued with values relating to sexual and gender identities, but more pressingly that pre 1967 for people to have created or collected material relating to their LGBTQ identities, such as love letters and photographs would have implicated them in the law.

Beyond legal and medical records and ephemera such as posters, zines and banners, LGBTQ histories largely remain untold and ignored in museums due to a seeming lack of material culture. Moreover, the material that exists often documents persecution, victimisation, visibility, sex and partying, without any physical record of the more domestic and every-day aspects of queer life. Increasingly museums are realising that the most effective way to encourage LGBTQ communities to tell their varied stories is through the use of oral histories, but gathering stories from these particular community groups presents challenges, not least in the actual collecting process, but in weaving these histories into museum narratives.

As I stated earlier, the use of oral histories is sometimes contested and rarely untroubled. Even the staunchest supporters will agree that oral histories may often be less about truth and fact, and more about memory, the unconscious and fantasy, but

these factors could indeed be the strength of oral histories. In *An Archive of Feelings*, Ann Cvetkovich notes that 'the history of trauma [which LGBTQ histories so frequently are] often depends on the evidence of memory, not just because of the absence of other forms of evidence but because of the need to address traumatic experiences through witnessing and retelling' (2003: 241-242).

Queer at sea

One of the most celebrated exhibitions addressing male same sex relationships using oral histories is *Hello Sailor! Gay Life of the ocean wave* at the Merseyside Maritime Museum in Liverpool in 2006, curated by Jo Stanley and Charlotte Stead. Although not without its problems, the boldness of the exhibition was due more to do with *where* it was, than with what it was.

Anthony Tibbles, former Director of the museum, acknowledges that Maritime Museums generally follow a conservative route, where content is more concerned with practicalities rather than life at sea (2012: 165), recent developments in museums that have seen personal narratives coming to the forefront and have encouraged such institutions to look not only at the lived experiences of those at sea, but furthermore to interrogate false notions that seafarers were exclusively white, heterosexual and male. Tibbles notes that the experiences of women seafarers, seafarers of colour, and those with disabilities have only recently become a part of maritime museums agendas, with LGBTQ identities bringing eventually up the rear. It has, perhaps, taken an unusually long time to acknowledge queerness at sea, given how the sailor has long been used as a campy figure of stereotypical homosexuality (2012: 161), most iconically perhaps, by Tom of Finland. Furthermore, the sex lives of sailors have not been taboo entirely, the high instances of prostitution at ports has been well documented (2012: 162), albeit only when the prostitution involves heterosexual activity.



Figure 3.1 Imagined cabin at *Hello Sailor!* at Merseyside Maritime Museum

Meecham argues that it was a brave move to introduce such an exhibition to the ‘resolutely heteronormative’ (2008: 372) and ‘battleship grey masculinised spaces of maritime museums’ (2008: 373). Equally refreshing, is that after touring, the exhibition was condensed and slotted into the permanent exhibition looking at life at sea, the rather clumsily compiled gay testimonies sitting within the main flow of the narrative. Physically the now permanent exhibition is strikingly prominent with its hot pink walls.

The exhibition was based on Baker and Stanley’s book *Hello Sailor! The hidden history of gay life at sea*, which used oral histories to challenge fetishized stereotypes of sailors in gay pornography. Transition from book to exhibition results in an uneasy and confusing tone. The authors’ focuses are on Camp and Polari, rather than homosexuality and this sits uncomfortably when realised as an exhibition, with the themes being ‘overtly represented and yet under-theorised’ (2008: 373). This overt ‘loss of scholarship’ (2008: 372) means that the themes addressed are often thin in substance and vague. Camp is presented as ‘apolitical’ (2008: 375) and whimsical, (although Sontag would argue that Camp is always apolitical (2009 [1964]: 277) and fails to mention that it might be seen as a rejection or criticism of heteronormativity

and assumed gender roles. The focus on camp could also be offensive and interpreted as being misrepresentative of the gay community, and particularly of the gay seafaring community. One visitor to the original exhibition commented in the guest book that 'while very strong on camp, "gayness and camp are quite separate things"' (Meecham, 2008: 378) this difference could and should have been emphasised and explored.

Despite the authors' eagerness to dissect the 'heterosexual hegemony and patriarchal patterns that are both masked and exposed when queerness is handled as comic masquerade' (Baker and Stanley, 2003: 16), the exhibition itself seems to handle queerness at sea as just that, as comic and shallow fun for the amusement of heterosexual colleagues and passengers. While this approach is celebratory, it seems misleading to suggest that the gay seafarers never encountered any hostility or prejudice. While the exhibition paints a brief picture of the way gay men were perceived on dry land, it does not approach any notion that there may have been homophobia on-board as well. Perhaps an exhibition like this that now forms part of a very broad exhibition, should not allow scholarly indulgences and instead address same-sex relations and gay lifestyle in the merchant navy more generally initially, especially given that the size of the display is not vast.

While it is a positive and necessary step to avoid representing gay histories as purely those of victimisation and prejudice, the other extreme is often just as patronising. The authors of the book acknowledge this romanticisation, by stating that, as much of the research was conducted using oral histories, there is a worry that those telling their stories have 'a tendency to see the past through rosy spectacles' (2003: 17), and whilst 'mistaken' memories allow 'unconscious fantasy' (2003: 17) to rise to the surface, leaving the oral histories unedited and uninterpreted in the exhibition would have allowed visitors to draw their own conclusions, rather than constructing a narrative from the oral histories that many museum visitors will take to be authoritative. This rosiness captured in the exhibition was quite intentional, Tibbles states that 'it was agreed that the principal approach should be to illustrate the sense of freedom, the campery and the fun that characterised the experience of the men who had contributed to the research' (2012: 166). He goes on to say that 'a worthy but

poorly visited exhibition would not achieve the aim of illustrating the diversity of life at sea and helping to counter-act prejudice' (2012: 166), which suggests that the soft-touch approach was as much to do with footfall as it was with social justice.

The response to the exhibition was varied, with many feeling it was long overdue, and many ex-seafarers pleased to see their lifestyles and experiences finally acknowledged (Meecham, 2008: 378). Others questioned the accuracy of the exhibition as 'they had not been aware of any floating gay havens' (2008: 378) and a minority of visitors voiced unashamed homophobia such as the capitalised 'NO SODOMY IN OUR MUSEUM' (2008: 378), the "our" indicating a view of "them" and "us", and a view that the museum should only be for the majority.

One of the most striking visuals from the exhibition, which was installed into the permanent exhibition as well, was that of the imagined recreated cabin of a gay seafarer. A discordant and fantastical 'period room' that raised more questions about the difficulties of creating displays around issues that are not well documented or have no material culture, than it did inform the visitor about life at sea for gay people. The small cabin bed was covered in Doris Day and Dusty Springfield records, while the walls featured photographs from camp classic *The Wizard of Oz*, male pin-ups and a Kenneth Williams still from *Carry on Cruising*. The centre piece of this anachronistic display of stereotypical and tenuous imagery was the open cupboard door revealing an elaborate orange dress with a feather boa. Aside from the assumptions about gay men that could be drawn by visitors to the exhibition, the trope of the half open *closet* door remained undiscussed, untheorised. This constructed cabin was a direct response to the difficulty of collecting materials that relate directly to sexual identities (2012: 167), and serves as a clumsy example of how *not* to get around that problem. Regardless, in the feedback gathered from 89 visitors, the cabin was identified as the most memorable exhibit (2012: 170), though with no indication of whether this was memorable for good or bad reasons.

Rightly or wrongly, *Hello Sailor!* is regularly mentioned as a pioneering and game changing exhibition. Its legacy, aside from its rather awkward permanence in the *Life*

at Sea exhibition, is in the establishment of an archive that resulted from an amended collection policy, called *Sailing Proud*, which mainly consists of the oral histories from the exhibition, and hand drawn “memory maps” of foreign ports and the various bars and other places that impacted the experiences of gay seafarers (Merseyside Maritime Museum, 2013). The long term aim is for the archive to be fully accessible to the public. The *Military Pride* exhibition at Imperial War Museum North in 2008 has similarly resulted in a permanent exhibition, in the form of a talking heads style video highlighting the experiences of four LGB narrators included in the temporary exhibition. Rhys highlights that while commendable, LGBT short term exhibitions should be complimented by the acquisition of objects for the permanent collection (Rhys, 2011: 90). It is the dialogue between the collections (or lack of) and the oral histories that often create the greatest challenges.

‘Queering’ objects

Many exhibitions have challenged the aforementioned idea that the LGBTQ communities have little material culture with which to tell their stories in museums. Queering an object by tenuously linking it to a figure who may have made, owned, encountered or used it, who may or may not have fitted into contemporary understandings of sexual and gender identities has the potential to be interpreted as 'tokenistic political correctness' (Winchester, 2012: 145). However, the inclusion of an object read queerly into a canon of more traditionally understood museum objects can be a bold act of resistance. In *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (MacGregor, 2010), a collaboration between the BBC and the British Museum, first broadcast as a radio series in 2010 and published as a book of the same name, a handful of the objects are overtly identified as having LGBTQ significance. The Warren Cup is one which according to Neil MacGregor serves to remind us that the ‘way societies view sexual relationships is never fixed’ (2010: 234). David Hockney’s etching ‘In the Dull Village’ (1966), MacGregor claims, could not have been made in any earlier time period (2010: 636), he therefore uses it to frame a time of sexual liberation and battles for gay rights. In a museum context the Warren Cup is an example of an object with overt themes, and its framing as a queer object therefore was largely successful, whereas, in the

Hello Sailor! exhibition, using an orange dress as part of a visual representation of queerness as sea is, as I discussed earlier, more problematic. One more thoughtful and innovative way of approaching an object-centred discussion of queer identities, is arguably through the insertion of newly created artworks, or reinterpreted existing objects into dominant narratives.

Progress at the British Museum?

A game changing exhibition took place in 2006, perhaps surprisingly, at the British Museum. The iconic institution is perhaps not synonymous with progress and innovation, but its history of collecting more risqué objects is a long one. In 1865, the British Museum 'Secretum' ¹⁵ was founded, a so-called 'secret museum' in which materials of a sexual or "obscene" nature were stowed and only accessible to those 'of mature years and sound morals' (Gaimster, 2000: 11) under the assumption that it was only 'the most educated of intellect who could be trusted to respond appropriately' (2000: 14) to such material. More often than not it was exclusively men that were allowed to view this material, after making a written request to do so. David Gaimster believes this reveals underlying 'fears held by the British (male) establishment, [...] that if women or children were exposed to pornography, and even to the sexual material culture of the past, it might provoke an imbalance in the relationships between men and women and hence a breakdown in the social order' (2000: 14). This idea of suggestibility still remains to some extent, as evident in the earlier example of *Hidden Histories* at the New Walsall Gallery. It suggests that the British Museum and others were endorsing a heteronormative way of thinking and censoring certain material in order to "protect" those more vulnerable to apparent corruption, to maintain the patriarchal balance in society and to prevent poorly educated people from *misusing* the opportunity to engage with the materials. The last acquisitions to enter the collection in 1953, were several condoms made from animal membrane from the late eighteenth-century (Williams, 2007: 61).

¹⁵ The Secretum was officially founded following the Obscene Publications Act (1857) and included, amongst other things, a collection of 434 objects, including many phallic objects, described as 'symbols of the early worship of mankind' donated by physician George Witt (Gaimster, 2000)

Despite changing attitudes, the now notorious Warren Cup was refused by the British Museum when the chance to acquire it first arose, it was only after a second opportunity to purchase it in 1999 that it became part of the collection.

The Warren Cup is a Roman silver drinking vessel that has been dated between AD 14-37 (2007: 46). It depicts two scenes of penetrative same sex male intercourse and the ages of the figures suggest that both of these are pederastic encounters. Homosexual and homosocial aspects of ancient culture are often 'discreetly ignored outside of academic discourses' (Frost, 2007: 65), perhaps this is because the Classical world was often considered a 'model for nineteenth-century European civilisation' (Gaimster, 2000: 14) and therefore it was not widely acknowledged that the cultures that are seen as a 'blueprint' (2000: 14) for modern day society embraced a more open, free and diverse approach to sexualities. The museum is ideally situated to reopen this discourse beyond the academy and in mid 2006, this is precisely what the British Museum sought to do.

Entry to *Warren Cup: Sex and Society in Ancient Greece and Rome* was free and the exhibition took a single object and experimental approach, as is often the case in the Room 3 exhibition space. The small exhibition ‘took an “object in focus” approach, using a single exhibit [...] as a way in to help visitors engage with larger themes and narratives’ (Hargreaves McIntyre, 2006: 6). It contextualised items such as the Warren Cup within Ancient Greek and Roman societies and delved into the theme of attitudes to sexuality in other cultures as well, allowing visitors to ‘draw parallels with the present day’ (2006: 6).

Despite a gallery attendant claiming that visitors ‘either love it or hate it’ (2006: 29), according to the Hargreaves McIntyre report, the response was overwhelmingly uncontroversial and positive. Whether this is entirely reflective of the attitudes towards the exhibition and its content or more reflective of the nature of the kinds of visitors who are willing to engage in visitor surveys and interviews is debatable. Perhaps visitors were not shocked or challenged by the graphic sexual content because of the object’s antiquity and age, if the cup had been contemporary, it may be that the views expressed would have been very different, much like the response to modern artworks in the aforementioned *Hidden Histories* exhibition, and indeed, if it is proved to have actually been produced in the early 20th century, as archaeologist Professor Luca Giuliani claimed in 2014 (Alberge, 2014). By contextualising the cup within a more general view of same-sex relationships, the exhibition was prompting visitors to interrogate and examine their own responses to sexuality. The Warren Cup exhibition, in terms of visitor numbers, length of stay and the engagement levels of the visitors, was the most successful to date of the temporary exhibitions in Room 3 (2006: 3), illustrating that there is a demand for more challenging exhibitions in historical museums, but also that there might be a demand that is not exclusively from LGBTQ communities to include more exhibitions relating to themes of sexuality.

A resonant theme from the feedback was that the exhibition defied expectations of what one would expect to find not only at the British Museum, but at museums in general: ‘it was pretty unexpected’ (2006: 29), ‘it is something different that what I expected’ [sic] (2006: 29), ‘a little more scandalous [than the rest of the museum]’

(2006: 29), 'it is quite provocative for a museum' (2006: 30). Others felt that an exhibition of this type was long overdue: 'an "about-time" display' (2006: 30), 'they should have had an exhibition like this a long time ago' (2006: 30). It would be interesting to see what proportion of the positive feedback came from people who identify as LGBTQ. This is not feasible in terms of surveying views, as it is not a question that is always appropriate to ask or that people feel comfortable answering, but an anonymous paper-based or online survey could include optional questions about identity. It may be that those who found the content of the exhibition inappropriate or distasteful avoided visiting it at all, much like at the *Hello Sailor!* exhibition, where a guide 'distanced himself from the exhibition with "I don't go in there much" but he was quick to defend the right of gay mariners to have their history told' (Meecham, 2008: 378).

Perhaps the most telling feedback was a recurring point that although *Warren Cup* worked well as a starting point, it felt like just that, and visitors were eager to see or learn more about the themes raised: 'the subject [...] could have been explored in greater depth' (Hargreaves McIntyre, 2006: 33), 'the exhibition seems to suggest a more thorough exploration to come' (2006: 33), 'I feel like it maybe suggests like a more thorough exhibit to come – like a beginning of a question' (2006: 29). To an extent, the British Museum have followed up on this feedback, the Warren Cup has since been re-integrated into the main collections, and is included as one of the 'object in focus' items on the website. The British Museum also worked with *Untold London* to produce a trail highlighting a number of LGBT objects. The booklet, produced in conjunction with Untold London (a primarily online hidden histories organisation), was briefly available freely at the museum and as a PDF online.

One of the factors driving these changes in unexpected institutions could be the recent growth in scholarly writing and research relating to queer themes and alternative sexualities. Academics from within museums and galleries, often gay themselves, have identified a little-explored niche in academia. As a result of this the 'professional culture of many museums has experienced something of a shift' (Liddiard, 1999: 168), an example of which is the increasing quantity of more risqué examples of Shunga

(erotic Japanese prints) being displayed in the British Museum following international research being carried out, including a major exhibition *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art* (October 2013-January 2014). This may indicate that academic research is a green light for conservative curators to begin collecting or displaying materials of LGBTQ significance. Though much of the recent scholarly writing about museums has a progressive agenda, many more typically conservative institutions, whilst embracing the theory, have resisted implementing it. Events to mark LGBT History Month have opened up a more public discourse on queer history, scholars 'need to find ways of engaging creatively with that discourse' (Mills, 2010: 86) by actively assisting with the shaping of such events, and of museum exhibitions.

Creating material culture

Figure 3.3 'Lucifer' *Queering the Museum* Exhibition, curated by Matt Smith at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 2010. Photo © Birmingham Museums Trust

In 2010, ceramicist Matt Smith's intervention in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, *Queering the Museum* recognised the difficulty of 'queering' existing collections, so Smith used his own art practice to tell an alternative story. Using green carnations to represent where interventions had taken place, Smith made objects such as a ceramic

model of the Ladies of Llangollen¹⁶, and performed simple corrective interventions such as the insertion of a civil partnership greeting card into a display about celebrations. In the atrium of the museum, Jacob Epstein's androgynous Lucifer figure was draped in a cloak of carnations to emphatically announce the queer interventions to visitors. Smith aimed to 'queer' the whole museum, recognising that an exhibition around queer objects was difficult or perhaps impossible (Horn et al, 2010: 15). He undertook a more 'lateral – and fragmented' (2010: 15) approach to storytelling.

Figure 3.4 'Tearooming' *Queering the Museum* Exhibition, curated by Matt Smith at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 2010. Photo © Birmingham Museums Trust

While some interventions were subtle and straight forward, such as moving figurines around to challenge the curatorial decisions of always pairing a man with a woman, others were more playful, for instance by juxtaposing a stuffed otter with a ceramic bear, Smith highlighted stereotypes within the gay community (otters and bears are slang categories describing the body types of gay men) and creating a double spouted teapot to sit alongside the teapot collection, playfully noting the phallic form of the spout. Smith also addressed more serious themes such as his use of existing drug jars

¹⁶ Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, better known as the Ladies of Llangollen lived in Plas Newydd, Llangollen in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. They eloped to North Wales from Ireland in the late 1770s and had a fifty-year partnership, which is often thought to have been a romantic one (Oram, 2011: 189-190).

from the collection to tell a story about the impact of HIV (2010: 16). While bold in its delivery, the impact of Smith's interventions was greater due to the subliminal insertion into existing permanent displays, that visitors could either actively seek out, or experience 'serendipitously' (Frost, 2011: 59).

A similar and more widely known intervention took place at the British Museum in 2011. In *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*, Grayson Perry was invited to create and curate his own artworks alongside mostly unseen objects from the collections as chosen by him, to act as mediator and offer a new interpretation of mostly craft objects whose creators had long since been forgotten. Describing the exhibition as an artwork in itself (Perry, 2011: 11), Perry themed the objects around his own tastes, values and beliefs. A queer figure himself, Perry identifies as a transvestite, and sexuality and gender formed one of the main themes in the exhibition. Included was a mezzotint of the Chevalier D'Eon, a transgender French diplomat, whose fluid gender identity led them to be the namesake for the Beaumont Society, the longest running transgender support group in the UK. Elsewhere, Perry displayed a pack of playing cards depicting Japanese drag queens, made by artist and activist Ōtsuka Takashi in 1997 and donated to the museum with the instruction that 'it should be stored 'with queens on top'' (Parkinson and Smith, 2013: 114). The juxtaposition of museum pieces (some traditional, some more risqué), challenged the authority of museums by rejecting the canon of named artists and recognisable artworks and objects, and in turn highlighted the depth of collections rarely delved into.

Equally innovative was the Molly Spoon Archive at Bruce Castle in Haringey, which aimed to cultivate new collections by inviting visitors to express their identities or imagined identities through making 'molly spoons'. The idea is taken from the wooden dolls 'used in ceremonies at the Molly Houses of Renaissance London as a symbol of 'coming out' as a new character' (UCL, 2014)¹⁷. As well as adding the creations to the permanent collection, the project aimed to collect and display the spoons digitally as

¹⁷ Molly Houses were taverns at the turn of the eighteenth century frequented by lower middle and lower class gay men as a place to be together and have sex. Noted as being venues marking the first time men who had sex with men came together as a distinctive minority to create their own social institutions, Molly Houses are amongst the earliest recorded gay subcultures (Stewart, 1995: 169-170).

well, using the hashtag #MollySpoon. While perhaps seeming tenuous and frivolous, the exhibition opened up a dialogue around why content must be created and collected this way, in response to omissions, silences and non-existent material culture relating to certain minority groups. The act of inviting people to make visible alternative identities and thus 'coming out' could be read as an expression of new narratives surfacing in the museum.

My own exhibition, *Master-Mistress*, at Sutton House (which I will discuss at length later) took inspiration from these initiatives, particularly *Queering the Museum*, in that I invited artist Judith Brocklehurst to create objects especially to facilitate silenced queer voices.

Queering biography

As collections are rarely overwhelmed with artworks or objects with overt LGBTQ themes, biographies of people associated with objects 'offer a broader territory for exploration of queer themes' (Winchester, 2012: 147). The problem of the biographical approach is that it relies heavily on secondary sources and an invested participation from the visitor (2012: 149). The object is not queer, nor is its queerness apparent until interpreters or curators step back from the object and situate it within a broader narrative or context.

Likewise, in "outing" historical figures, the interpretation relies on assigning contemporary values retrospectively on figures from the past, trying to weave together disparate threads of competing and incompatible identities in an attempt to form a coherent and linear approach to sexual and gender identities.

Including LGBTQ narratives through biography requires a more radical overhaul of our understanding of their place within heritage sites, and a cautious step away from rhetoric relating to *just* inclusion and insertion into troubled and contested existing power structures:

Perhaps it is the partial, contingent and truly personal nature of sexuality, as manifested through material culture, that lies at the core of a form of engagement that can be all too easily simplified to the realm of inclusion and representation alone (Winchester, 2012: 153).

An example that, although a widely praised blockbuster, could be considered as being purely about inclusion and representation, was the *Gay Icons* exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, London in 2009. The exhibition featured portraits of people chosen by ten lesbian and gay celebrities, chosen for the impact they had on their own gay sensibilities and that had influenced their own gay identities (National Portrait Gallery, 2009). The term 'gay icon' does not necessarily infer that the icon in question themselves identifies or identified as LGBTQ. This was arguably unclear in the exhibition interpretation, and the link between these figures and the impact they had on the queer identities of the selectors may have been confusing to a non-queer audience, or those unfamiliar with the term.

Islington Museum, London, has made steps towards drawing clear links between queer biography and exhibition content, in two exhibitions relating to Joe Orton, Kenneth Halliwell and their work. *Malicious Damage: The life and crimes of Joe Orton and Kenneth Halliwell in Islington*, which ran from October 2011 to February 2012, used their outsider status, both socially and as artists as a lens through which to exhibit a selection of the library book covers that the couple notorious defaced in 1962, for which they were both sentenced to six months imprisonment. Arguably artworks in themselves, alongside contextual panels the book covers told a story of the couple's dissatisfaction with the type of material held at their local library, and their subversive, and perhaps, activist response. The title of the exhibition, derived from the name of the crime for which they were prosecuted, also alluded to Orton's supposition that the sentence was so extreme 'because we were queers' (Leicester City Council). This suggests, perhaps, that it was Orton and Halliwell who were the victims of *malicious damage*. Further, the title may have alluded to the tragedy in which their lives ended, whereby Halliwell beat Orton to death in a fit of jealousy over the latter's 'crimes' of success and promiscuity, before killing himself with sleeping pills. In 2014, the museum returned to the pair, but this time with a focus on the collages of Halliwell in *Kenneth*

Halliwell: Collage, where a newly acquired work *Untitled No.2* was exhibited, alongside collages made by local community groups. Both exhibitions were supplemented with talks and events.

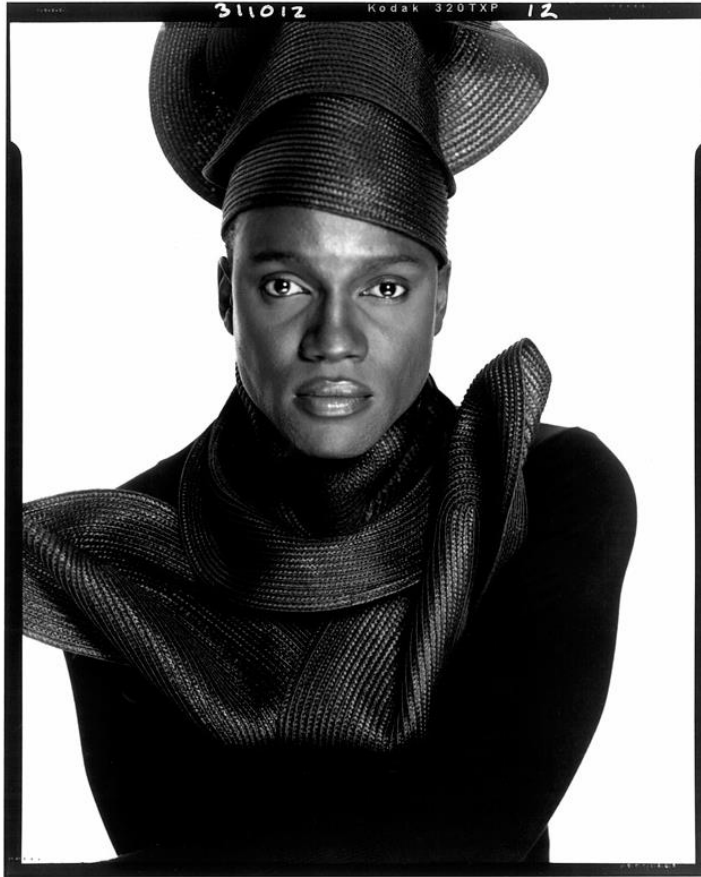


Figure 3.5 Julius Reuben-Model /Platinum/ Palladium Print 11 Inches x 14 Inches from *FIERCE* used with kind permission of Ajamu

It was lesser known queer people who were displayed at the Guildhall Art Gallery, London in early 2013, beginning in LGBT History Month. *FIERCE* was a photography exhibition featuring portraits of young black LGBTQ artists, activists, poets and others by artist Ajamu. Although at a quick glance, it was an obedient art exhibition, *FIERCE* marked the first time an LGBTQ related exhibition was held at the Guildhall and coincided with the tenth annual London Metropolitan Archives LGBTQ History and Archives conference, which was also held there. The text alongside each portrait was brief, but the figures were united in their intersectional marginal identities and the important roles they play in advocating for equality, subversion and freedom. One of the subjects of the exhibition, activist Zia X, said of the exhibition:

Ajamu's work is a transformative act of iconography, celebrity, a slicing out

of time. Our respective journeys had been marked out; our participation in FIERCE was recognition of what we each had achieved. But we had been chosen, and some of us guided, by Ajamu. We stood on his shoulders. In turn, Britain and its institutions was built on the labour of people, the poor and the global poor, colonial subjects and those enslaved-proper, many of them our forbearers and ancestors. Britain is here because of them, though they may not have known the fruits of their labour. We were there because of them. To be Fierce is to dare to uncover and face alternate histories, and to dream fabulous futures (X, 2014).

When the National Portrait Gallery acquired a portrait of Chevalier D'Eon by Thomas Stewart, 1792, it was the perfect opportunity to use a single portrait as a conversation piece about gender nonconforming people, and the problem of retrospectively using contemporary language to describe and define historical figures. The Chevalier D'Eon, a soldier, diplomat and spy born in 1728 lived the beginning of their life as a man, and the later stages of their life as a woman, described variously now as a transvestite or as transgender: both terms are problematic. But the National Portrait Gallery decided *not* to open up a dialogue about the challenges of choosing an appropriate pronoun, and instead chose 'he', even though in the later years of D'Eon's life, they corrected the gendered pronouns in their diaries to she/her. When challenged about this at the 11th London Metropolitan Archives LGBTQ History and Archives conference, assistant curator Dr Clare Barlow claimed that male pronouns were chosen for consistency, both in describing Chevalier D'Eon on the text panel, and in the context of the wider museum (Barlow, 2013).



Figure 3.6 'Chevalier d'Eon' by Thomas Stewart, after Jean Laurent Mosnier oil on canvas, 1792, used with kind permission of National Portrait Gallery

This decision, made without consulting the transgender community, was at best irresponsible and flippant, and at worst offensive. Even in making a firm choice about the pronouns that were chosen, they could have used the acquisition to their collection as an opportunity to open up the dialogue about the challenges faced transparently with visitors. Being wedded to 'consistency' is troubling when it risks undermining trans identities by shoehorning them into non-binary modes of classification.



Figure 3.7 *The April Ashley: Portrait of a Lady* sign outside of the Museum of Liverpool

On the other hand, *April Ashley: portrait of a lady* (September 2013 – March 2015) at the Museum of Liverpool was a result of active consultation with the trans community to ensure appropriate and sensitive interpretation relating to a transgender figure. Ashley, who is now 79, was born in Liverpool and moved to Paris in the 1950s where she started transitioning. She is one of the first people from the UK to undergo gender reassignment surgery, and was famously 'outed' by the *Sunday People* in 1961 with the headline "'Her' secret is out", after which she struggled to work again in the UK, where formerly she had modelled for publications such as *Vogue*. A mainstay in British headlines since then, Ashley has become a highly regarded activist for trans issues. Co-curated by Homotopia¹⁸ and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the small exhibition occupied an interesting space overlooking the main sweeping staircase, and attracted

¹⁸ Homotopia is an annual international LGBTQ festival held in Liverpool, inaugurated in 2004

visitors who might otherwise have avoided or not been interested in it had it been in a more discreet or isolated space in the museum. On my visit there was a surprising number of families with young children at the exhibition, who seemed engaged and interested.

Figure 3.8 'Miss April' by Ben Youdan (2012), *April Ashley: Portrait of a Lady*, Museum of Liverpool

Alongside the ephemera from Ashley's life, a timeline marking developments in legal rights for trans people in the UK and the US, and some original artworks, was an interactive screen from which visitors listen to oral histories from a variety of local trans people. This combination of a wider historical narrative supplemented by localised and personal accounts and contemporary artworks neatly overcome the difficulty of relying solely on tenuous objects and newspaper cuttings to tell a story.

Arguably, the most interesting part of the exhibition was the recreated cabaret stage area, which was paying homage to Le Carousel in Paris, where many gender variant people found refuge and worked as performers in the 50s and 60s. The screen on the stage showed short films from and about trans people, and aside from being an attractive and innovative feature, provided a space to sit and reflect within the exhibition.

When artists intervene

Due to the aforementioned challenges of making LGBTQ voices visible in meaningful ways, I am drawn more to the artists and curators who disruptively and playfully intervene with museum narratives and in doing so challenge the conventions of museology and the imagined authority of the museum.

Perhaps the most famous example of an artist intervention in a heritage site is Fred Wilson's 1992-1993 exhibition *Mining the Museum* at the Maryland Historical Society. The exhibition sought to critique the absence of black history in the museum, in a suggestive, rather than didactic way. Exhibits throughout the museum included three empty pedestals alongside busts of famous white men of history labelled with the names of overlooked black historical figures. Other more evocative interventions included the insertion of a pair of rusty slave manacles in a glass case containing silverware, and the placing of a Ku Klux Klan hood in a 19th century baby's pram, both objects having been found in the museum archives. While the museum itself was bold in its invitation to Wilson, and in allowing these objects to be juxtaposed with the permanent displays in such a way, perhaps criticisms that the museum was accepting its complicity in the black history erasure could be displaced onto the artist, as it often seems that artists are allowed to take more risks in museums than curators are. Wilson, in conversation about his institutional critiques, identifies the combination of inequality and frustration with museum practice as being the driving force:

I had a fire in my belly around issues of social justice because they directly affected me and because, as an outsider, I was able to see the rhetoric of the museum and the profession's complete denial of the codes in place, codes that exclude, stereotype, and reinforce hegemonic power structures (in Marstine, 2012: 42).

Mining the Museum, arguably the ancestor of Matt Smith's aforementioned *Queering the museum* exhibition, and Grayson Perry's *Tomb of the unknown craftsman*, helped to pave the way for artist practice in museum spaces to be a defiant but sanctioned act of institutional critique. Tyburczy asserts that 'queer curatorship aims to do for sex (and race) what Wilson did for race in the context of display' (2016: 3). Much like Wilson's *Mining the Museum* exposed white centric values of display, queer curatorship aims to 'expose how traditional museums socialize heteronormative

relationships between objects and visitors to cope with ethically fraught objects of queer cultures' (2016: 1). To curate queerly means to undo heterosexual biases and to confront established 'taxonomies of normalcy' (2016: 11). Tyburczy claims that queer curating can contradict assumptions of the passive spectator (2016: 38) by reframing display as a choreography of spectators, which in turn positions the spectator as performer. Queer curating challenges the institutionalised disciplining of bodies through spaces and through taxonomies of sex and sexuality.

The disruptive potential of the tour guide

In lieu of biographies and objects, another layer of museum interpretation that strikes me as having great queering potential is that of a tour guide. In my own work with the National Trust *London Project* I have been a tour guide in two controversial pop-up properties, the Big Brother house in Borehamwood, and the Balfour Tower in Poplar. Both unlikely properties for the National Trust to engage with, the tours required a little more than the usual recital of facts, dates and figures, and instead required a more self aware approach with regards to the nature of what being a tour guide means, or can mean. In this section I will look at the disruptive potential of the tour guide as a form of institutional critique, looking primarily at the work of avant-garde queer cult figure David Hoyle, and drawing on the work of artists Andrea Fraser and Claire Robins. I attempt to answer the question of how the museum tour can take on an alternative life if we consider the role of the tour guide as more than a didactic one, and instead, a performance, that includes posing questions, institutional critique and parody and fiction. These critiques allow both a challenge to exclusionary practices and a way of unearthing and raising questions about suppressed narratives.

The anti-tour guide

At an evening to celebrate the *Gay Icons* exhibition in 2009 at the National Portrait Gallery, a tall figure sweeps through the crowds, a glass of wine in hand. Statuesque, and dressed in a long black dress, close cropped hair and excessive makeup that blurs the line between infantile and grotesque. This figure is David Hoyle, cult figure in the queer arts scene; a disruptive powerhouse, 'anarchically transgender' (Oliver, 2012: 2),

an avant-garde “anti-drag queen”. He pauses to paint his nails in a slapdash manner, he staggers around holding up a poster of Sid Vicious from the Sex Pistols and finally removes himself from the room ascending backwards up a large escalator. When he is half way up, he stops and begins to walk back down, against the current of the stairs, it becomes a demonic catwalk of sorts, a punk Miss Havisham who is trying to resist the flow. Realising it is futile to fight, he sits for a moment, head in hands, then stands, and tries to walk again, exhausted, manic, desperate, heels clacking loudly on the metal of the steps, he reaches out, seemingly dreading whatever it is that lies in wait at the top. Finally, as if accepting his fate, he slowly allows himself to be taken to the top, bidding farewell with a sorrowful wave. He slips out of sight.

This unnamed performance is one of a handful of times that David Hoyle has been invited to perform in an art gallery. It lasts only a few minutes, and as it occurs, not all of those in attendance pay attention. In spite of this being a celebration of a blockbuster LGBTQ themed exhibition, this anarchic performer captures, in this brief resistance of ascension, a reticence to engage fully with the space. The liminal space he occupies in between floors of a highly regarded and elite gallery speaks volumes about not only where he positions himself in such mainstream institutions, but more broadly about where the queer outsider might be positioned. As an artist known for his disruptive and antagonistic nature, this, perhaps his most subtle performance, shows that despite him being *invited* to perform, he is hesitant to engage fully with that world.



Figure 3.9 David Hoyle at the Tate Modern, used with kind permission of Mark Wallis and David Hoyle

Having eschewed the platform that brought him more widespread fame, by killing off his Divine David character in 2000 following two cult television series on the once radical Channel 4, Hoyle took a five year sabbatical while he dealt with mental health issues. He returned under his own name, his act modified only slightly, still as vivid, bold and antagonistic, though this time making short films with collaborator Nathan Evans and performing at various queer venues, including a number of well received residencies at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, London.

As part of Homotopia, an annual LGBT arts festival in Liverpool, in 2010, Hoyle was the tour guide at the Walker Art Gallery for *Queering the Portrait*. The tour was filmed and is available to view online, and follows Hoyle and his paying guests through a tangential, warm and acerbic alternative glance at the collections at the Walker. Standing in front of a Wolfgang Tillmans work, after noting the powerful contrast of the Cobalt blue against the deep red walls, Hoyle notes that he wanted to contribute to the infusion of contemporary art in a contradictory space by drawing on it (“just smiley faces- that sort of thing”) but was not allowed, a knowing nod to the fact that his very presence as an, albeit temporary and tongue-in-cheek, authority figure was contribution in itself. He ends by drawing a portrait of a visitor he had flirted with earlier, and then breaks into an acappella version of the Joseph McCarthy standard “You made me love you (I didn’t want to do it)”, a song performed by many, but notably Judy Garland, as a b-side to the camp classic and queer favourite *Over the*

Rainbow. The b-side to what has become a mainstream gay anthem of sorts is Hoyle half way between galleries on an escalator, the queer outsider. David Hoyle *is* the b-side. Hoyle is one of many performers who have the unique ability to create a queer space around them. Writer James Gardiner, in conversation at an event at the Bishopsgate Institute about queer spaces, claims that before Pride events, large public gatherings of LGBTQ people were limited to spaces celebrating shared cultural references and tastes, such as Judy Garland concerts and music halls (Gardiner, 2016).

In an event to support the *Civil Partnerships? Queer and Feminist Curating* conference at Tate Modern in 2012, David Hoyle led a queer tour of the gallery. One reviewer suggests that he ‘occupies the legitimacy that comes from being asked to show people around one of London’s biggest and most cherished sites, and uses it to storm out his political views and judgements’ (Jankovic, 2012), while another applauds his ability to voice thoughts about contemporary art that others would hesitate to voice:

“I’m interested to know what the girl who modelled for this actually looked like,” says David regarding the Picasso before us, voicing our own unconscious, secret thoughts. It’s this delicious rebellion against the unthinking, accepted perception of art that unites us all as we move from one piece to another. “This one is very...*blue*,” says David, unable to contain his own mirth and moves swiftly on. “Next!” A Henry Moore-style sculpture is similarly presented. “I wonder if this piece came out of the kiln looking quite how the artist expected it to?” (Wallis, 2012)



Figure 3.10 David Hoyle at the Tate Modern, used with kind permission of Mark Wallis and David Hoyle

Hoyle's provocative tours have also taken him outside of gallery spaces and into the outside world, including the streets of Vauxhall and Canal Street in Manchester. Hoyle, originally from Blackpool, has made his home at Manchester, and his anarchic tour of Canal Street, the centre of Manchester's gay village, made notorious by the TV drama *Queer as Folk*, entitled *Manchester (so much to answer for)* (a line from The Smiths' *Suffer Little Children*, a song about the moors murders), attacks the consumerisation of gay lifestyles¹⁹. One bar owner remarks to him that gays will 'pay through the nose' in defense of the prices there, to which Hoyle wryly retorts 'of course they will, they've got no dependents', this is followed by a shot of him gurning and smoking, whilst noisily swinging a sign for an ATM back and forth. He describes, with all sincerity, a grim patch of asphalt at one of Manchester's major parks, and motions towards a pile of rubbish on the floor: 'the detritus of a recent picnic'. Throughout the tour, as locals squirm to avoid the camera, Hoyle meets the 'avant-garde' characters who work and socialize there, including, as he says of a barman to a young man 'the Muriel Belcher of your generation'. When talking about the artworks on the wall of the 'Not Right Bar', Hoyle says 'the place is a veritable art gallery', the camera focuses on the open door to the toilets; 'it's competing with the National Portrait Gallery'.

¹⁹ *Manchester (so much to answer for)*, directed by Nathan Evans was part of a series called *Dave's Drop-In Centre*, filmed for Hoyle's residency at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern in 2008. The video can be viewed online: <https://shootingpeople.org/watch/97568/manchester-so-much-to-answer-for>

In his earlier incarnation as the Divine David, Hoyle conducted an open top bus tour of London for his Channel 4 show²⁰. A bemused looking audience listens to his half truths and complete fabrications, as he highlights such sights as the Thames (a ‘man-made canal’), St Paul’s Cathedral (which is made from polystyrene), and a tree that Princess Margaret lived in for a number of years. After explaining the origins of the Great Fire of London (someone let their joss sticks burn all the way down), Hoyle says ‘I wouldn’t lie to you. I wouldn’t want you to think I’m a historical revisionist, oh no.’

Daniel Oliver discusses Hoyle’s films with Nathan Evans in terms of the socio-political efficacy of the ‘car-crash’ moments in them, a car-crash being defined as an ‘incident, and its aftermath that both seduces and repels our gaze’ and ‘a sudden shift from reassuring order to disturbing messiness’ (2012: 1). The agenda of these films, Oliver argues, is ‘an effacious confrontation and engagement with a series of localized social issues (LGBTQ identities and consumerism), investigated through a participatory methodology (conversations with participants)’ (2012: 4). An exchange with a bar worker in *Manchester (so much to answer for)* that becomes an aggressive and tense moment as they ask Hoyle and Evans to move away with the camera is, according to Oliver, a car-crash moment; an ‘accident’, where the film shifts from a tongue in cheek and celebratory affair into a ‘destructive outburst of antagonism’ (2012: 4). How does our reading of this, and other similar moments in Hoyle’s touring oeuvre differ if we see him, not as a performer, but as a tour guide? Or indeed if we look at the craft of the tour guide as being not one of an educator, historian or preacher, but as a performer, who uses participatory methodologies to engage, and confront localized social issues?

A tour guide who embraces a participatory methodology would immediately shift the usual power roles at play in a tour situation. They would be, instead of imparting pre-rehearsed knowledge, guiding a group through an experience, facilitating engagement with a space or with ideas that was not a didactic one, but rather an embodied and

²⁰ A clip of the bus tour, filmed for *Divine David* in 2000, can be seen online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_MubTzrHBo

immersed, and perhaps disrupting one. In the notes I received prior to being a tour guide for the National Trust's Big Brother take over, it recommended that our delivery should be 'enthusiastic, but tongue in cheek'. The same could be used to describe David Hoyle's delivery, which Oliver describes as laced with 'deceptive and sinisterly insistent enthusiasm' (2012: 2). This sinisterness should not be mistaken for hostility though, Hoyle's vitriol is reserved for the structures which force people to live in certain ways, such as capitalism, not for the individuals he meets.

The strength of his tours and his interactions with the public is in his unwavering warmth, that moves far beyond merely humouring people and is almost affectionate in its sincerity. This ultimate faith in people is quite at odds with the lifestyle he alludes to in his *A Village Stroll*²¹ film about Vauxhall, in which he tells a group of gay men sitting on a grassy hill that he admires how they are all supporting each other; 'I live in a perpetual lonely hell, so to see people together-' he breaks off, hand on chest and walks away. These contradictions, as well as his occasional bleak insights into a life that is difficult to distinguish from his own real life, create a tragicomic weeping clown: this is camp in its most relatable, yet conversely formidable form. Hoyle is Blanche Dubois rendered as a gargoyle. Gavin Butt, in conversation with Hoyle, recalls a statement from Hoyle that campness can be given weight or a lightness, though Butt develops this by saying 'this either / or understanding of camp (either weighty or light) seems to miss what makes Hoyle's camping so remarkably funny: namely, that it solicits laughter that is *both* grave and flippant at the same time' (Butt, 2008: 33). Likewise, his surrealist approach to touring could be dismissed as merely indulgent, abstract and avant-garde, or throwaway silliness, but he uses absurdity to highlight underlying social issues that are usually avoided in this setting, or in the case of his tours of art galleries, to say what visitors want to say, but can't.

By occupying this role as a politicized and angry figure whose grasp of the facts and figures is scant, but ultimately unimportant, Hoyle wholly subverts the usual tour guide script. His tour is political, biased and filled with inaccuracies. Hoyle asks more

²¹ *A Village Stroll* is another from the series *Dave's Drop-In Centre* directed by Nathan Evans and is available online: <https://shootingpeople.org/watch/97567/a-village-stroll-with-david-hoyle>

questions than he answers, his tour is a series of ellipsis, a cupboard full of opened cans of worms. In his live shows, he often follows a controversial or provocative statement with 'I'll leave that with you', which is exactly what he does. Speaking to Butt, Hoyle said 'I'm interested in questioning and betraying my own ignorance and prejudice rather than sounding learned and PC-ed up to the eyeballs' (2008: 31), Hoyle, is not afraid to ask, is not afraid to find out.

In November 2014 politician and gay activist Peter Tatchell led a tour of Tate Britain collections as part of series of well known figures reinterpreting collections. The tour's aim was in 'unearthing hidden stories of LGBT subjects and artists. Who were they and how were they represented? How might we imagine their lives and experiences? What clues to the existence of LGBT individuals, communities and societies can be found in the works? What work has been done uncovering this knowledge? What do these images tell us about the development of the rights we enjoy today?' (Tate Britain, 2014).

The works that a nervous Tatchell had selected were largely because of the queer way in which they could be read, the ways in which they challenged masculinity, or because the artists were known to be, or could be easily read, as LGBTQ. The majority of the stories he told were about gay men, but Tatchell acknowledged this, rightly identifying that the collections on display were mainly by men.



Figure 3.11 Peter Tatchell's 2014 tour of the Tate Britain collections

The tour included artworks by Simeon Solomon, Gilbert and George, Duncan Grant and various others. While Tatchell seemed unconfident speaking about the artworks, or the stories behind the earlier classical works, his strength was in making links with contemporary issues and politics. He recounted the OutRage! Kiss-in in 1990 in Piccadilly Circus to protest the arrest of gay couples for showing affection in public, the protest took place under Alfred Gilbert's statue of Anteros, the god of requited love, he told us this story while standing by a small sculpture of Anteros in the same pose. The personal anecdotes recounted as inspired by the artworks were the strength of this tour, yet did not feature heavily, and instead Tatchell attempted to recreate a typical art history tour, it was only in his more informal conversations with the visitors and when he strayed from his notes that the tour became engaging.

The reverent tour guide

Unlike Hoyle's critiques of the institutions he tours, which he does as a disruptive outsider, artist Andrea Fraser's various guided tours critique the institutions by playing along, by parodying the extreme of the ideal: the ideal of the 'enlightened' visitor with cultivated taste; the ideal and reverent volunteer; the ideal tour guide, while offering a critique of the gender and class relations in such institutions. In *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989) at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Fraser adopts the role of Jane Castleton, the prim museum docent. In a filmed 30 minute tour, she leads the viewer around the museum 'mimicking the public face of the museum while simultaneously deconstructing it' (Trainor, 2002). The tour could, at a glance, be the genuine article, Fraser's intervention is more subtle and more scholarly than Hoyle's.

After a brief introduction, Fraser, as Jane, situates her character in the space, as one who is both guest and a volunteer, and in a privileged position, she stresses the unique perspective that she, as a unique individual, can provide. In her notes to the script, she highlights the museum docent as 'a figure of identification for the primarily white, middle-class audience' (Fraser, 2005: 110) unlike the nonprofessional museum staff.

Throughout the tour, she also positions the museum, and the relationship visitors *should* have with it. She alludes to the museum as a cultivator of taste (2005: 98), and its purpose for developing both an appreciation of art and of values (2005: 108). Unlike Hoyle's campy references, Fraser's are verbatim quotes and the tour is rehearsed. She quotes a plaque from the Museum of Modern Art, New York, by its first director Alfred H. Barr Jr.; 'the museum's task could be described as the continuous, conscientious and resolute distinction of quality from mediocrity' (2005: 104).

Both Hoyle and Fraser's wildly different approaches manage to challenge any ideas that the museum is neutral in its values, Hoyle with a satirical faux-sincerity and biting asides, and Fraser through her parodied reverence. Fraser's interactions with those on the tour are instructional and enforcing the power relation between visitor and guide ('uh- can everyone hear me?', 'I hope that all of you have paid your admission fee')

(2005: 96)), the warmth of spontaneous exchanges in *Manchester (so much to answer for)* is absent, hers is a caricature of a tour, Hoyle's is two fingers up to the tour.

Towards the end of *Museum Highlights*, Fraser breaks character briefly, referring to both herself as artist, and her character Jane Castleton in the third person, while discussing museum donors:

‘You know, I’d like to name a space, why, if I had \$750,000 I would name this shop um... Andrea. Andrea is such a nice name.
Jane walks a few feet further down the corridor and stops again to address the group.
This is our Museum Shop, Andrea, named in 1989 by Mrs. John P. Castleton, a onetime museum guide and eternal art appreciator’
(Fraser, 2005: 107).

This almost Pinteresque moment is jarring in the way it is weaved within a wider class critique of the institution, destabilizing the sense of belief in Jane as a tour guide, and forcing viewers to consider the relationship between artist and tour guide, fiction and non-fiction. This moment is one of many that positions the visitor to the gallery as aspirational, Fraser's rather surreal repetition of ‘I want to be graceful’ captures this more directly.

Both Hoyle and Fraser make reference to the place they occupy as artists in the gallery, Hoyle in his reference to wanting to draw on the paintings at the Walker Art Gallery and Fraser's knowing nod through Jane's thoughts; ‘I’d like to live like an art object. Wouldn't it be nice to live like an art object...’ (2005: 107). In this tour, Fraser, or rather Jane Castleton, *is* the art object. Fraser ‘imitates the stock choreography of the typical museum tour to memorialize banal spaces and objects in the museum’ (Tyburczy, 2016: 57), through her conscious hyperbole and mimicry of socialised scripts, Fraser aims to ‘destabilize the spectator's or participant's ability to simply perform ritualistic roles’ (Tyburczy, 2016: 57) and thus to disrupt the museum experience for them.

The absurd tour guide

Claire Robins' *An Elite Experience for Everyone* (2005) intervention at the William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow has echoes of Fraser's *Museum Highlights*. Robins too offers a critique of the pre-requisite values expected of a museum visitor, but takes

various elements seen in Fraser's tour further. Robins also assumes the role of a typical tour guide (in this case Victoria Fielding). Her interactions with the audience are more forceful ('NO, don't put your hands on the cabinets, it makes the glass dirty' (Robins, 2013: 129)) and she too makes direct quotes and allusions to other texts albeit parodically, the value of which is that it 'stays close enough to its source to enable moments of doubt as to whether it is not reverent and iconic' (2013: 139), the same could be said about both Robins' and Fraser's performances.

Where Robins' intervention differs, is that she takes the parodying into a higher level of surrealism, inserting a fraudulent artifact into the museum, a replica beard hand-woven by William Morris, from his very own hair, which she focuses on in the tour: 'By way of recompense, in his characteristic style, Morris turned his hand to the ancient craft of wig making in order to bring to society at large the benefits, privileges and potency that accompany the possession of a very large beard' (2013: 136). This moment is perhaps more comparable to Hoyle's style of fictionalised history and absurdist comedy, but Robins takes it further still, by trying on the beard, and furthermore, by critiquing the "authenticity" of the merchandise in the museum shop, as during the private viewing of the performance, replica wigs were sold there. The beards were not permitted to remain in the shop for the duration of the exhibition as it was thought they might compromise the sales of the other merchandise, which 'suggests some very interesting issues concerning the ways that 'museum merchandise' retains aura and becomes transformed into art and thus given authenticity' (2013: 138).

In *The Anarchist Guide to Historic House Museums*, one of the recurring critiques is in how effectively room guides and tour guides are used to enhance visitor experience. In many houses, including those in the UK owned by the National Trust, tours are the only way visitors can experience the properties. Vagnone and Ryan note that most guides 'are neither trained educators nor performers, and sometimes they lack the experience to bring factual information to life' (2016: 112). Much like formal educators, having a wealth of knowledge on a subject does not necessarily make for the most engaging teacher. This was particularly apparent during the previously

mentioned Balfron Tower tours, where the visitor experience was enriched by the variety of expertise, experience and backgrounds of the tour guides. The experience also allowed for more personal reflections about the site, rather than one of 'rote memorization' (2016:93). Vagnone and Ryan suggest that visitors are keen to hear about what the tour guides love about the property, and to hear personal anecdotes (2016: 92). More diverse recruitment of volunteers, including of a younger demographic 'may result in new ways of presenting your narrative' (2016: 97), and indeed reveal layers of histories that appeal to a more varied audience.

In this chapter I have attempted to trace the roots of the silence in museums and heritage sites around LGBTQ narratives, and outlined the increasing foregrounding of social justice in contemporary museological thinking and practice. Using examples of exhibitions that have attempted to address these silence, I have countered the notion that no material culture exists for LGBTQ identities, and highlighted creative examples of overcoming this perceived barrier. As well as critiquing examples of queering objects and queering biographies, the chapter closes with a more disruptive set of examples of queering both museum narratives and museum practice, through artists intervening as tour guides. In the following chapter, I will introduce Sutton House, the central site in my research, give an overview of my own curatorial interventions there, and analyse the data that arose from my work.

CHAPTER 5

Queer activism at Sutton House

A search on the *Guardian* website for news stories about Hackney paints a bleak picture; rich-poor divides, stabbings, sexual assaults, homelessness, rocketing house prices, gang wars and racial tension. The lived experience of people in Hackney might expand on those scaremongering snapshots by celebrating its growth as a hub for artists; the vibrant mix of queer people, Muslim, black and Turkish communities; and the gentrification of a once maligned borough that has transformed an area known for all of the above into a desirable place to live, albeit at a startling cost. A bustling and grey urban area highlighted by splashes of colour and warmth from the diverse communities who have made their homes there, Hackney may be the antithesis of the usual haunt for a National Trust house. However, just a five minute walk from Hackney Central Station, on the curve of road where Homerton High Street meets Lower Clapton Road, sits Sutton House.

Sutton House

April 1946

Today I went with one of our new agents to St John's Institute in Hackney, the first time I have ever visited this property. And what a wretched one! It is no more important than hundreds of other Georgian houses still left in slum areas. Very derelict after the bombing all around it. Tenanted by a number of charitable bodies. It does have one downstairs room of linenfold panelling. I found it terribly depressing and longed to hurry away (Lees-Milne, 1984: 35).

The depressing prospect of renovating Sutton House might explain why it took the Trust over 50 years to open it to the public after acquiring it in 1938. While Lees-Milne lamented the *wretched* house in a *slum* area, Sutton House stood proud and defiant to surrounding war damage as the second oldest building in East London, and the oldest in Hackney, and was a notably early example of a brick built house (Belcher et al, 2004: 2). As such, it was originally known as Bryck Place.

Nonetheless, the Trust was disillusioned with the acquisition in the early post war period, and it was thus not a high priority for investing resources and labour. This disillusionment was latterly more likely influenced by the country house scheme (introduced a year prior to acquisition) which ensured the Trust was largely occupied

with crumbling country piles and penniless but privileged bachelors and their reluctance to compromise; far from the modest and “derelict” urban building in Hackney.



Figure 4.1 Sutton House

It is no surprise, therefore, that Sutton House’s journey to what it has become was largely community led, an ethos that continues today and truly sets out the property as an anomaly in the Trust’s portfolio.

Little is known of the house’s origin; the exact footprint of the attached land, gardens and out buildings are lost and unknown (2004: 24), even the name of the building, taking after Thomas Sutton (1532-1611, founder of Charterhouse School), is a misnomer, as he was an adjacent neighbour in a house that was demolished in 1806.

Sutton House, or Bryck Place, was in fact built in 1535 by Ralph Sadleir. The house was ‘relatively modest in size, as befitted the purse of a man whose office-holding was still in its infancy and whose status was essentially that of a servant, however favoured, of one of the great men of the realm’ (Belcher et al, 2004: 23). Sadleir’s career peaked

during his time at Sutton House, which he spent with his seven surviving children, his wife Ellen and possibly two children from her former marriage. John Machell and family followed and likely introduced the linenfold panels to the house, which I will discuss later. In 1647 the house became a girls' school, and remained so until 1741, when John Cox divided the house in two, with the east wing housing Huguenots and their descendants until the late 19th century, and the west wing becoming a boys' school by 1818. The frontage of the house was altered during the Georgian period, but it otherwise remains a Tudor house, contrary to what Lees-Milne might have observed.

In 1890 Sutton House was purchased by a rector of Hackney Church and became St John's Institute recreational centre for young men. In 1914 the East Cellar, which had probably been used for storage, was converted into a chapel, which became the site for my exhibition in 2015. The house likely stood empty between 1930 and 1938, when the Trust purchased it with the proceeds of a bequest, and during the war it became a centre for fire wardens. Lees-Milne had his disappointing visit to the house in 1946, and notably still referred to the house as St John's Institute in his diaries.

Following the tradition of the previous 400 years, the late 1900s were a time of rapid change for Sutton House; from the 1950s to the early 80s, the house served as headquarters for the ASTMS (Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staff) Union, led by Clive Jenkins, while in the 1970s, the neighbouring land became a car breaker's yard (which would eventually be acquired by the Trust in the mid 2000s). Following the departure of the ATSMS Union, the house lay vacant and became vandalised, but by April 1985 there were eight squatters living in the house. Initially they were warmly received by locals and the Trust for their care and concern for the building and the area. They proposed a variety of crafts activities for those who made up the area's disproportionately high unemployment figures and planned to undertake rudimentary repairs, and open the house and a café to the public. They also added to the layers of décor and history of the house with a number of graffiti artworks. By Christmas of that same year, only one squatter remained thanks to waning interest and solidarity from locals and the Trust. It was around this time that the linenfold panels were stolen, seemingly by men who pretended, to the squatters, that they

were from the council and were sent to check for asbestos (Fitzgerald, undated). Luckily, a Shoreditch antique dealer recognized the panels and they were returned.



Figure 4.2 Detail of the Linenfold panels

On 13th December 1987 the first open day was held, hosted by the National Trust and the 'Sutton House Society' (formerly 'Save Sutton House campaign'), which included an exhibition about the past and future of the house. The campaign group was set up to oppose the Trust's plans to sell the house to developers to turn into five luxury flats, a move that historian Patrick Wright claims was emblematic of the National Trust's 'priorities gone wrong' (Henriques and Wright, 1988). This community driven period had a lasting impact on the direction the Trust would later take with the way the house served the local community, and served as inspiration for my own intervention. From 1990, conservation and restoration was undertaken by architect Richard Griffiths, and in 1994 the Trust finally achieved what Lees-Milne had considered a waste of time, and opened Sutton House to the public.

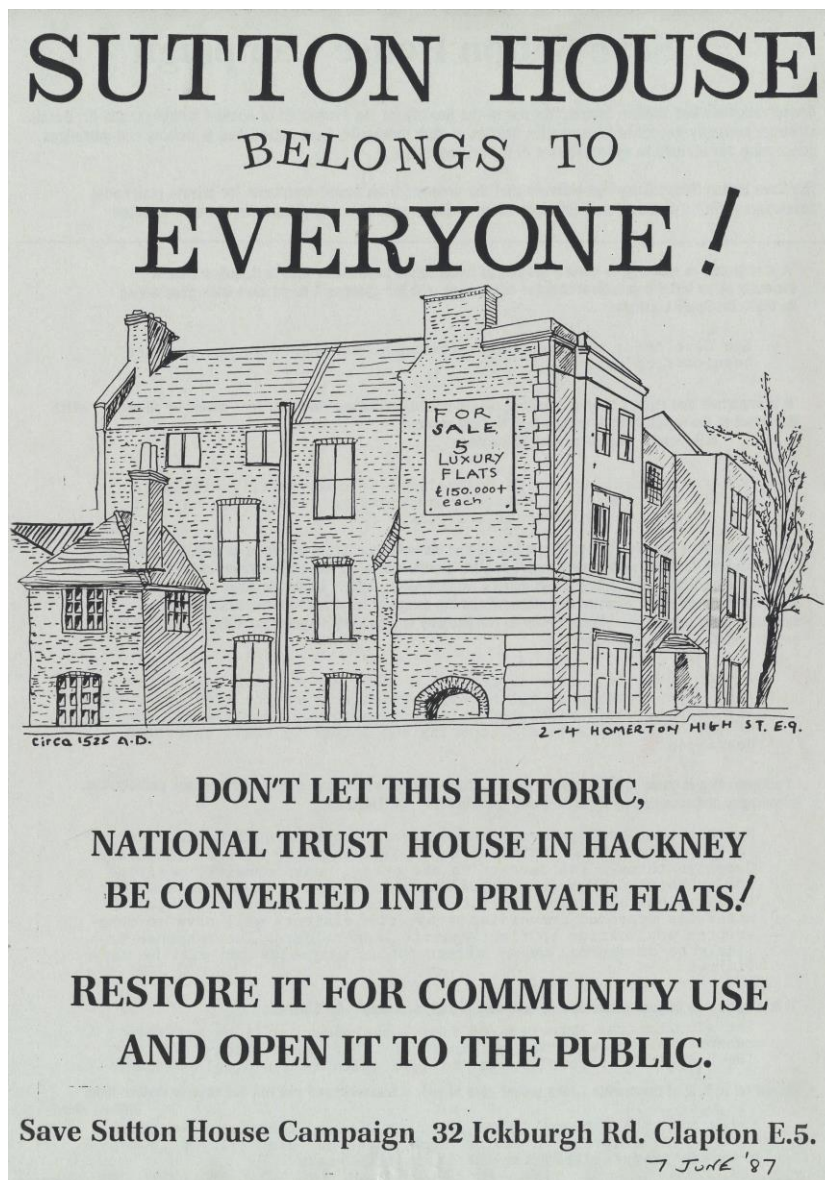


Figure 4.3 Save Sutton House Campaign poster, used with the kind permission of Sutton House

Today Sutton House attempts to capture the cacophony of voices for the visitors with some success. While many rooms have been recreated to resemble traditional Tudor rooms, there is a Victorian Study, a Georgian Parlour and a recreated Squatter's room featuring a preserved wall of graffiti²². In the summer of 2014 the Breaker's Yard, which had previously been overgrown and unused, was opened as a palimpsestic garden and playground, featuring a sandpit filled with large tyres, a gutted bus and a

²² The squatter's graffiti is one of the most interesting and un-National Trust features of the house, but remains divisive, one commenter on TripAdvisor muses that 'one wonders how the Trust allowed squatters to inhabit the place for many years during their custodianship in the 1980's. We asked the question but got shrugs of the shoulder and "oh well, that's part of it's history we suppose" response. It may sound innocent enough, but we DO know what damage, squatters do in these instances, what with burning precious timbers etc to keep warm in the winter, defecation and graffiti etc. . No, methinks they should have been evicted' (Trip Advisor)

double-decker caravan with a sweeping staircase and chandelier within it, commissioned by artist Daniel Lobb.



Figure 4.4 Two-storey caravan in the Breaker's Yard

Its urban setting, and the diverse community it serves, makes Sutton House one of the National Trust's biggest anomalies, as most of the grand historic houses owned by the Trust can be found in rural settings and have footfalls of largely white, middle-class visitors. Because of its chequered ownership and history, Sutton House also defies the mold for the National Trust by its paucity of original objects, artworks and pieces of furniture on show in its rooms. The atypicality of both its setting, and its barren rooms create both challenges and a space for more creative opportunities than most National Trust properties.

My own involvement with Sutton House began in mid-2013 when I volunteered to assist with the reimagining of a Black History Month exhibition that had been running every October since 2001. The exhibition took the form of a trail around the house that featured a number of influential black Londoners, and the aim was for the trail to evolve beyond its existing format of a number of laminated text panels and small lo-res

images. The exhibition was not without its flaws, the same figures were retained that were originally chosen by a group of historians and community leaders back at the exhibition's inception, and the balance of people represented was troubling; only two of the nine figures were women (Mary Seacole and Dido Elizabeth Belle); one of the figures was actually a group of people, the Lascars, a group of Bengali sailors, which raised questions about how 'black' was being defined in the exhibition; five of the figures were all born within 51 years of each other (1729 - 1780); three of the figures were musicians or composers (Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, John Blanke and George Bridgetower) and the most recent figure was born in 1875 (Coleridge-Taylor). Each of the figures were linked tenuously to time periods and rooms in the house. While undeniably all of the black Londoners on the trail were influential and important figures, the list could hardly be described as representational or broad, and the project showed that the vast contributions of historical black Londoners cannot be objectively reduced to just 9 people. While the tone of the exhibition was, as a result, quite clumsy, it provided a great opportunity for school groups to create interesting artworks in response to the characters, and started a conversation around whether or not this format would be useable again in the future.

Following my involvement with the exhibition, which included recruiting a historian, researching three of the figures and proofreading and mounting the text panels, I suggested an exhibition to celebrate LGBT History Month in February 2014. I quickly eschewed the format of 'influential LGBT Londoners' for similar reasons that I resisted the Black History Month format, and decided to explore a more subtle approach to unearthing queer voices throughout Sutton House. This was a challenge given that we had around three months and no budget with which to produce the exhibition. One of the provisions of executing the exhibition was that it must relate in some way to the house itself, or to the area of Hackney. I quickly dismissed the idea of focusing on Hackney, as with a bigger staff and a bigger budget, Hackney Museum, just moments walk from Sutton House, was more equipped to approach LGBT History Month from that angle. After researching Sutton House's history and finding no obviously queer strands that could be quickly woven into an interesting exhibition, I decided instead to look more broadly at the Tudor time period, and settled on Shakespeare's *Fair Youth*

Sonnets as a starting point. The result was an exhibition throughout February 2014 called *Master-Mistress: passion, desire and ambiguities in Shakespeare's sonnets*.

Fair Youth

The Fair Youth Sonnets, first published in 1609, are thought to have been written to a man, known only as 'Mr W.H'. Hatchlands Park, another National Trust property in Surrey, which was gifted to the Trust in 1945 by Harry Stuart Goodhart-Rendel (the architect who remodelled the home of the Ladies of Langollen, Plas Newydd), has a portrait believed to be of the Fair Youth in question. The portrait of Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, hangs in the library at Hatchlands and was painted in the early 1590s and originally mis-identified as a portrait of a woman. Others contend that the subject of Shakespeare's desire was a William Herbert, or perhaps, both Herbert *and* Wriothesley (Paterson, (2010) 2012).

Figure 4.5 'Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton', Cobbe Collection/Hatchlands Park

It might be that to read these sonnets as an indication of same-sex desire is to see them through a contemporary lens, and therefore not an accurate reading. It might

also be true that these sonnets are not autobiographical, and are fictional, (a reading which Paterson finds 'reductive' ((2010) 2012: xiii)) in which case, both the speaker and the subject of the sonnets are in question. It is often disputed whether or not Shakespeare had even intended these sonnets to be published.

Paterson states boldly that 'the question 'was Shakespeare gay?' is so stupid as to be barely worth answering, but for the record: of *course* he was' ((2010) 2012: xiii), he posits that the 'Fair Youth' moniker was but a 'sly euphemism'. On the subject of the first 126 of Shakespeare's sonnets, Paterson hones in on the line from Sonnet 20 that became the title for my pilot exhibition:

A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted
Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion
Sonnet 20

The couplet, which echoes the misidentification of Wriothesley's androgynous portrait, is summed up simply by Paterson, who notes 'he still looks a bit like a bloke, and his stunning looks allow him to control the expressions of all who gaze upon him' ((2010) 2012: xiii).

In 1640, publisher John Benson notoriously changed all of the pronouns in the sonnets to suggest that the subject was always a woman, demonstrating a discomfort with the implied love- platonic or sexual- for another man. These amendments were repeated in the sonnets' numerous reprints throughout the 18th century (de Grazia, 2001: 146). Margareta de Grazia disputes the charges that through 'these simple editorial interventions, [Benson] succeeded in converting a shameful homosexual love to an acceptable heterosexual one' (2001: 146) by citing only a handful of examples where amendments were made to avoid 'solecism rather than homoeroticism' (2001: 147).

She goes on to claim that any contemporary refiguring of Benson's motivations in doctoring pronouns in the sonnets reflects more damningly on our assumption that the 'editorial suppression' (2001: 147-148) indicates that there was something shameful in need of suppression, be it to satisfy Benson's own prejudices, or to sanitise the sonnets for the readership of the time. She argues that it 'is not Shakespeare's

text, then, that has been falsified by Benson but rather Benson's edition that has been falsified by the modern tradition' (2001: 147), (including – I confess- by myself in the supporting text to the exhibition), 'modern treatments of the sonnets have displaced onto Benson a singularly modern dilemma: what to do with the inadmissible secret of Shakespeare's deviant sexuality?' (2001: 147). Indeed only a minority of the 126 sonnets were subject to Benson's gender-based edits, as approximately five sixths of the Fair Youth sonnets leave the beloved's gender unspecified. De Grazia points to sonnets 20 and 53 as examples of conscious ambiguity, where Shakespeare's language points to the ambiguous and ungendered nature of the subject's beauty:

Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
Is poorly imitated after you.
On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,
And you in Grecian tires are painted new
Sonnet 53

Modern readings of the sonnets, in which sexual discourse relates to the precondition of personal identity, rather than in biological or psychological terms (2001: 162), we have read the distinction between the fair youth sonnets and the dark lady sonnets in terms of this classification, while still obeying a binary view of gender:

the dark lady sonnets present an identity crisis. If sonnets 1–126 are homosexual poems, and sonnets 127–54 are heterosexual poems, then what about the two together? They can only constitute a pathological middle identity as "bisexual" poems (Smith, 2003: 22).

What the critical interpretations, and the edits of John Benson all have in common is that 'sexuality is a culturally contingent concept' (Smith, 2003: 24), suggesting that any readings, or debates around the sonnets, their author and their subject/s reflect more on the values and sensibilities of the audience of the time, rather than on Shakespeare himself.

The exhibition sought to address these grey areas, and the use of disembodied voices from LGBTQ people expressed the universality of desire, whilst acknowledging the ambiguities around gender and sexual identities.

Master-Mistress



Figure 4.6 *Master-Mistress* poster

The experience begins in the Linenfold Parlour, a room interpreted as a masculine space, in spite of the feminine nature of the panels. The walls are lined with dark carved panels that resemble folded linen, likely to have been installed by John Machell around 1550, panels open on hinges to reveal a painted wall in the same design as the linenfold carvings. The sash windows that let in light to the otherwise dark room were introduced in the Georgian period, though the remains of earlier higher windows can be seen on the east wall. The fireplace, though original, features a Jacobean overmantle from the 1630s, and an iron fireback from the 1990s. As soon as you enter,

you hear a voice reading Sonnet 93. The accent of the speaker is part Yiddish, part Maltese, and the rhythm of the sonnet is somewhat disjointed, but beautifully read. The voice almost cracks with emotion on the line; ‘Thy looks with me, thy heart in other place’, a line that the speaker had admitted to relating to during the recording process. The voice comes from a speaker right by the door, angled inwards, softly filling the whole room. The speaker is not incongruous with the Tudor feel of the room, until you notice its function, and the electrical chord trailing from it. Upon the top of the speaker, rests the head of a teasel, a dried thistle.

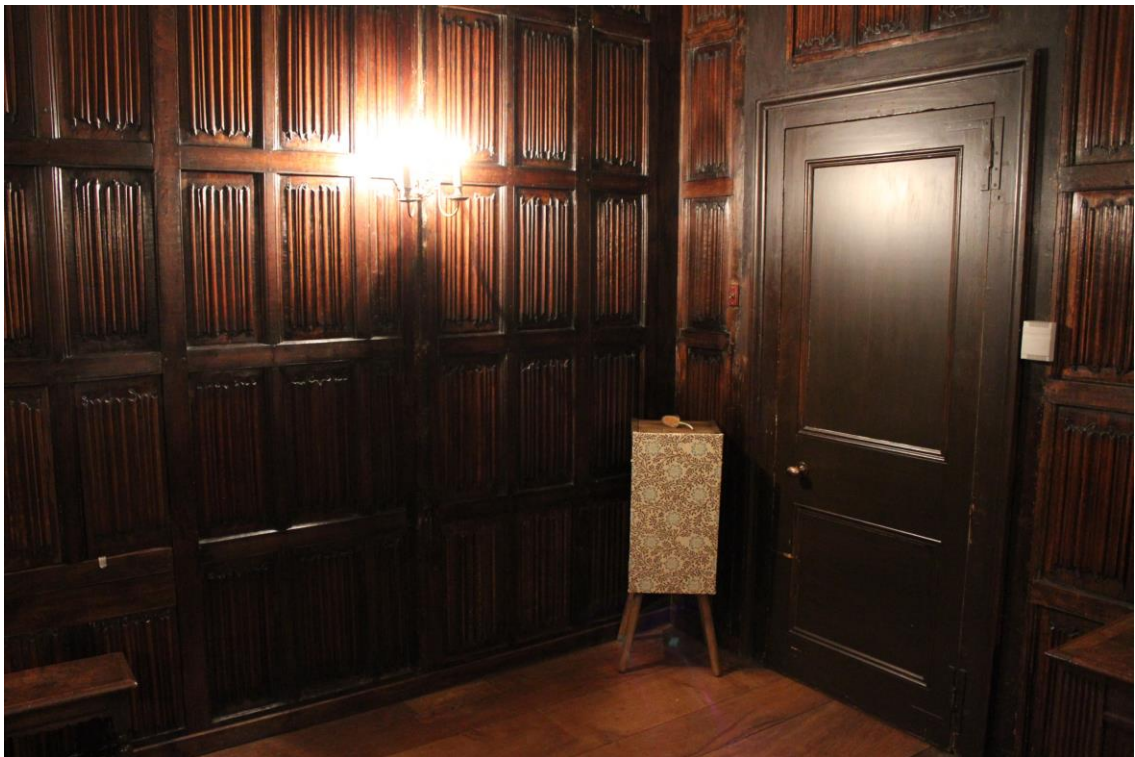


Figure 4.7 Linenfold Parlour speaker, Judith Brocklehurst, *Master-Mistress*

Up the painted staircase, with the trompe l’oeil style paintings that are intended to look like three-dimensional wood carvings, to the room directly above, the experience continues. The Little Chamber is interpreted as a more domestic space. Originally a bedroom, the space is now used as a tool for telling the story of Ellen Sadleir, wife of Ralph and cousin to Thomas Cromwell. The room is dominated by the reproduction colourful geometric oilcloth floor covering, on which sits a rocking cradle and a harpsichord. To the left of the original fireplace sits a second speaker, shorter than the one in the linenfold parlour. This time, another voice reads Sonnet 20, perhaps the most queer of the Fair Youth Sonnets, from which the exhibition’s title was taken; ‘A woman’s face with nature’s own hand painted, / Hast thou, the master mistress of my

passion'. The voice this time is a little softer, a well-spoken English accent that lengthens the vowel sound in 'master' in a way that I, or most other Northerners, would not.



Figure 4.8 Little Chamber speaker, Judith Brocklehurst, *Master-Mistress*

Already the soft hum from the neighbouring room filters through. Follow the sound and you enter the grandest space in the house. The Great Chamber. The Great Chamber is a less overtly gendered space than the previous two rooms, and its dimensions mirror how the Great Hall directly beneath it would have been, although now the space is a tea room and the admissions desk. The very floors of the room were double-layered to enforce them for what would have been a very social space, the function of the room has also been many-layered, from a space to banquet in Tudor and Stuart times, to a billiard room in the 1890s and a schoolroom in Mrs Freeman's girls' school in the late 17th century. The room is adorned with portraits, two of which, depicting Sadleir's descendants, were painted by Mary Beale in 1687. In this genderqueer space, a romantic voice reads Sonnet 75; 'So are you to my thoughts as food to life, / Or as sweet-season'd showers are to the ground;'. The room, which has four doors leading from it, is often used as a through bridge from one side of the house to the other, and passing visitors are drawn by the voice to another speaker, tall

and wide, resting on spindly legs.



Figure 4.9 Great Chamber speaker, Judith Brocklehurst, *Master-Mistress*

The final sonnet can be heard in the Tudor kitchen, from perhaps the most well-disguised speaker, which is tall and thin, the velvet texture of the fabric providing a striking contrast to the red brick walls behind. A silky voice speaks the words of Sonnet 53; 'Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit / Is poorly imitated after you;'. The kitchen is overstuffed with interpretation; text boards, plastic fruit and a plastic chicken glued to a wooden plate. The smell of herbs and spices claw back some degree of authenticity to the room. This, more than any other room, has seen vast numbers of alterations since it was first built, the pictures on the panels illustrate its evolution to what we see now. On one visit I made, two members of Sutton House's over 55s community group the *Recycled Teenagers* were sat at the large table that dominates the room, sketching an arrangement of fruit in the centre. One of them commented 'I'll know this sonnet off by heart by the end of the day' and the other laughed.



Figure 4.10 Tudor Kitchen speaker, Judith Brocklehurst, *Master-Mistress*

I chose the four who read the sonnets based on two things, firstly I wanted them to reflect more marginalized voices within LGBTQ communities, and secondly I chose people who I felt would be able to deliver powerful renditions of the sonnets. In spite of the interesting biographies of the speakers, I later decided not to include these, and furthermore not to attribute the names of the speakers (or their gender or sexual identities) to the sonnets they read or the rooms in which their voices could be heard. While it was a shame to exclude the compelling biographies of the speakers (project leader for the LGBTQ Jewish oral history project Rainbow Jews; a queer Black activist; a writer of a weekly lesbian column for the *New Statesman*; a Goldsmith's lecturer interested in post-structuralism, gender and queer studies), I felt that it undermined the themes of the exhibition, and that the biographies could potentially become a distraction from experiencing the sonnets and addressing the questions that arise from my reinterpretation of them.

The Tudorish “speakers”

While arguably the voices themselves would have been powerful enough, I was inspired by Matt Smith’s *Queering the museum* at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, which I discussed in the previous chapter, and specifically the way in which he identified the places where interventions had taken place with green carnations. I approached artist Judith Brocklehurst and provided a brief to produce artworks that served a dual purpose; firstly to indicate where interventions had taken place, and secondly to obscure, if possible, the rather clunky stereotypes from which the sonnets would be playing.

The faux speakers that Judith created, aside from masking the stereotypes, added a further dimension of queer interpretation to the exhibition. In the exhibition guide I struggled to find a word that neatly described them; steampunk and retrofuturistic were words I quickly dismissed. The only word that adequately captured the significance of the speakers that blurred time so much was ‘timefuck’ a word I based on ‘genderfuck’, a style of dress and presentation that grew out of radical lesbian and gay movements in the 1970s where items of clothing designed for both men and women were worn together as a political statement about gender, and as a way for gay men to offset the inherent privileges associated with being a masculine man (Stewart, 1995). I gathered that the National Trust was not quite ready for timefuck. Unfortunately more suitable and Trust-friendly words cropped up only once the exhibition was underway, the first being the charmingly vague ‘periodesque’, which appears in Alan Bennett’s *People* to describe the porn film being shot in the stately home, and the second ‘Tudorish’ which came from a conversation with a staff member from Sutton House, who after expressing an interest in purchasing the speakers to use in future interpretation said that they would fit in nicely, as they were *Tudor-ish*. For me the difficulty I had in describing the speakers captured why they worked so well. The speakers queer time, by being positioned both in the past and the present, as while they blend in with the Tudor spaces without being pastiche, they also are designed to look like modern day speakers. It was this tension that had originally led me to think of them as steampunk, a word that comes from a science fiction genre in which industrial and mechanical objects feature in an alternative history.



Figure 4.11 Close up of speaker, Judith Brocklehurst, *Master-Mistress*

The fact that Trust staff were interested in the speakers, not in spite of their inauthenticity, but in their ‘Tudor-ish’ appearance speaks volumes about the blurred lines around authenticity in historic houses. Writing about the *Unravelled* project at Nymans, Matt Smith notes that:

Bringing change to historic properties raises competing emotions. More than museums and galleries with their temporary exhibition programmes, historic houses often seem to be frozen at one point in time [...] The (albeit temporary) insertion of ‘foreign’ artworks into a house saved for posterity raises interesting, and occasionally challenging, questions for artists, staff and visitors alike (Smith, 2012a: 75).

One visitor to the exhibition noted that they thought it strange that an exhibition aimed at making queer identities visible included objects that blended in with their surroundings, and they wondered if it was at the National Trust’s request that we had done this. I am certain that the staff at Sutton House would have been supportive no matter how outrageous we had made the visual elements of the exhibition, but I found

this feedback quite striking, partially because it had not occurred to me, but also because it demonstrated how this visitor perceived the National Trust, and their expectations of how queer visibility should be achieved. Rather unwittingly, in this light, the speakers raise questions about what visibility means. First, that the speakers are both at home, and at odds with their surroundings, illustrating a queer tension, a tension not dissimilar to the lived experience of many queer people. Secondly, for many queer people, visibility is not about standing out or displaying signifiers to show sexuality or gender identity, rather, visibility is just about being seen, and being recognised. Not to mention that many queer people are simply not able to be visible at all. This feedback turned out to be the inspiration to the follow up exhibition 126.



Figure 4.12 Detail of the teasel in the Great Chamber, *Master-Mistress*

On top of each speaker (apart from the one in the kitchen, which we felt was too small) we placed the head of a teasel. The teasel is a familiar sight to visitors of historic

houses, as they are often used, interchangeably with pinecones, to denote where visitors should not sit. In Sutton House there are few, partially due to the lack of original furniture, and also due to the Assistant Custodian of the house who looked after conservation, as she felt they potentially cause more damage to furniture than good (specifically to the fabric on chairs). In spite of this, the teasel is still a recognisable trope of historic houses, and our inclusion of these on the artworks, whilst perhaps disguising them further, playfully critiqued the sort of hidden vocabulary that regular visitors to places such as this come to understand. The thistle is an exclamation point in the language of the National Trust, a thoroughly British and passive aggressive way of regulating the behaviour of visitors. In her book *Curious Lessons in the Museum: the pedagogic potential of artists interventions*, Claire Robins notes that ‘Gentle mocking, parodying, negating and destabilising, artists’ interventions are a form of communication that generally avoids a direct didactic, prosaic or literal *modus operandi*. Like a raised eyebrow, a wink or a sardonic intonation, a lot can be ‘said’ without recourse to explicit use of the word.’ (Robins, 2013: 100), though perhaps subtle attempts of this can be lost in a historic house, where, for example, a parodic teasel can be mistaken for a genuine signifier. Either way, the speakers are a knowing nudge, they should elicit a double take, they should *always* appear in quotation marks.

While the inclusion of queer voices challenge a dominant or official narrative, the “speakers” challenge the space in which they sit, the blurred lines and the weary tropes of a historic house that prevent those queer narratives from being explored.

Robins states:

The effectiveness of parody relies on its ability to jolt visitors into questioning, however momentarily, the cultural and social values, assumptions and prejudices that might be legitimised in such displays. Parodic interventions often ask the museum visitor to accept the possibility of simultaneous and contradictory meanings held within a certain state of flux (2013: 90).

What did you think of our LGBT exhibition? ‘I never saw it’

Smith notes that the strength of artist interventions in historic houses is that they help to ‘visually signpost, and allow visitors to access, discrete insights into alternative aspects of the property and its pasts’ (2012a: 78) and steer particular under-explored stories and ideas into the forefront of an often overwhelming and contradictory narrative. This unearthing of queer voices amongst the muddiness of a ‘perioesque’ house was appreciated by many visitors, one noted that the exhibition was ‘very in keeping with the building’s age’ while another said it was an ‘historically appropriate’ exhibition. One of the recurring phrases from the feedback, which was written on feedback forms that came with the exhibition guide, was ‘thought-provoking’, and many visitors commented that they would revisit the sonnets with ‘new eyes’, they hoped for ‘more next year’ and that they would ‘like more stuff like this, inc outside London’ [sic], presumably the last comment is directed at other National Trust properties.

While all of the feedback was appreciative of the exhibition and its aims, there was also some carefully considered criticism, which shows that people are invested in the idea of introducing queer elements to the interpretation at Sutton House, and in National Trust properties more broadly, and feel that the space allows them to offer constructive feedback to improve future exhibitions. The longest piece of feedback read as follows:

Nice idea, but unless you knew what you were looking for you’d miss it.
Not treated like a feature by staff, eg talking over the recording, leaflet not offered until I said this was why I was here. I found this card, was requested to complete one for family day. [their underlining]
I was also expecting a little more.
Couldn’t hear one even when room was quiet.
Would like more stuff like this, inc outside London.

When first reading this, I perhaps defensively felt like it was negative, but the last line, asking for more events like this, suggests that in spite of the problems the visitor had with the exhibition, the very fact that it was happening was an important thing. They, like a few others, hinted that the exhibition was perhaps too discreet, but place the blame of it not being enough of a feature on the staff, presumably meaning the

volunteers who room steward and staff the admissions desk. Perhaps this was because they had visited on a family day, so staff would have been primarily dealing with that, and that also explains why some of the speakers were not as audible as they might have been on another day of the week. Unfortunately the visitor did not elaborate on the line 'I was also expecting more', but perhaps a piece of feedback from another visitor expressed the same sentiment;

innovative

interesting

inclusive

It would have been nice to have some images accompanying the sound.

Still or moving. And also some information about the people reading the sonnets. Bringing in another layer of information and role models for LGBT history month.

Oddly, this comment was accompanied by a line drawing of an angel, perhaps a way of showing that the criticisms were well intentioned. The comment about more visual accompaniment to the sonnets was an echo of the verbal feedback that felt the speakers were not visible enough, and the desire to know more about the voice contributors was a concern I had as well, but as I noted earlier, I felt that any attempts to situate the voices alongside the identities of the speakers would have undermined the ambiguity I was aiming for. Perhaps the exhibition was *too* ambiguous and abstract for a historic house, a space in which people are accustomed to having a lot of written information in front of them. They may have worked better, although in an entirely different way, in a white cube gallery.

Two of the most interesting pieces of feedback were amongst the briefest, the first of which simply said 'GAY', on the surface, this shows a fairly literal understanding of the exhibition, but I presume that is not entirely how it was meant, this could potentially be the only negative piece of feedback, equating 'gay' with the way it is colloquially used to mean 'rubbish', but without any more context, it is impossible to tell.

Maybe:

A boy in year 6 is visiting Sutton House on a family day. His mother brought him here because it's just round the corner from home, and it's free on a family day. Being at an age where he is no longer so uninhibited as to join the activities and play with other children of varying ages, he leaves his mother's side and wanders the house, she has settled in the cafe and is reading one of the second hand books they have on the shelves there. The boy starts by crossing the courtyard and entering the kitchen. There's no one else in there. He sticks his head into the open hearth and looks up, but it's all dark. There's a low voice speaking words that he can almost understand. It's coming from a speaker, that look a bit like one his granddad has, but not quite. He presses his ear up to it and the velvety texture feels nice on his face. Later in the great chamber and notices another voice, and others in the little chamber and the linenfold parlour. He tries to listen to them all, but some are difficult above the din from other visitors, but he enjoys the sounds they make, they sound like poems, and the voices carry a hint of sadness. It is only when he is looking for his mother that he spots the text panels at the beginning. He feels embarrassed when he reads the words 'lesbian and gay', he recognises that they mean something that his mother has kept secret from him and he recognises that 'gay' is used a lot in his school, but not in a very nice way. He finds a postcard asking for feedback, and a pen. He wants to write something, but he doesn't know why. His mother says his name, and walks over to him. He quickly writes down a word in panic and puts the postcard in the slot, hoping she doesn't notice.

Or:

A couple visit Sutton House during the week, it's early morning, and they are hoping to go to Ham House later in the day, they are only in London for a few days, and they have been loyal National Trust members for twenty years. The only difficulty they ever encountered was some confusion from a volunteer when they purchased their joint membership. Obviously the volunteer was not expecting a pair of women to get a joint membership together, but that was a long time ago. As they enter they are each handed a room guide by a volunteer, and a second guide, for an exhibition. One of them takes a cursory glance at the exhibition guide and spotting a rainbow logo

nudges her partner in excitement. They spend a long time reading through the guide and looking at the text panels before looking for the exhibits, and when they find them they listen to each of them twice, reading along with them the second time. As they move around the rooms, they talk about the sonnets, trying to decide if the queer undertones are a bit too tenuous, but decide that some speak to them more loudly than others, and even so, they are excited to be invited to have such a conversation. In the kitchen, they notice a pair of young men who are listening intently to the sonnet there. They all exchange a smile and share a thoughtful few quiet moments together. The couple decide to stay a bit longer and have some tea and cake, one remarks to the other that there is such a nice atmosphere there. One of them finds the feedback card, and carefully considers what to write for a few minutes, before expressing her excitement and disbelief at such questions being posed in a National Trust house with a single, celebratory word.

Or maybe not. Such comments on feedback forms can only be taken with a pinch of salt and a heavy handful of hopeful conjecture, otherwise they might as well be cast aside completely. They can, however be an incentive to action.

The second said 'I never saw it', which begs the response 'why bother filling in a feedback form for it then?', though I soon realised I could and should not dismiss this feedback, as it could mean a number of things. It shows first of all, that someone was willing to engage with the exhibition, even if they did not see it. They wanted to be heard. Perhaps they looked around the house, and could not discern the speakers as part of the exhibition or hear the sonnets, if they had not seen the initial introductory text panel they could have seen and heard the exhibits without knowing the significance of them. My last thought was that perhaps they had seen the exhibition, but that the comment served as a way of saying that they felt it was not visible enough.

In a wall collage of paper bricks, which was un-related to the exhibition but ran at the same time, visitors were asked to write their thoughts about Sutton House. Many people used this opportunity to mention *Master-Mistress*. One visitor who emphasised

how 'Welcoming and family friendly' the house is, also mentioned the 'Inclusive LGBT exhibition', another simply wrote 'Hidden histories/herstories', though my personal favourite simply read:

NT IS GAY = GREAT

One of the most telling responses I gathered from the exhibition came quite incidentally, I attended a training session at Sutton House for volunteers, and a session about the National Trust's 'values and behaviours'. We were split in to groups to discuss a number of scenarios and how best they could be dealt with. One such scenario was about an artist who had rented a space in the house for an exhibition, that was potentially unsuitable for a younger audience and how to deal with visitors asking about the exhibition. A long-serving room steward brought up the LGBT exhibition in his answer, saying that while it was running, a year 6 child had started to tell him about Harvey Milk, the first openly gay American politician to be elected to public office, who they had been studying at school. The steward said that while the exhibition might be suitable for a year 6, it would not necessarily be suitable for a year 4 child as they "don't know about that". Following a sharp intake of breath from myself, the custodian who was facilitating the session stressed that the LGBT exhibition was not an artist led exhibition in a rented space, but was a National Trust exhibition, that they had decided was appropriate for everyone. The distinction between what a year four child and a year six child should, or will already know about is a baffling one. Interestingly enough, one of the feedback cards appeared to have been written by a young child; 'The LGBT History month was exciting' [sic].

Later, in the 'equality and diversity' session, we were given a scenario about a gay couple with a child asking for a family membership and a volunteer sending them away, everyone agreed they should be treated as a family, though later justifications included 'if any two people want to pay for a family membership, we'll take their money' and also statistics about the amount of same sex weddings and civil partnerships were mentioned; showing that alongside the commitment to social justice and equality, is a financial motivation in the shape of the Pink Pound.

In addition to the exhibition, I organised and chaired a panel event called ‘Challenging histories: what place do lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer identities have in museums and historic houses?’²³. The free event was filled to capacity, and featured three museum and archive professionals, and a historian. I had invited Ivo Dawnay, then Director of the London Project, to be a part of the panel but he was unable to make it, but sent a letter to be read at the event, after mentioning James Lees-Milne, William Banks and the Sackville-Wests, Ivo closed with ‘it is perhaps time that all this and all of them were better acknowledged’ (APPENDIX). The organisers of LGBT History Month included this letter on their website, with a preface declaring ‘We at LGBT HM have taken this as an indication of the Trust’s intention to bring LGBT stories to the proper forefront of the histories of their properties’ (LGBT History Month, 2014). What we had not realised at the time was that aside from having a public endorsement by a National Trust higher up for further exploring LGBTQ histories for the first time, *Master-Mistress* was the first ever LGBT History Month exhibition to be held in any of the National Trust properties (Hayward, 2015: 176), an angle we would have used heavily in marketing had we known.

126

Later in 2014 I was invited to take the lead with a follow up LGBTQ exhibition to mark LGBT History Month 2015. In an initial meeting with Sutton House staff I glibly suggested expanding the exhibition to include all 126 sonnets. My laughter was not returned by the staff there, and they thought it was a great idea. To make life harder for myself, as well as collecting audio recordings of the sonnets, I also asked for video recordings of the contributors which I described as ‘moving selfies’ in the call out. I asked for:

- a self recorded reading of a sonnet (I will assign the sonnets to make sure we have no duplicates), if you have a smart phone you will be able to do it on that, if you are unable to, or don't have a phone that can record sound, then I can help you record it. The sonnets all take approximately 1 minute to read
- a 10 second 'moving selfie', a video (again, just use your phone, and again if you don't have the technology, we can help you

²³ The panel event was recorded and can be listened to online (Curran, 2014a)

out) that serves as a portrait of you, of your face or your full body, or if you're not comfortable showing yourself, you can send a clip of something personal that captures an element of you, an object, an item of clothing, a place, or whatever you want (get in touch if you're short of ideas and I can help)

- Your permission to use both the sound recording, and your videos in an exhibition, promotional material for the exhibition and online

(Curran, 2014b)

Crowdsourcing

I chose to crowdsource for participants for practical purposes. Unlike *Master-Mistress*, it was unlikely I would find the time to record 126 people reading sonnets, and many people might feel less inhibited recording themselves, as they would be able to record as many takes as necessary for them to be happy with their contribution. Of the 126, I recorded only a handful myself. One of the *Recycled Teenagers*, the over 55 community group at Sutton House did not have a smart phone, so I recorded his sonnet with him, and filmed him in his two favourite rooms in the house. I also visited *Gay's The Word* bookshop, London, where I recorded the Manager and Assistant Manager, and one of the customers.

Crowdsourcing in museums is increasingly becoming a 'means of promoting increased public participation in core tasks such as collecting, describing, categorizing, or curating heritage collections' (Noordegraaf et al, 2014). *126* became an exhibition of a newly created collection that would continue to exist virtually through Vimeo, an online video sharing website, beyond the run of the physical exhibition.

Inviting participants to record videos of themselves as well, was not only an experiment in crowdsourcing, and a recognition of the accessibility of high quality cameras on smartphones, but was a direct response to feedback about the lack of visibility of people in *Master-Mistress*. On two accounts, *126* was influenced heavily by the most iconic LGBTQ crowdsourced project in history; in both the mode of collection, and in the naming, or making visible of LGBTQ people. I'm referring to the 'NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt'.

Upon seeing a wall of placards featuring names of those who had died of AIDS, Cleve Jones was reminded of a patchwork quilt handed down within his family. This was his inspiration for the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt. Contributors were invited to create large panels, 3 feet by 6 feet (the size of a grave) and to decorate them as memento mori for loved ones lost to AIDS, and specifically featuring the names of those lost, as a way of personalising the mass pandemic, and giving names and faces to horrifying statistics. Formally organized in June 1987, by the time the quilt panels were displayed on the Mall in Washington DC in October of that year, almost 2000 panels had been created. By September 1995, around 32,000 panels had been received.

The NAMES project, above all else was a move to document names, to aid remembrance, and to avoid the 'threat of oblivion' (Hawkins, 2009 [1996]: 135) of a lost or forgotten generation, one that the US seemed eager to forget. The quilt panels, en masse, exposed both the 'private loss and public indifference' (2009 [1996]: 136) of a nation ill-prepared and unprepared to deal with a harrowing and sweeping disease thought to be one that only affected gay men. The very scale of the memorial might suggest authorlessness and anonymity, but rather it hints at a collective authorship, where the naming of names is of central importance. The quilt has 'no official status, no public funding, no fixed location in Washington, indeed, no single place where it can be seen as a whole' (2009 (2006): 138).

The very fabric of the NAMES project is queer. The various panels and their display by their nature resist hierarchy, order or ranking; the project constantly evolves, grows and is reconfigured; it rejects a linear narrative, a beginning or an end; there is no 'correct' way to display it, or to view it. In spite of the solemn thread of grief weaving the panels together, they are not an earnest or miserable experience, they embrace camp, humour and 'tackiness' (2009 (2006): 140). While naming names, they do not exclusively do so with names recognised by legal documentation, they include nicknames, pet names and assumed names and alter egos. This, alongside the familial links with quilting that Jones was inspired by, suggests a family outside of the nuclear, a collective and community that is at its core entirely queer. Unlike stone memorials, the NAMES project will fade, will come undone, will age. The fragility of fabric echoing

the fragility of queer life in uncertain times. Like a protest banner, its multiple parts can be folded and stored, moved across borders, resurrected when needed.

Hawkins describes quilt-making as a 'quintessential folk art' (2009 [1996]: 136), and draws parallels with the much revered American flag. Quilting, he asserts, has a 'distinctly female historiography with its own traditions and [is] set apart from the official channels of cultural production' (2009 [1996]: 141). This matriarchal memorial is about love, sadness, anger and hope, and is at odds with the masculine towers of stone that so often celebrate power and patriotism as much as they mourn the dead.

The naming of names for LGBTQ people is often an act of outing, or of coming out, and indeed its exhibition on the Mall (October 1987) allowed a space for others to do so, a temporary safe space where LGBTQ people could hold hands, kiss, publically grieve in ways not often afforded to them. Hawkins suggest that the quilt was a mass coming out of sorts:

The Quilt's provocative appearance on the Mall gave the project's leadership an opportunity to denounce the country's indifference to the AIDS endemic and to rally for greater attention to research and support. For others it offered a way to suffer intimate losses in the most public space in America, to leave behind ghetto and closet, to bring mourning from the margin to the centre (2009 [1996]: 137).

Arguably, today the most accessible folk art and means of cultural production is through audio-visual technologies and smartphones. I will revisit this shortly when looking at the 'selfie', but ideas of coming out were always at the forefront of my mind as the submissions for *126* began rolling in.

The NAMES project would not, at the time of conception, be considered a crowdsourcing experiment, as the naming of such is a more recent thing. Crowdsourcing is more often linked to asking for money to support projects, websites such as Kickstarter, GoFundMe and Indiegogo are built for such ventures, where artists, musicians, filmmakers or other creators ask for financial help in making a product (be it an album, a film, a touring show etc.) happen. In exchange for the generosity of supporters are rewards of differing values; a name in the film

credits/liner notes of an album, a signed copy of the eventual CD, book, DVD etc., a private performance, an invitation to a private launch and so on. If a project fails to meet its target in a given time, the backers do not pay anything, and the project goes unfunded.

Punk cabaret singer Amanda Palmer more than met her target when she raised \$1.2 million from 24,883 backers towards the creation of her album *Theatre is Evil* (Lindvall, 2012). What followed was a backlash about both her supposed shamelessness in asking for money as an already established, albeit record label-free, musician, and about the way she spent the extra money. Palmer was invited to give a TED talk on the matter (Palmer, 2013), and subsequently penned a book called *The Art of Asking*. Both begin with anecdotes about her former life as a 'living statue' street performer:

Being a statue was a job in which I embodied the pure, physical manifestation of asking: I spent five years perched motionless on a milk crate with a hat at my feet, waiting for passersby to drop in a dollar in exchange for a moment of human connection (Palmer, 2014: 2).

She stresses the importance, and the necessity of shedding the shame of asking for help to make art happen, especially for emerging artists. My second consideration, after time, was money. Even though Sutton House was happy to endorse this as a National Trust exhibition, I was working unpaid and without a budget. I was cripplingly aware of asking people to work for free, but it was phrased as a volunteer opportunity from the start. One artist who had agreed to take part was affronted when I presented them with a deadline, and complained that they were doing it for free, likely unaware that I too was unpaid, and that it was not feasible to pay 126 people for a minute of audio and ten seconds of video. They pulled out, but were the only person who was not prepared to take part in the project unpaid, and indeed the only person to bring it up.

Noordegraaf et al note that asking the public to help create something for museum exhibitions or collections has 'clear organizational appeal in an age of austerity' (2016), but more than that, it was a necessity in this project, given that I was working alone on

it otherwise and it was entirely unfunded. I was rewarded with a bottle of wine and a Sutton House mug for what ultimately became a full time job for 6 months, and an administrative headache. I was both happy to do this, and also aware of my privilege as a funded PhD student to be able to have the time to embark on such an ambitious project, and to take advantage of the Trust's reliance on (and the Sutton House staff's faith in) volunteers.

Crowdsourcing for LGBTQ memories, ephemera, artwork and knowledge is becoming more commonplace. Historic England's Pride of Place map pinning project that I mentioned in the first chapter is another project that could not have happened without the collective recollections and expertise of LGBTQ communities around the country; their submissions to the map directly informed the content of the eventual online *Pride of Place: England's LGBTQ Heritage* exhibition. A Facebook group called 'Lost Gay London' invites contributors to upload photographs from the London gay scene in the 70s, 80s, 90s and 2000s. The Museum of Transology is a pop up travelling exhibition with no fixed home run by dress historian E-J Scott, which asks for donations or loans of objects and ephemera from trans people which relate to their trans stories. Even the BBC is crowdsourcing for material for an upcoming documentary marking the 50 year anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of sex between men (Lyell, 2016).

This enhanced awareness of crowdsourcing as a methodology for collecting queer voices is a positive result of the presumed fleeting and intangible nature of LGBTQ histories that I mentioned in the previous chapter, which requires that histories are gathered from the community itself. At the 126 private view, for which there were about 100 in attendance, a great many of those were faces I recognised from the video selfies, when people have contributed to an exhibition, they become more invested in it, and are more likely to visit, bring friends and tell others about it. Crowdsourcing is, as well as a convenience and a celebration of the wealth of stories, perspectives and knowledge from within the LGBTQ communities, a 'valuable platform for increasing audience engagement with cultural heritage' (Noordegraaf et al, 2016).

126 took place over February and March of 2015, in what was billed by Sutton House as 'Queer Season'. The season also included a retrospective of the work of gay artist Nick Fox and an event by collective Amy Grimehouse who run cult film club nights. I edited together all of the submissions for 126, and the half hour long film was played on loop in the Chapel in the East Wing of the house throughout the two month run. In 1914, when Sutton House had become the St John's Institute, a recreational club for men, the east cellar was converted into a chapel designed by Edward Maufe, a church architect who went on to design Guildford Cathedral.



Figure 4.13 The chapel, Sutton House

Projected against a white brick wall where an altar once would have stood, the film comprised short clips from each contributor, showing the entirety of the video they submitted, and featuring a partial snippet from their audio recording. I chose not to run the clips in order of the sonnets, but instead varied them based on their visual content to ensure that similar clips did not run together. I also slowed down the clips slightly, in order to allow more space for the sonnet to be heard, and also to create a continuity and flow across the whole film, without distracting from the diversity of the films themselves. Where I felt the collection was less strong on representation, for

example with people of colour, trans women and disabled people, I gave extra prominence to those clips by letting them run for longer. The wall upon which it was projected has patches of exposed brick showing under the white paint. As well as being an aesthetically pleasing backdrop for the film, these patches of bricks obscured small portions of the shots, and created an interesting sense of concealment, playing further on the theme of visibility.

The room was arranged with three rows of six chairs, joined together by wooden slats, I had originally wanted to remove the chairs, so that the space felt less formal for the duration of *126*, but changed my mind when I realised the conservation nightmare this would cause. It was a happy compromise, as the seats ensured that visitors' engagement with the film was not fleeting, and during the private view, those in attendance, many of whom were contributors, sat to watch the whole film. The space, as per its intention when converted to a chapel, became a reverential space once more.

Figure 4.14 126 poster, Alex Creep

The promotional poster for the exhibition, which was distributed around LGBTQ venues and shared online, was designed for free by graphic designer and artist Alex Creep. I approached Alex Creep to design the poster, as their zines and club posters captured the DIY feel that I wanted the artwork to suggest. The cut-out collage style resembles a 1990s club poster more than it does an exhibition poster, and Creep playfully used an image of Shakespeare and an inverted version to suggest a loving gaze. I provided them with screenshots from some of the videos, to include some of the contributors' faces on the collage as well. The bold visual was completed with a

National Trust oakleaf logo in the top left hand corner, as dictated by the National Trust brand guidelines.

126 – reviewing the data

There was a comment book in the chapel for the duration of *126* on a table by the door. Visitors had to pass it on the way in and the way out. Many chose to write in this, though seemingly most of them were contributors, or friends and family of contributors. I also sent a survey to the volunteers, to ascertain why they had become involved, what they got from it (if anything) and what they thought of the finished product. The response rate was about 40%, and the answers only mildly interesting. A friend, who had also participated and had refused to do the survey because they did not think it was a sufficiently queer way of collecting data (which I'm inclined to agree with) pointed out that I already had a wealth of data, in the form of 126 films, and 126 sonnet readings.

Ruth Holliday's research in the late 1990s using video-diaries to examine the performative nature of queer identities is useful in considering the videos in *126*. It has also helped me to unpick some of the methodological and ethical issues that have arisen as dictated by the type of data that emerged throughout the project, and address issues around the relationship between researcher and participant.

Holliday notes that the video is an 'active, even empowering, process, since it offers the participant greater 'editorial control' over the material disclosed' (2004: 51), though I did make some minor edits out of necessity. I cropped the videos of those who submitted them in portrait videos, purely for aesthetic reasons and for coherence when viewed as a whole. This meant I had to make decisions about which parts of the videos to include and which to crop out. Likewise, when screened, parts of the video could not be seen, because of the beams on the roof of the wall upon which it was projected, but I will discuss this further later.

The contributors all gave written permission to use their contributions in the exhibition, online, in publicity for the exhibition, and in my research. Holliday

addresses the argument that using such videos as data can ‘privilege the experiences of the researcher over those of [the] respondents’ (2004: 57). Does my own identity, and my own status as a participant as well as a researcher and curator make this less problematic? Holliday argues that:

...if debates continue to focus on the ‘incorrect’ ways of doing research we risk an increasingly introspective academy. What we must do to escape this impasse of ethical debates which operate in ever-decreasing circles is to *risk being wrong...* (Holliday, 2004: 59)

My interpretation of the visuals, and my own authorial voice, is hopefully countered by the accessibility of the videos. I felt it was important to make the videos accessible to those consuming my research by making them available online, so that they can be viewed, and read, independently of my interpretations. I have to hope, therefore, that the reader will always read the word “data” in inverted commas.

I transcribed each of the videos²⁴, by writing what I could observe in each instance, and also included notes about what was less visible, but had become apparent through correspondence with the volunteers. Both the setting of the exhibition, and the format of the films, made the videos seem quite confessional, the chapel once again becoming a reverent space. This idea of the confessional had parallels with the ‘coming out’ video, which is, according to Alexander and Losh ‘a robust genre that invites production, elaboration, response, and remediation’ (2010). I wondered if it would be a useful idea to look at the ‘coming out’ video as a starting point for analysing this data.

Coming out

Christopher Pullen (2010: 1-2) identifies the following examples of ways in which LGBTQ people test, affirm and connect identities online:

- Opportunities for virtual coming out
- Engagement in dating, or sexual encounters
- The easy access to pornography
- Composing self narratives through blogging

²⁴ See appendix 5

- Connecting to and constructing communities
- Establishing identity ideals
- The potential to mobilize political ideologies
- The potential to contribute to historical foundations
- The opportunity to evaluate preferred service providers, manufacturers and employers

I myself have engaged with all of these, and more, and had my own blog on MySpace documenting my own coming out in the mid-2000s. Coming out since then has evolved into the confessional world of vlogging, or video blogging, in which (usually) sole narrators speak to the camera, and thus to the viewer, in the first person about their experience, usually unscripted and informal, and often inviting feedback, comments and response videos. The most famous of these in recent years is Olympic diver Tom Daley's who leans against a bed head adorned with union jack cushions, perhaps reminding the viewers as much about his contribution to British sport as to educate us about his sexual identity. The impact of high profile celebrity outings can be as damaging as they are useful. The recent *Vanity Fair* cover shoot of fellow Olympian Caitlyn Jenner is a prime example. While her transition has been largely warmly received by the press, the before and after transformation reveal is a troublingly unrelatable phenomenon for trans women, many of whom do not have access to the resources for a quick physical transition, and will not be able to "pass" as a cisgender woman. With these examples in mind, personal coming out videos of more relatable people grow in importance, and are reflective of a more widespread variety of experience. The more well-known figures using this genre of communication often do so to prevent their identity being revealed by the media, but the non-famous who make these videos do so for very different reasons.

Alexander and Losh state that:

coming out videos often make [...] questions of representation quite explicit, particularly because the specific media form promises access to an unmediated truth by a confessing subject who seems to be offering a moment of intimate disclosure of an authentic identity hidden by a social mask, while also emphasizing how gender and sexuality are performed for the camera much as they are staged in offline environments (2010: 39).

The subject is responsible for their own narrative being told the way they wish it to be, doubtless after many reshoots, and also self-mediated edits and effects depending on their skills, abilities and access to video editing software.

This genre of video is now so recognisably part of online queer culture, that it is drenched with clichés, tropes and recurring themes, much like any other genre. The repetition of coming out tropes ‘creates a commonality of experience and community’ (2010: 40). The ‘coming out’ story in queer communities is a varied but shared experience, but it is also not a one off event. I am fortunate enough to pass as queer, but for others, coming out is something they have to continuously do.

Heteronormative assumptions about gender, marital status and children all require people to come out again and again. This is why I feel that these videos in *126* can be viewed as a coming out of sorts, and this was recognised by some of the participants, who chose to obscure themselves with effects, show themselves only partially or omit their faces entirely. I encouraged this approach as I was well aware that many in the queer community do not feel comfortable or safe to out themselves in such a public way, and also for many trans and gender non-conforming people, anxieties about being misread was also an issue.

Individual coming out videos on YouTube are rarely viewed, it is in aggregate where their strength lies (2010: 46), although ‘the aggregation of polymorphous and seemingly unregulated coming out videos on YouTube may still be subject to architectures of corporate control that can contain and filter out certain forms of queer expression’ (2010: 48) due to the metadata, statistics and sponsorship involved in key word searching.

The *It Gets Better* project was founded in 2010 by Dan Savage and Terry Miller, in response to an alarming spate of young queer teen suicides in the USA. It began with a single YouTube video uploaded by partners Savage and Terry with the message that while it might be hard coming to terms with sexuality, and facing the discrimination that comes with this; the future is bright. Since then, tens of thousands of people,

including high profile figures and heterosexual supporters, have contributed their own videos with the same message.

Cover claims, in his research on queer youth suicide, that *It Gets Better* 'is among the first widely-available communicative media form to address directly queer youth on issues related to suicide, and the first to draw on lived experiences as a means by which to provide resources for queer youth resilience' (2012: 58). This is an example of how 'digital participatory culture' has contributed to a reinterpretation of knowledge, and how it can steer forward a discourse through which individuals and communities can undermine official narratives and amplify silenced issues. While well intentioned, the rhetoric of many of the submitted videos is that being young when queer is alienating and difficult; that bullying is to be expected, rather than critiquing or attempting to disrupt and dismantle 'institutional cultures that legitimate heteronormativity' (2012: 74). Further, it is often only privileged white homonormative LGBT people for whom it really does get better. Matthew D. Blanchard in his essay 'It gets better?' recounts his overdose-induced HIV/AIDS-related pneumonia that resulted in his jaw being severely disfigured (Blanchard, 2012), due in part to limited access to health care.

Likewise the figures of over 2000 trans people murdered between 2008-2016 (Trans Respect, 2016), most of whom were trans women of colour under the age of 30, make the rhetoric ring hollow. Even so, *It Gets Better* is just one example of how queer people are motivating themselves to share experience and build communities online. On the *It Gets Better* website, the matrix of videos is more striking than any of the videos in and of themselves, although it's arguably nothing more than a roll call of survivors.

The internet acts as a queer support network in many ways. Many establish and explore their queer identities more fully virtually before they do so in the real world. One YouTube user whose coming out FAQ has over 1 million views recounted how they had privileges removed by their mother when they came out, including internet access: 'which meant my life basically' (2010: 41). I can relate to this in many ways. The

vast majority of my queer friends were made either directly or indirectly, through online platforms. I wonder how I would have survived without that particular meeting ground. Likewise, the internet is increasingly becoming a space in which non-heterosexual self-representation is possible (Laukkanen, 2007: 82). Many sites, including Facebook, where in 2014 the gender options were increased to 71 (Williams, 2013a) and users could select gender neutral pronouns, are beginning to recognise that more restricted binary options are not sufficient.

Reading the contributions in *126* as coming out videos of sorts, I decided that for the sake of my analysis I would assume that all videos were consciously constructed as a representation of the queer self. I know certainly from my own video, and from the conversations I had with some of the participants, that many contributions were very carefully curated, with queerness and visibility at the forefront.

Audience

I also made the assumption that not only were the participants consciously constructing and performing their queer identities, but they were doing so specifically for a National Trust audience. From the survey, the contributors considered the Trust to be “fusty”, “dusty”, “stuffy”, “conservative” and “haughty, exclusive and expensive”, and that its audience was “Middle-England”, “posh retired folk”, “heterosexual” and that they were not good at “attracting people outside its stereotypical white British middle-class image”²⁵. While some of the contributors said they enjoyed being part of a community of contributors, given the aforementioned perceptions of the Trust I will assume that the intended audience was the visitor, not their queer peers. It was only in viewing the other videos, either online or at the exhibition, that the sense of queer community was established for many. One visitor said “The similarities between the texts and the ways people read created this weird sense of community, despite nobody (to my knowledge) collaborating”.

There are obvious differences between *126* and Holliday’s video diary project, namely the restricted brief I gave participants, as they had only 10 seconds. Perhaps a more

²⁵ See Appendix 4 for the complete survey results

interesting difference was that the contributions were entirely visual, aside from incidental background noises and music, and in some cases dialogue from the subject to another person or from the person doing the recording.

Holliday notes that:

since we are accustomed to conceiving of ourselves as viewers of media productions rather than as creators of them, [although amongst digital natives this is likely shifted somewhat since the late 1990s] the mirror analogy seems appropriate since we are likely to imagine audiences of our own productions through a strong process of identification: we imagine ourselves as audience for our own productions (2004: 53).

We are perhaps performing the self *for the self* or being ourselves for others like us. This reading perhaps addresses the problem of the 'ethnographic spectacle' (Stanley, 1998) or pre-empts the othering gaze of non-queer audiences. According to Michael Renov, the confessional discourse of the diaristic form 'addresses itself to an absent, imaginary other' (1996: 88-89), so perhaps the intended audience for the 126 submissions was a triumvirate of the self and peers, the presumed National Trust audience, and the imagined other.

The selfie

I initially looked at themes, and although there were many similarities in the videos in terms of content and composition, the interesting elements could be broadly shoehorned under five headings; place, self, actions (including props), and linked to all of these, but worth singling out; taste signifiers. The fifth is invisible signifiers.

First, let me unpick what a 'selfie' is. In the initial call out for volunteers, I asked for a ten second "moving selfie", none of the contributors needed any clarification about what this was, indicating that although the selfie is normally a static form, the word has reached a public consciousness amongst internet-savvy people, this is confirmed by its selection as Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2013 (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013). The selfie is a variation of a photographic self-portrait, usually where the subject holds the camera device (most often a smartphone) at arm's length, meaning

that the arm holding it is often visible. Variations of this include photographs in mirrors showing the camera reflected, or now that most smartphones include a reverse camera function, close-ups with no arms or device visible. Most selfies exist solely online, and are posted instantly for immediate approval (through “likes”) from peers and strangers. On Instagram, users add popular hashtags to their selfies to ensure a wider audience, such as #selfie and #instagay.

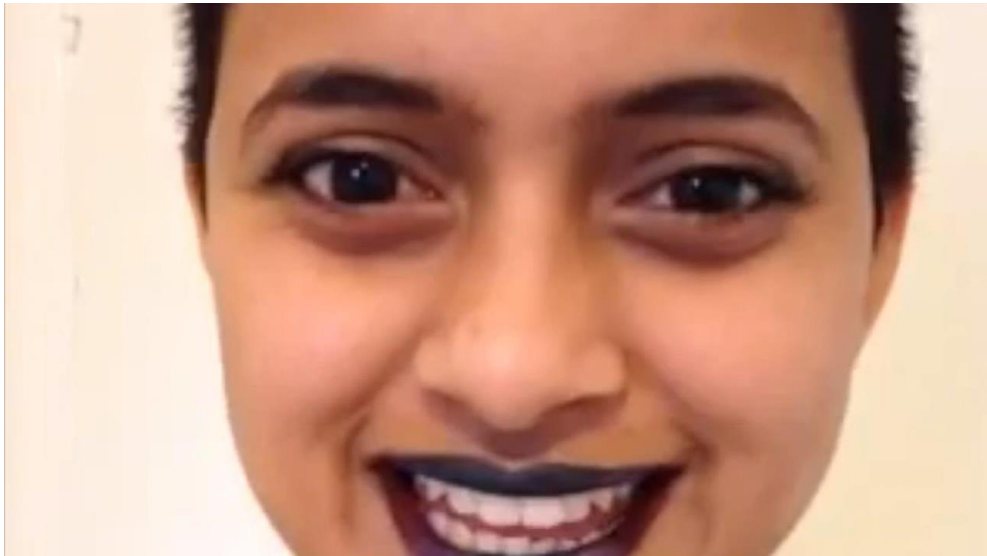


Figure 4.15 Still from video submission for Sonnet 112

Art critic Jerry Saltz describes the selfie as the ‘most prevalent popular genre ever’ (2014). It’s hard to argue, as of June 2015 there were over 280 million pictures with the hashtag #selfie on Instagram. Saltz argues that it is a type of self-portrait ‘formally distinct from all others in history’ due to the spontaneous, casual and improvised nature of them. He also argues that the selfie is about control, stating that ‘any selfie that you see had to be approved by the sender before being embedded into a network’ (2014) (though this is not strictly true thanks to the prevalence of online slut-shaming and revenge porn), ‘this implies’ he goes on ‘control as well as the presence of performing, self-criticality, and irony’ (2014).

I would also argue that the selfie has been a liberatory device through which queer and other marginalised communities have been able to express themselves in their own terms. The hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown went viral following the shooting of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in response to the way in which the media portrays people of colour who are victims of gun crime. The hashtag would be accompanied by

two pictures of the same person, mostly black people, one a more wholesome image, of graduations or with family, the other of them wearing street clothes, drinking with friends or smoking, with the implication that the (specifically US) media would chose the latter to depict them. Likewise fat activist women used the hashtag #LoseHateNotWeight to show positive images of fat beauty in response to online fat-shaming. Selfies have contributed to an idea of radical vanity, to taking ownership of bodies, identities and beauty. James Franco, actor, sexual enigma, and newly titled Selfie King, says 'In our age of social networking, the selfie is the new way to look someone right in the eye and say, "Hello, this is me."' (Franco, 2013)

The composition was the first thing I considered when revisiting the videos. I asked contributors to film in landscape, as this would work better projected, although many either forgot or chose not to. Most users featured their faces, and a lot of those were interpreted like static selfies, ie: just a head and shoulders shot. A few participants didn't move at all and kept a single expression for the 10 seconds.



Figure 4.16 Still from video submission for Sonnet 101

Slight variations of this included looking at the camera and spinning around to show their surroundings, some indoors, some outdoors. Other variations started with a standard selfie, and then panned around the room or wherever they were, this strikes me as a direct way of situating oneself: this is me, this is where I am.

Place

Approximately 36 of the videos appear to have been shot outdoors, some in gardens, some in public spaces. The mostly grey skies and heavy coats and scarfs are unsurprising given that the majority of films were gathered between October and January. It would be interesting to see how this would have differed if the submission period had occurred over summer, one can imagine there would have been more flesh on show for a start. A recurring backdrop is one of urban messiness and decay; graffiti, broken windows, pylons. What does this mean? Mowlabocus claims that queer people have historically occupied 'low status' and 'devalued spaces', citing London's Vauxhall Arches²⁶ as an example (2010: 204). Is this inclusion of these spaces a way to reclaim marginalised status in a neo-liberal time where we are superficially accepted in society? Perhaps it's rather more reflective of the fact that LGBTQ people who are comfortable and able to be visibly queer tend to migrate to cities.



Figure 4.17 Still from video submission for Sonnet 58

I know a lot of the participants to be from London, because of mutual friends or the networks through which they heard about the project, but others situate themselves

²⁶ The queer clubbing scene was established in Vauxhall throughout the late 1990s following the arrival of *Duckie*, a queer cabaret night at *The Royal Vauxhall Tavern* hosted by Amy Lamé. *Duckie* is shaped as an evolution of and tongue in cheek response to the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens of the 17th-19th centuries. While initially ignited by those from within the queer community, the value of Vauxhall as a place reimagined as a 'historical and contemporary centre for hedonism' (Andersson, 2011: 91) was seen in the form of the pink pound. Where best to infuse neoliberal attempts at portraying a more diverse, decadent and living pink pound trap than in disused and industrial spaces with relatively cheap rent? The clubs lie mostly in railway arches and the 'gritty urban aesthetic' (2011: 92) of the spaces has been manipulated for marketing purposes that still confers the clientele with a marginalised or outside status.

very visibly in London in their videos, including public transport or landmarks such as the O2. Another participant included a shot of Margate Pier. How much does the location of those shots (where identifiable) outside of domestic spaces relate to the participants' identities? I suppose anywhere can be immediately identifiable to the right people, it might be a case of "I hope some people will recognize that I'm in Margate here..."

I paid a lot of attention to pictures hanging in the background when transcribing. Many of the videos are filmed in domestic spaces, and as such paintings and posters are often in shot. I wonder to what extent the positioning of the subject was intentionally in front of these pictures. Mine is an extreme example, I included a shot of a very large Morrissey poster almost as the main focus at the end of the film, but others are more subliminal. I noticed a small framed picture of dancers in the background of one, who I know to be involved with a successful gender neutral queer dance school, a link that visitors to Sutton House would not necessarily know about. These, perhaps, serendipitous images are as much about location as they are signifiers of taste, which I'll return to later.

(performing) Self

I was struck, but not completely surprised, by the visual similarities between many of the participants, something also observed by one of the contributors in the survey, who said:

I always worry with queer projects that they'll be dominated by white thin youngsters. Although there were a bunch of white asymmetric-haired boy-dressed types (like me), we weren't (I hope) overwhelming. I don't know if this was achieved through deliberate publicity/recruitment or was a happy accident, but it was really important.

The participant, I expect is referring to those who are masculine, butch or transmasculine, youthful and thin with short hair. Variations within this look include thick-framed glasses and visible piercings and tattoos.



Figure 4.18 *Radical Sameness* zine front cover, used with kind permission of the author Rudy Can'tFail

In a 2012 queer zine called *Radical Sameness*, Rudy Can'tFail unpicks the radical potential of queer sameness, referring to the regularity of herself and her girlfriend being mistaken for sisters. She claims that visual similarities between queer partners and their friendship group undermines the differences upon which mainstream heterosexual relationships are configured, and that rather than being about conformity, that queer sameness is a 'bold statement of otherness' that reinforces the rejection of binary gender. The collective aesthetic on show in 126 enforces in part a community of sameness, while disrupting a notion of binary gender identities and differences, binaries that are strongly enforced in historic houses, through their interpretation of feminine versus masculine spaces and of the gendered roles played by those who lived there, such as domestic staff. Likewise writer James Gardiner claims the term 'dolly sisters' became gay slang for two gay people dressed alike, after the Hungarian American identical twin cabaret performers who were popular throughout Europe in the 1920s, and became camp icons (Gardiner, 2016).

This idea of Radical Sameness raises questions about the level of performance that is evident in the videos. Paul H. Fry, using the work of Judith Butler argues that gender

and sexuality are not what one is but rather what one does (Fry: 2012). This challenges any notion of stability in gender and sexual identities. Our genders and sexuality are performed, as a product of power relations, whilst also producing and reproducing this power relations. One can only perform within the constraints of how gender and sexuality are currently understood in available discourses. One repeats what one supposes themselves to be, thus our performance of our gender and sexuality is always imitative. The performance of gender, Butler claims, is 'theatrical to the extent that it *mimes* and *renders hyperbolic* the discursive convention that it also *reverses*' (1993: 23).

Many of the 126 videos deal with the performativity of, specifically, gender, in an overt way. Parody is one way of subverting the recognised and available discourse around gender, Butler uses drag as an example of this. While it is important not to conflate drag with non-binary trans and gender non-conforming identities, which while performative are still very much real, Fry notes that what the performance of drag reveals 'is that gender is always in and of itself, precisely performance' (2012: 310). Butler disputes readings of her writing on drag (1993), and notes that it should not be considered the exemplar of performativity, and rather that 'what is "performed" in drag is, of course, the sign of gender, a sign which is not the same as the body it figures, but which cannot be read without it' (1993: 26). Mary Bunch interprets this to mean that drag 'undoes gender norms precisely because it repeats gender norms, but with a difference' (2013: 45).

Claudia Schippert (2006) reflects on the pedagogical potential of performance, citing an example she uses in her university teaching, by saying to students "I forbid you to pay attention to my penis", the aim is not only to make the students uncomfortable (although she recognises the value of discomfort in furthering critical thinking), but instead to make the students recognise the assumptions that they are making about her, and to consider their own understanding of how the body relates to gender presentation or performance. Butler notes that 'performativity works, when it works, to counter a certain metaphysical presumption about culturally constructed categories and to draw our attention to the diverse mechanisms of that construction' (2010:147).

Through her attempts at a 'performative pedagogy', Schippert aims to '*proliferate* rather than *represent* a bounded identity in order to expose and contest the normalizing process of identity construction' (2006: 286). She also identifies a distinction between theatrical performativity, and discursive performativity, with the latter aiming to 'highlight and transform cultural narratives' (2006: 288), although her own example perhaps serves to demonstrate that the distinction between the discursive and the theatrical is not a clear one.

In one video, the contributor is seen wearing a pink wig, covering their mouth with the hair, they then remove the wig, to reveal a black beard and lips painted black, their hairy chest becomes more visible too. This contribution, in just ten seconds, confronts the viewer by asking them to reconsider their own assumptions about gender, and ends with the contributor sticking out their tongue, perhaps a knowing nod to having fooled or challenged the viewer. In another, the contributor is wearing a tiger onesie with the hood over their head, they remove the hood and ruffle their hair, before smirking at the camera, another example of a "reveal" moment, where the subject presents first a costume, before revealing the self.



Figure 4.20 Still from video submission for Sonnet 120

Other videos show the process of dressing up, in one, an androgynous figure does up a tie and straightens it under the collar, before carefully arranging their hair, while another contributor's video shows them applying mascara, their face visible through the reflection in the mirror. These contrasting videos, of undressing and of dressing,

can be read as expressions of performance, or the physical embodiment of gendered identities, both the enforcing and undoing of.

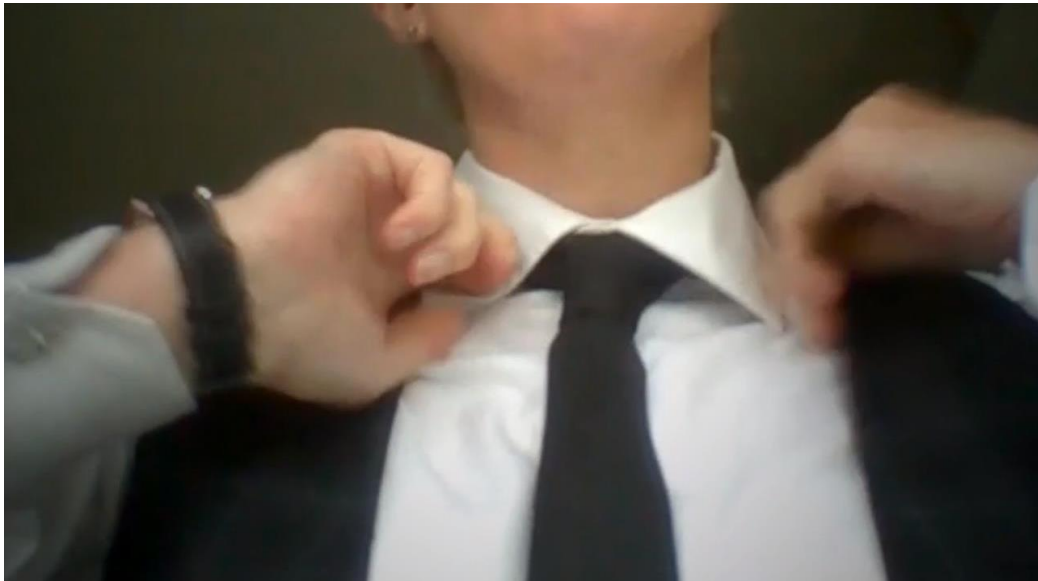


Figure 4.21 Still from video submission for Sonnet 85



Figure 4.22 Still from video submission for Sonnet 3

One contributor looks into the camera, they too have short asymmetric hair and thick glasses, the video seems a straight forward selfie until they lift up their necklace to show the camera, they angle it towards the light so that the word 'They' becomes clear, they smirk and play with their hair. 'They' is becoming an increasingly preferred

pronoun in radical queer circles, but while an unambiguous statement of identity, this, coupled with the smirk, suggests a knowingness about the radical potential of sameness, and of acknowledging that their androgynous appearance could be read and misread in many ways by the viewer.



Figure 4.19 Still from video submission for Sonnet 31

A notable difference from the participants in Holliday's project is that the participants were instructed to dress as they usually would, while there were no such instructions given by me, although the extent to which Holliday's participants followed that is unknowable. There are examples within *126* where contributors clearly dressed especially for the video. One contributor told me in an email that they were waiting for a "good hair day" before filming. I awaited for such a day for mine too.

The recurrence of smirks, self-deprecating laughs and uncomfortable-looking faces is notable. Ten seconds is a surprisingly long time to be filmed doing nothing, perhaps these faces are an acknowledgement of the discomfort of the assignment, or perhaps it might be an ironic statement that distances the subject from the intimacy of filming oneself, as if to show they don't take themselves too seriously: a way, perhaps, of counteracting the presumed narcissism of the selfie.

In her video-diary project, Holliday notes that where others were involved with the filming, there was a more light-hearted or ironic nature to the film. While as mentioned there was an ironic edge to many of the self-filmed contributions too, this is largely the case for the videos in *126*. One contributor is filmed on a balcony

overlooking the River Thames with the O2 Arena in the background. After a second or two, the person filming asks 'are you not supposed to say anything?' to which the contributor replies 'well no, not really' and laughs, bending over as they do and disappearing off screen. The contributor asked me to crop the laughter out of the clip, but I asked if they would mind if I left it in, as I thought it was amusing, they were happy for me to do so. Their compliance with me including a part of the clip they had thought inappropriate struck me as interesting in terms of what they thought should be presented in an exhibition environment. This lapse in seriousness in the clip captured something much more, for me, than a standard serious selfie.

Another contributor filmed themselves eating their dinner, a TV can be heard, and a voice in the background, who presumably does not know that the filming is taking place, asks an inaudible question, presumably about the food. The contributor responds "is it good? Funny isn't it? It's a bit weird", the background voice says "I quite like the texture" to which the contributor replies "hmm, baby food" and they both laugh. This fly on the wall glimpse into a very normal domestic exchange is interesting in many ways, first that it was included at all in the clip I was sent, and second in that the contributor had seemingly not told the other person in the room what they were doing. It also shows a glimpse of a rather mundane domestic exchange between two same sex partners; the domestic side of queer life, as discussed in a previous chapter, is rarely documented.

Holliday suggests that those video diaries filmed without an accomplice showed more candour and intimacy, and that 'the self consciousness thus appears to be a result of performing in front of a *known* other' (2004: 52).

Another issue around comfort and discomfort, is eye contact. I joked to a friend shortly after sending out the call for volunteers that it seemed like the ultimate form of vanity to ask 125 queer people to send me love poems and videos of themselves. Many who filmed more straight forward selfies struggled to maintain eye contact with the lens for the full 10 seconds, some looked away coyly or looked down. Some did not look at the camera at all. Eye contact can be read as a form of intimacy; a form of intimacy many

might not be comfortable with when they know it will be shared with a viewing public. Alternatively, breaking eye contact could be read as an act of defiance, of breaking the onlookers gaze, or looking away from an institution that has systematically overlooked LGBTQ people.

Some videos seemed to speak directly to the visibility element of the project, namely those that made visible intersecting identities. In one case, this was influenced by having seen contributions from other participants. Throughout the project, I posted teaser videos collected so far on various social media platforms, both to promote the eventual exhibition, and to recruit more volunteers. One contributor had sent me a video featuring one of their eyes in an extreme close up. They contacted me after seeing some of the other videos to ask if they could resubmit, because they wanted to make their disability more visible. The second take was a wide shot selfie in a mirror, in which you can clearly make out that the contributor is in a wheelchair. Perhaps they had rightly recognised that the contributions so far could be read as representing only able-bodied people, and that it was important to show the variety of body types in LGBTQ communities. Likewise, another contributor made their kippah (a cap traditionally worn by Jewish men and boys) a central focus of their video, which helps to combat the assumption that faith and LGBTQ identities are always at odds.

Actions, props and taste signifiers

Inevitably, the representation of the queer self in the form of short videos also frequently included objects. These objects can be read in many ways, as signifiers of taste, as branding of sorts and of representations of normality. Books and bookshelves were some of the most prominently featured objects, mostly in domestic spaces, either in the background, or as the focus of the film. In one of these, the contributor stands under a sign that says 'poetry' and reads from a collection of Sappho's poetry, and in another, the contributor stands with their back to the camera and takes a book called *The Family Book*, which is for children, from the shelves and flicks through it, the covers of two other books are clearly visible on higher shelves, one is called *Born Gay*, and the other, *AIDS*. In a different video, a tattooed contributor is sitting in a café, and

is reading a book called *The IMP of the Mind: Exploring the Silent Epidemic of Obsessive Bad Thoughts*, the film begins with a close up of the book title and zooms out to show the contributor reading it, and biting their lip. Each of these seem quite pointed books to be featured, the first is by a poet considered by many to be lesbian, the second suggests at more heteronormative ideals of family and the third could be read as an acknowledgement of the increased likelihood of LGBT people suffering from mental health issues (Merrill, 2014; Strudwick, 2014). Other recurring props were bicycles, cigarettes and drinks.

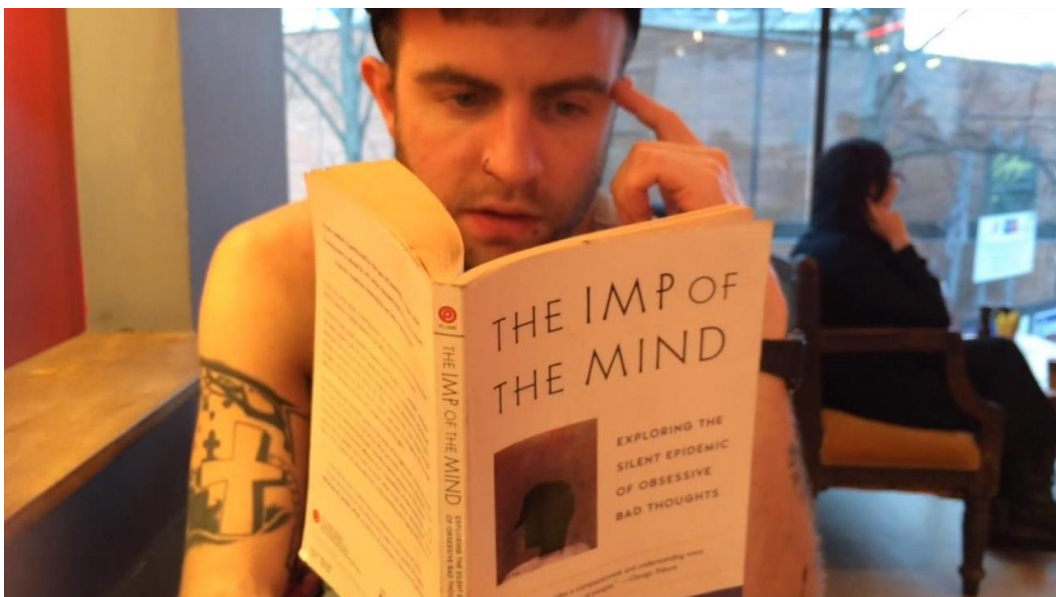


Figure 4.23 Still from video submission for Sonnet 108

Some people are wearing slogans on t-shirts, one contributor wears a Terrence Higgins Trust vest. Terrence Higgins is a HIV and AIDS charity. Another contributor wears a t-shirt saying 'love' and 'tolerate' with a picture of a cartoon pink pony, my own contribution featured a 'Lesbians and Gays support the miners' t-shirt and it was quite intentional on my part. What are these displays of "brands" of sorts trying to communicate? The individual videos on the whole are quite superficially apolitical, but some of these slogans and identifiable words and brands could be read as a demonstration of political and more specifically, queer political stances.

These signifiers of taste and values could be much more than just the contributor telling us about themselves, when exploring the domestic life of Joe Orton and Kenneth Halliwell, Matt Cook notes that pop culture paraphernalia in their home could

be ‘used as a means of affirmation or revelation to others who [...] were ‘in the know’’ (2014: 180).

Pets and animals also featured a lot, particularly dogs, but cats and a bird too. One contributor I met at Sutton House one day had come to visit the exhibition, and was planning on bringing their parents to see it, which was lovely to hear, but also quite surprising, because although their voice features, their film was a static shot of their dog lying down.



Figure 4.24 Still from video submission for Sonnet 24

Some people who contributed sent films they had previously made. One singer submitted a clip from their music video, another performance artist submitted a clip of their work that already existed, a friend submitted a clip they had filmed weeks previously and posted on Instagram. In the case of the artists, is this exhibition also an opportunity for self-promotion? Another featured the sign of the business they own before panning out to show themselves at work. How much are people’s queer identities tied in with their art practice or work?

Invisible signifiers

It became quite apparent early on in the project that many of the signifiers in the videos were invisible without context, context that was impossible to communicate to

visitors to the exhibition. Both from my own knowledge of some of the participants, and from email correspondence I had with people, I would read the videos very differently to the visitors. What were people hoping would be visible or recognised that might not be immediately obvious, or clear at all? Is the act of withholding or not being fully visible a subversive act in itself? One participant, for example, is wearing a flowery hat, which I know them to be wearing because they had lost their hair as a result of chemotherapy; this might not be clear to many people. Another informed me that the dog they filmed was their assistant dog, thus the dog is representative of the participant's disability, but to someone who doesn't have this information, it is merely a film of a dog. This made me wonder what else *wasn't* I seeing that participants might have hoped to be clear?

There are invisible signifiers in terms of place as well, specifically in the countries in which the contributions were filmed. From correspondence I know some of the videos to have been filmed in the Netherlands, Sweden, Mexico, Australia, Belgium, and best of all, Lesbos. The online nature of the volunteer recruitment meant that its focus was not only on London, or even just the UK. The *126* community is a global one.

A participant who I had initially assigned an earlier sonnet requested to read sonnet 116 instead, they told me they were having it read at their same sex marriage in three weeks time and that it meant a lot to them. I happily obliged, and was keen to have the inclusion of something that so deeply resonated with someone's marriage, even if it was not apparent to the viewer. *126* was as much about facilitating experiences for the contributors as it was for the audience who viewed the finished piece, even if these experiences were private.

Disruptions

The *126* film was also exhibited at the V&A Museum at the first ever LGBTQ themed Friday Late *Queer and Now*²⁷ in February 2015. Given this alternative setting, and the

²⁷ *Queer and Now* (27 February 2015) was the first LGBTQ themed Friday Late at the Victoria and Albert Museum and hosted a series of performances, lectures, pop up workshops, events and art exhibits.

online presence of the individual contributions following the exhibition, is the setting of a historic house important?

The oldest contributor to the exhibition was a member of the *Recycled Teenagers* community group. They did not have access to a smartphone so I agreed to meet them at Sutton House to help record the sonnet and film the video. They asked to be filmed in their two favourite rooms, the Tudor Kitchen, and the attic room in front of the squatter's graffiti. The squatter's graffiti, a large eye painted on a red background is one of the most iconic sights in Sutton House, and is doubtless instantly recognisable to many who were visiting the exhibition. I was delighted that this contribution happened, as it immediately situated the exhibition in its surroundings, and suggested that even aside from the exhibition, queerness is always present at Sutton House. The graffiti itself is arguably a queer point in itself. Visitors often express surprise that the National Trust have left it intact. Its presence in the house is anachronistic, contemporary, political, mildly anarchic and undoes the frozen historical periods of the other rooms. The graffiti eye does, more subtly what the exhibition itself aimed to do. The use of Sutton House as a backdrop for a video also, rather ironically, played by the National Trust rules, by ensuring that their focus is local.



Figure 4.25 Still from video submission for Sonnet 109

Some videos take errant departures from more standard selfies. The video to accompany sonnet 87 is of a wooden sculpture, that looks like a double helix hanging

from a chain. In my email response to the contributor, I commented how unusual it was, and they volunteered more information about it. I had assumed it was related to kink culture, though was thrown that it was rendered in wood. The participant said that it was one of their favourite things, bought around 20 years ago in South Africa, and notable for being carved from a single piece of wood, their interpretation was that it symbolised 'struggle, water, connections, environment, love'²⁸. The video for sonnet 26 shows a configuration of candles laid on what appears to be red velvet, a hand places a sword in the middle and angles it from side to side to catch the light. No explanation accompanied the video, but it speaks to me of ritual, paganism, witchcraft.



Figure 4.26 Still from video submission for Sonnet 8

One video that disrupts homonormative politics is that which accompanies sonnet 8. The contributor responded to me saying that they did not like the theme of marriage which was evident in the sonnet, but that they would use their video as a platform to oppose it. In the video, the contributor holds an open note pad to the camera with the words *COULD NOT GIVE A FUCK ABOUT MARRIAGE* written across the pages, they turn the page to reveal the words *WTF [what the fuck] WOULD SHAKESPEARE KNOW ANYWAY? (except scansion obvs [obviously])*, they shrug playfully and turn to the final page which reads *THOU SINGLE WILT PROVE FUN!* and they grin at the camera. The final line is a reference to the closing line of sonnet 8; 'Thou single will prove none'.

²⁸ From email correspondence

This playful response is perhaps the only video to overtly reference the sonnet that accompanies it, and for me, does three things. Firstly, given that the submission came just a year after the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013, it highlights that for a lot of LGBTQ people, equal marriage was not as pressing an issue as was suggested in the media during the equal marriage debates in parliament; it also is a queer response to one of the more heteronormative of the Fair Youth sonnets; finally, it is an empowering statement of self-sufficiency, all done with a campy grin. I found editing this video particularly challenging. I decided not to inform the staff at Sutton House that the word 'fuck' would appear in a video, as I did not want to censor it, or have to put an age restriction on the room. Instead, I made sure to slow down the second and third pages for emphasis, while keeping the 'offending' page in real time.

Another video I intentionally did not tell the staff about was the video that accompanied sonnet 114, in which the contributor, a performance artist, lies face down on a bed, naked and typing on a tablet. The shot changes to a close up of the text they are typing, which reads 'Don't you realise, I say/ that the scratches on your ankle'. The shot changes again and they sit up, showing a glimpse of their genitals, and they resume typing sat cross legged. I was concerned how the staff would react to a penis being briefly visible on the screen, so again decided not to mention it. Curiously, for me the most striking thing about this video was the text that appeared. The quote, unsurprisingly, does not feature in the sonnet, and an internet search could not locate it from anywhere else, so it is likely that they are the contributor's original words. What the internet search did yield was claims that scratching the ankle is thought to be as pleasurable as sex, and an alternative to masturbation.

Another, less apparent moment of nudity, occurs in a grainy close up of a pair of white hands. Though it is not clear without hearing from the contributor, these hands caress a black body, the body of the contributor them self. The extreme close up of a sensual and tender embrace is accompanied by a seductive French accent reading sonnet 115 and a slow disco track. As the video progresses, a pair of black hands cover the white hands as they continue to glide around the body. Unfortunately, when projected, this video was even less clear to see, as it in fact is a beautiful depiction of a moment of

interracial sexuality. The contributor is also disabled, which again is not visible in the video.



Figure 4.27 Still from video submission for Sonnet 110

There are other bold displays of non-normative bodies, including of body hair and tattoos, but most interestingly is an extreme close up of a scar. The scar will be a familiar sight to many in the trans community, it is a mastectomy scar, or a top surgery scar on a trans man's chest. Top surgery is the informal name often given when a trans man has his breasts removed. While not a shocking image for most in the LGBTQ community, or for cis women who have undergone mastectomies, the image may have ruffled feathers of the more conservative visitor, although whether or not it was a recognisable visual for a broad audience is debatable. It is more than likely that this was the first time a trans man's top surgery scar was exhibited in any National Trust property.

I specified that contributors could request an alternative sonnet if they were not pleased with the randomly assigned one. Only two such requests were made, the first for less of a tongue twister, and a second for a sonnet that made no reference to having children. Conversely one of the most arresting contributions was about motherhood, and about grief. Focusing on a framed picture of three children in school uniforms, the video could be mistaken for a still if it weren't for the slight flicker of a candle that sits alongside it. The voice sadly and deliberately reads Sonnet 97, which

coincidentally deals with absence, but in this reading sounds more like a sonnet of grief:

For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
And, thou away, the very birds are mute;
Or, if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer
That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near
Sonnet 97

When I asked the contributor how they wished to be named on the contributor panel, they asked that following their first name for 'mother of 3, daughter passed away from severe asthma February 2013' to be in brackets²⁹. That the contributor chose to foreground their motherhood, their children and their grief was perhaps unsurprising since less than two years had passed since they lost their daughter, and showed that LGBTQ lives are not at odds with, or incompatible with family life. For any visitors who watched through othering eyes, perhaps this sobering moment of a mother's grief would undo that.

The art of asking, as Amanda Palmer calls it, was never more clear on my part when actively recruiting one of the last contributors. After seeing the film *Something Must Break* (2014, dir. Ester Martin Bergsmark), a Swedish film about a love affair between a non-binary trans person (Ellie) and a heterosexual man, I was compelled to investigate the lead performer further. I found Saga Becker, who later went on to be the first transgender person to win a Guldbaggen Award (the Swedish version of the Academy Awards) for Best Female Lead for her role, on Facebook and requested to be Facebook friends. She accepted and I messaged her to say how much I loved her performance and how rare and lovely it was to see a relatable non-binary trans person on screen. I invited her to be part of the project and she agreed, and her contribution, a selfie video of her face as she lies on her back, and her broken English as she reads sonnet 86 are both understated, and speak volumes of the generosity of LGBTQ people when they are asked to be part of something.

I'm particularly interested in a film that features a photostrip series of pictures

²⁹ From email correspondence

propped on a desk, the camera slowly pans out to reveal a whole host of things alongside it on the desk. This for me is the most striking and literal example of a minutely curated self through film, the participant includes a static image of herself (four actually), a cup full of pens (creative?), candles (relaxed? Spiritual?), a Buddha figure (peaceful?), a sea shell, elephant candle holders (a traveller?), topless woman picture (sexual?), a print saying 'alone but not lonely' (independent? empowered?). Even the song played in the background seems to raise questions, it's Billie Holliday's 'Having myself a time', a vintage choice for someone who can read as being young, and also the 10 seconds worth of the song she includes are the lines 'I mean I'm having what I want/ Wanting what I have/ Doing what I like/ And liking what I do', these lyrics, the Buddha, the candles, the text on the print all suggest contentment, which in itself, if someone is trying to demonstrate their queer identity and chooses to show 'contentment' as its theme, is pretty empowering, and also quite revolutionary, and completely betrays the narrative of suffering, hardship and self loathing in LGBTQ discourse.



Figure 4.28 Still from video submission for Sonnet 60

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions

This research began with an unpicking of the variety of ways in which LGBTQ individuals and communities navigate space and overcome the invisibility of recognisable and relatable figures from the past. I began as a ghost hunter, but as my research journey unfolded, rather than conducting a séance to bring back voices from the past, my project at Sutton House instead amplified contemporary and living voices from queer communities.

Queer encompasses a vast range of identities, and is an evolving and contested identifier. But queer also offers an alternative way of looking at things, of understanding things, and of reimagining things.

The National Trust was established for poor and working class people to have access to green spaces. The Trust now proudly boasts ‘for ever, for everyone’ as its mission statement, but questions still remain about who historic buildings are being saved for. Are they being rescued for the historic families that remain in them? Or for the public? And if the latter, who do the Trust consider the public to be? Often the representation of history in the houses would suggest that the public are white, straight, middle class and afforded a particular level of cultural capital that assumes they can both afford membership to access this heritage, and have the time and inclination to do so.

The discourse around saving built heritage has shifted, arguably since, and because of the *Destruction* exhibition at the V&A, mentioned in chapter 2. This thesis contributes to that shift, and an evolution of historic houses focusing more on people, and the house as a site for community building, rather than just as a vessel of material culture.

In chapter 1 I explored some of the unique ways in which marginalised communities have documented their own histories, and in the case of queer histories, the fleeting and ephemeral nature of this. In chapter 3 I highlighted a number of examples across the museum sector where these challenges were addressed head-on, with differing results.

Historic houses present different challenges and opportunities to curators and interpretation staff to museums. As such, work that takes place in historic houses that is deemed radical, new or progressive, is often still trailing behind the museum world. Historic houses, instead of being wedded to documented and palatable histories of the house and the families associated with it, should and could think more widely about the communities that use the buildings today, and indeed the communities who do not.

As my relationship with Sutton House developed, my thesis became a call to arms of sorts that suggests that the most authentic display of LGBTQ lives and voices is one that situates the community itself at its centre. While poring through archives to find hidden and silenced narratives has great value, but so too does creating new records, and collectively filling the gaps and silences with co-produced and co-curated original material culture. If selfie culture is teaching us anything, it is that people want to be seen, recognised and validated in some way, and if historic houses can contribute in any way to facilitating that for those who are unseen, feel unrecognised and in need of validation, then they, as public institutions, absolutely have a responsibility to do so.

When Sutton House was restored in the early 1990s, 'flexibility and inclusivity' (Belcher et al, 2004: 235) were the key philosophy. Belcher et al argue that the focus on the historic house as a dynamic space, rather than as a static exhibit is an 'experiment' that better serves historic houses in cities, but that the practice of using the space more creatively can inform more traditional historic buildings and the way in which communities are able to engage with them. Further, they note that Sutton House is:

an optimistic statement of faith in the possibility that the presentation of historic buildings need not only be an end in itself but also that their creative conservation can serve the needs of the present and future generations (2004: 235).

Creative conservation need not only be about the conservation of things, but about the creation and conservation of new layers of interpretation that make the historic

house relevant to the communities that access it. *126* is in keeping with the ethos of both Sutton House, and more widely of the National Trust, and Sutton House is widely used as a blueprint across the Trust for how creative and community led programming can be done.

Limitations

My research and my *126* exhibition was not without its limitations. My research, while touching on historic houses across England, was predominantly London centric. London is a unique challenge for the National Trust, due to its relatively low numbers of historic houses and its nationally atypical demographics. I discussed some of the ways in which the National Trust attempts to overcome this in chapter 2. The London Project was established to address these problems and to recognise that its model of interpretation that works to an extent beyond the capital was less relevant to a London audience.

As such, it is difficult to say whether the methodology and delivery of *126* would be as well received with more typical National Trust audiences. My research could have potentially had more impact, and have been a more fair reflection of historic house audiences elsewhere, although the freedom to actually do it may not have been granted so easily.

The London centric nature of my research also impacted on the exhibition itself, of the 53 participants who took part in the survey, 31 currently lived in London. While this does not necessarily mean that all of those are British, or were born in London, it still demonstrates that the most represented group in the *126* participants currently live in large cities where attitudes to LGBTQ people and communities are more positive than those in smaller cities, towns and rural areas. There were participants currently residing all around the world, including the USA, New Zealand, Belgium, Hungary, Thailand, but notable geographic gaps, mainly in the Middle East.

These limitations were partly reflective of the limitations of my own social networks. Admittedly, a large proportion of participants were my own friends, or friends of friends. I gathered participants almost exclusively through social media, so by its nature the project was restricted in its reach. While the National Trust has a large following, both in terms of its members, and its social media reach, Sutton House itself has a relatively slim one (approximately 2500 followers on Twitter compared to the Trust's 714.9k followers, and around 720 followers on Facebook compared to the Trust's Over 600,000³⁰). The team at Sutton House kindly shared my call for participants on its social media platforms, but had the Trust promoted it more widely, the range of participants would have been more varied.

A further limitation of my own social networks was evident in the overall whiteness of the participants. It seems inherently fraudulent to use the word queer to describe something that does not actively put intersectionality at its core. While I tried to ensure that the few people of colour who took part in *126* were highlighted for longer in the film, having a wider reach for my call out could have addressed this. I also could have tried more to actively reach out to people of colour more when recruiting. This whiteness was rightly recognised in some of the feedback from participants in the survey: 'Quite white, like London's gay scene'. Perhaps this demonstrates as well that simply being invited to participate is not enough. Why would people who have historically been (and continued to be) erased from history and from certain institutions want to be part of something that seeks to represent them if there is not a wider cultural opening up of spaces and opportunities?

Another issue which came up in the survey was about the inaccessibility of the exhibition. Like many listed buildings, physical access is often a problem. The entire ground floor of Sutton House is wheelchair accessible, but through my own ignorance I chose the chapel as the venue for the film, purely for aesthetic reasons. I also did not disclose in the call out, that the exhibition would not be wheelchair accessible, and was rightly called out for this by some of the participants, who only realised once they

³⁰ Correct as of 19 June 2017

had submitted their contribution that they would not be able to see it in situ. As always, with issues of accessibility, making the exhibition more accessible for those with access needs would also have improved the exhibition for everyone: 'I realise that it's due to space constraints and the age of the property, but a basement really wasn't an ideal place to put the project in terms of accessibility. It also felt a little bit 'out of sight and out of mind', especially as there weren't too many prominent adverts around the house.'

I ensured that for the private view event, there was a second screening in an accessible space, but one participant commented in the survey that as they were unable to make the private view, they were unable to see it: 'I can't access the venue and have very limited support available to get to Sutton House at all'. Making the videos available online as and when they were submitted increased the reach of the contributions, but again assumed that everyone has access to the internet. The frustration experienced by those unable to see the exhibition might have been lessened had I been more transparent about its inaccessibility from the very beginning of the project.

Impact

The immediate impact of *Master-Mistress* and *126* has been in the building and strengthening of relationships between Sutton House and LGBTQ communities. The strength of my communication throughout the project with the participants is partially responsible for this, which is likely why I am named so regularly in both the comment book feedback and the survey results. Participants were aware from the start that I was a volunteer, and also part of the LGBTQ community. This perhaps led them to feel more like they were part of a community project rather than subjects being curated. These relationships have led to bigger and better things for Sutton House. In the survey, some participants claimed that their perceptions of the National Trust has shifted slightly: 'willingness to reach out to the LGBT community has detracted from my perceived fustiness', 'it's challenged my stereotype about what the National Trust is interested in'. Others rightly recognised that I was but one volunteer doing one intervention in one of hundreds of properties around the country, and also the unique nature of Sutton House in the Trust's portfolio: 'This seems like one intervention, but

I'd say my larger perception has remained', 'I fear Sean's project was very unique', 'Sutton House is the only NT property I've been to that has been different from that.' 'The work at places like Sutton House seems to be quite groundbreaking for the Trust, but I don't know whether or not this is being replicated elsewhere', 'I will be popping in to Sutton House a LOT, as I feel that they actually represent OUR nation... Unlike the rest of the NT.' This suggests the Trust needs to more widely adopt a similar approach to mine to have any sizable shift in perceptions for LGBTQ people.

On 27 February 2015, while the exhibition was still up and running, I was invited to screen the *126* film as part of the V&A's sexuality themed Friday Late *Queer and Now* attended by 5690 people³¹. The museum captured more of a party atmosphere than a typical museum experience. *126* was projected at the bottom of the staircase leading to the National Art Library, a place of very heavy footfall, meaning the exhibition was seen by a much greater number of visitors than Sutton House would ever be likely to receive. Unfortunately I did not think ahead and consider ways of capturing feedback from visitors to this second iteration of the exhibition.



Figure 5.1 *126* screening at the V&A 'Queer and Now' event, 2015

Fleming (2010: 7-9; 2012), Anderson (2012), Sandell (2012), Marstine (2011), Nightingale and Mahal (2012: 34-36) have all indicated elements of practice that they believe should be found in the socially responsible, equitable and diverse museum.

³¹ Thanks to Dawn Hoskin from the V&A for the figure

Based on these elements, and the lessons learnt during *Master-Mistress* and *126* my own manifesto for the socially just museum might look like this:

Diversity and equality

- Diversity and Equality are not a tick-box policy and are embedded throughout all that the museum does. This is never static, and constantly evolves and is reconsidered.
- Diversity and equality are the concern of staff at all levels. All staff should be champions for social justice and a diverse workforce should be valued equally.

Education and learning

- The importance of education and learning should be reflected in the museum structure and in the allocation of financial resources.
- Learning, in all of the different guises this may take, including the varied ways in which people learn, is the most important thing, even if this means that exhibitions challenge and change unspoken museum cultures and rules.

Accessibility

- The core audience of the publically funded museum is the general public, not other museum professionals, historians, critics, academics and politicians. Those who do not use museums are actively enticed with appropriate programming. There is a continuous striving for accessibility, by removing all barriers, be it physical, intellectual or promotional.
- An authoritarian tone is shed, and instead the richness and diversity of expertise of a variety of stakeholders, including the visitors, is drawn upon. The public are involved in content creation. Content is in a constant state of change and renewal.
- Differentiated audiences are researched, exhibitions are evaluated and the

public, both those who visit and those who do not, are listened to. Successful promotion, as well as successful programming relies on this.

People

- The unique identity of museums as institutions of material and non-material culture is taken advantage of. Objects and collections are used in non-traditional ways but are *not* central to museum practice.
- Difficult and challenging contemporary issues are tackled and opened up for debate. Bold risks are taken in the interweaving of histories, tensions between minority groups are acknowledged. The museum acknowledges the amorphous nature of identities.
- Partnerships with a wide variety of community, cultural and educational groups and institutions are forged for the harvesting of ideas, audiences and information.

I was able to put this manifesto into practice with subsequent work at Sutton House, in the capacity of a paid member of staff rather than a volunteer.

Sutton House Queered

In September 2016 I became the Community Learning Manager at Sutton House. My role is to manage the schools programme, to work closely with our existing community groups, and to build relationships with new ones. It is unlikely I would have been successful in my application for this position had I not managed such a large community project there as a volunteer.

In December 2016, the National Trust announced that it was to be running its first National Public Programme in 2017, and the theme would be *Prejudice and Pride*, looking at LGBTQ histories to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Sexual Offense Act, which was a partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales. The National Programming team deferred to us at Sutton House regularly when preparing, given our experience of delivering high quality experiences for LGBTQ audiences. A

disappointingly slim number of properties opted in to be part of the programme, with representatives from under 20 buildings attending the training workshops hosted by Stonewall and by staff at the University of Leicester School of Museum Studies. Of those properties, it was only Sutton House who decided to shape our entire year long programme to the LGBTQ theme. I took the lead by putting together the programme, which is perhaps unsurprising given my research and experience, but also it seems fitting that such a programme should be led by someone whose role is community engagement.

Sutton House Queered, which kicked off in February 2017, was loosely linked to two main themes which tie with the history of the house. As Sutton House was saved by the activism of the local community, we used LGBTQ activism as a thread throughout the year, and likewise drew parallels with Sutton House's threat of being sold to developers in the late 1980s to the vast number of LGBTQ community spaces, pubs and clubs being lost in London today.

The launch event was attended by over 170 people, and featured three exhibitions of artwork. The first was by Victor Zágón, who appeared in the *126*, and is a member of the *Recycled Teenagers*. Zágón is an artist, and his artworks, which were displayed in the Gallery, neatly told a story about various aspects of his life: His love of figure skating and dance, his sexuality, his heritage and his relationship with his daughter, and his relationship with Sutton House. Zágón wrote his own accompanying exhibition text, and wrote of how he left communist Hungary in 1957 and has lived in East London ever since, and that he converted from Roman Catholicism to Anglicanism as he found his faith at odds with his sexuality. One of his most moving pieces of work was a portrait of his grandfather Francis Farago, who was murdered in Auschwitz. Zágón's work sat alongside a small exhibition about the work we do with community groups at Sutton House.

Figure 5.2 'Francis Farago, my Grandfather, Station Master. Died in Auschwitz.' Victor Zágón

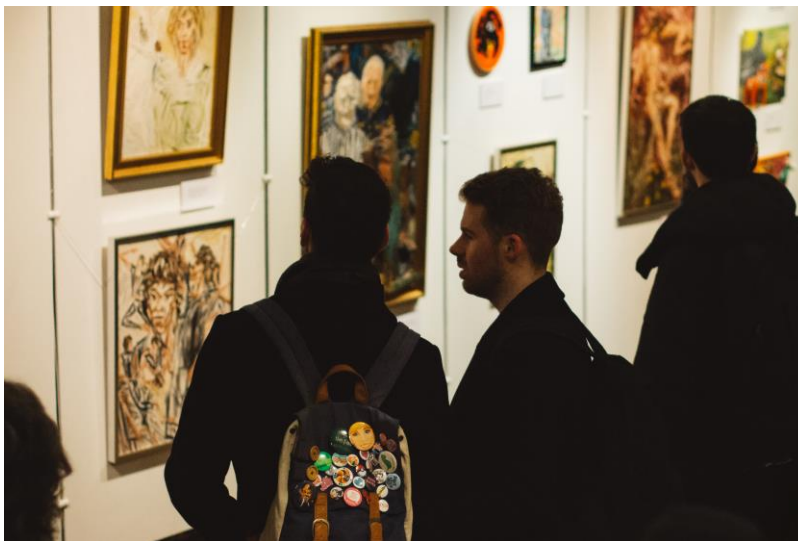


Figure 5.3 Visitors to the *Sutton House Queered* launch admiring Victor Zágón's work, used with kind permission of Eli Beristain and Sutton House

In the Great Chamber, and the Squatter's Room, were works by Sutton House volunteer Kev Clarke, a young queer artist whose collage style of work is inspired by Joe Orton and Kenneth Halliwell. Clarke's exhibition, entitled 'It's not yours it's mine', playfully re-appropriates historic imagery in a camp and playful way. Clarke also worked with our *Recycled Teenagers* community group to help them make their own queer versions of images from history.

Figure 5.4 'Maybe it's Maybelline' Kev Clarke

In the Victorian Study, there were photographic portraits of black trans activist, model, actress and DJ Munroe Bergdorf in and around Sutton House and the Breaker's Yard, taken by non-binary femme photographer Sarah Moore. My motivation for commissioning this series was to ensure that we were visibly giving space to marginalised people in our community, in a way to atone for the whiteness of 126.



Figure 5.5 Portrait of Munroe Bergdorf in the Linenfold Parlour, used with kind permission of Sarah Moore and Sutton House

We also became the first National Trust property to introduce gender neutral toilet signage, which has been a surprisingly popular move, with many visitors thanking us for it, and taking photographs of the sign.



Figure 5.6 Installing the gender neutral toilet sign

My volunteer status was an integral part of my research methodology, but also afforded me a few privileges and a sense of freedom that I have not felt to the same extent since becoming a paid member of staff at Sutton House. This has been ever apparent during *Sutton House Queered*. We were forbidden from sending out a press release to promote our launch event, as it was seen to be clashing with a planned press release of the London Project's newest venture, *Queer City: London Club Culture 1918 – 1967*. Throughout May, the London Project, in partnership with the National Archives and Freud bar in Soho hosted a month long recreation of the Caravan Club, a short-lived queer friendly bar from 1934. While this event was a cause for celebration, the deflection away from on-site events in London properties was problematic, which the London Project later admitted.

Much like Michael Petry's 'Hidden Histories' at the New Art Gallery Walsall, *Sutton House Queered* has also been victim of censorship and institutional homophobia by the National Trust. Two images were deemed inappropriate by the marketing team, one a playful reimagining of a historic painting by Kev Clarke, and another a picture of Munroe Bergdorf, that was deemed "too sexy". We also had the wording of one of our events challenged as it might not be palatable to Daily Mail readers. What *Sutton*

House Queered, and the wider *Prejudice and Pride* programme, has revealed, is that anxieties about controversy or backlash from exploring LGBTQ identities is largely a presumed and projected anxiety, that often does not play out as negatively as expected. When the programme was first launched, columnist James Delingpole penned a response for the Daily Mail decrying the ‘achingly right-on’ programme, and claiming that if he had not already cancelled his membership, he would do so over *Prejudice and Pride*. Surprisingly, unlike the Big Brother furore four years previously, many Daily Mail commenters seemed to think this was an overreaction: ‘What a disgraceful article - and could only ever be published in this rag. The LGBT community is as wide as it is diverse and learning about the history and struggles it has endured could only help assist in educating you and your ignorance. Seriously, was this article written in 1950?’, ‘Getting your knickers in a twist over an event. Pathetic’ (Delingpole, 2016).

Legacy

It is safe to say, that Sutton House could and would not have embarked on a programme as ambitious as *Sutton House Queered* if it was not for the success and scale of *126*. The exhibition shifted the way in which Sutton House operates. While it has always put community at the centre of its work, *126* has encouraged a move to using Sutton House as a platform, and an amplifier for marginalised voices. The ripple effect of Sutton House’s practice is already internally being recognised, as Sutton House is championed as one of the Trust’s diversity properties. Sutton House has also been chosen to host work by the *Prejudice and Pride* artists in residence Michele D’Acosta and Simona Piantieri, and the launch of the *Prejudice and Pride* guidebook (Oram and Cook, 2017), and plans for the National Trust’s first ever participation in London Pride is being coordinated from within the team at Sutton House.

2017 has seen a proliferation of LGBTQ related exhibitions and events in museums across the UK to mark the 50th anniversary. Large institutions such as the British Museum, the British Library, the V&A and the Tate are using this landmark anniversary as a platform to recognise the LGBTQ materials in their collections, and the impact queer artists, writers, activists and ordinary people have had on our history.

A personal favourite of these exhibitions is *Museum of Transology*, which was held at the London Fashion Space Gallery at the London College of Fashion from 20 January to 22 April 2017, and moved to Brighton Museum in July 2017.



Figure 5.7 'What mother nature didn't give me', *Museum of Transology*, used with kind permission of E-J Scott

Curator E-J Scott was inspired to start collecting everyday objects that tell a trans story by his own collection. Scott hung on to a number of items from his own transition, including hospital gowns and breast tissue from his top surgery. He invited trans people to donate their own items, and to write their own labels on brown paper tags. The plan was that if and when they were accessioned by a museum as a full collection, the labels would be accessioned as objects, meaning that the trans narratives of often mundane seeming items, like train tickets and cosmetic items, would never be separated from the object. There was a refreshing lack of sensationalism about trans narratives evident in the exhibition, and an authenticity that is only apparent when communities are given complete autonomy to tell their own stories, and not othered by dispassionate curators. Aside from being a beautifully curated and moving exhibition, *Transology's* power lies in the way it turns museum practice on its side. The *Museum of Transology* is, of course, not a museum, but a collection. A collection that as yet has no permanent home. While carefully curated by one person who belongs to

that same community, each participant has a voice, and defines exactly how their story is told. I would like to think that *126* has echoes of this, but the *Museum of Transology* serves as an excellent example of how community focused storytelling in museums is possible.

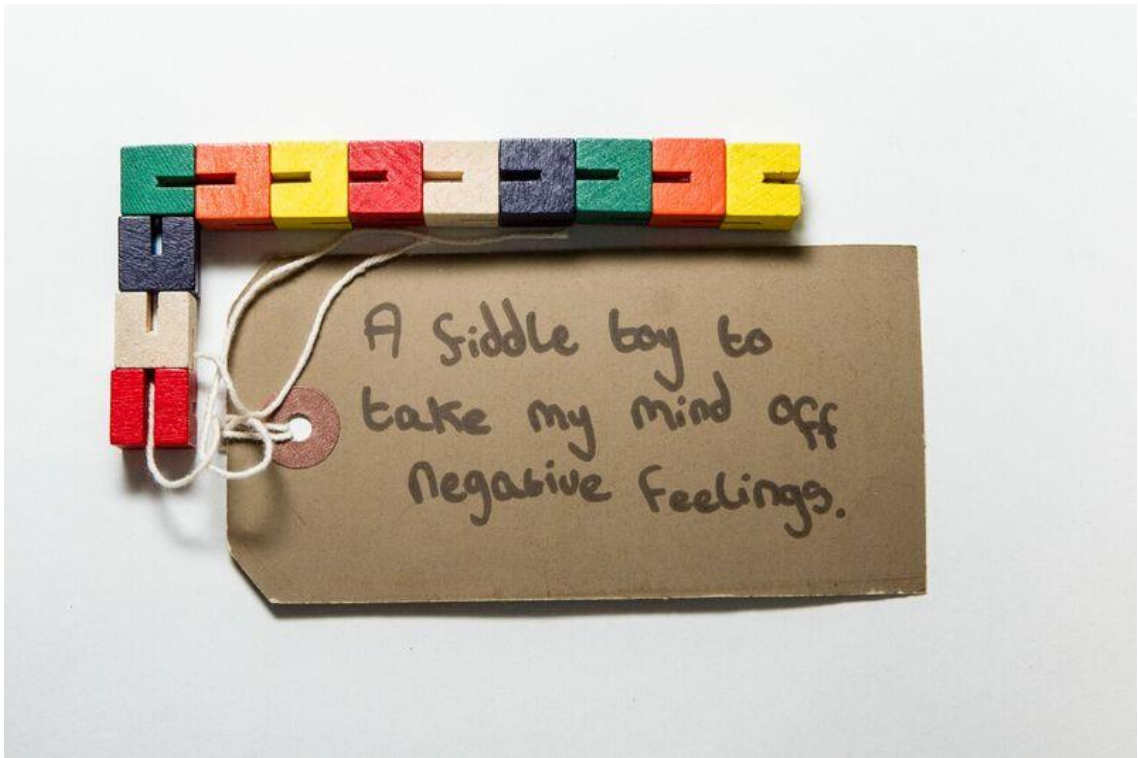


Figure 5.8 'A fiddle toy to take my mind off negative feelings', *Museum of Transology*, used with kind permission of E-J Scott

The key difference of *126* is that we weren't collecting objects, but readings of well known and well trodden sonnets. The mundane objects of day to day life were replaced by short snippets of ambiguous poetry. The labels in *Transology* are what activated and brought to life the objects, in *126* the video portraits were the labels. I never planned for the sonnets to be secondary in the exhibition, but they turned out to be so. The authenticity of both the self-penned labels in *Transology*, and the self-filmed and self-directed moving selfies allowed the participants autonomy to be seen in the way that they determined, these community efforts were not an act of exhibiting others, but a storytelling and sharing experience.



Figure 5.9 'Immersing myself in My Little Pony is how I manage my dysphoria', *Museum of Transology*, used with kind permission of E-J Scott

The AIDs quilts that I mentioned in chapter 4 were a way to build a memorial around a community that was being forgotten and disregarded. *126* took inspiration from this, and sought to create queer material culture where it was previously hidden or non-existent, material culture that was appropriate and responsive to the modern age.

I opened the thesis with a metaphor about cruising, and how cruising for queer people has moved predominantly into digital spaces. The comment book for *126* became a site for cruising in its own right: 'Is my reaction supposed to be 'who's that guy in pink-lit night club and where do I find him?', 'I enjoyed all your faces!', and my favourite comment which read: 'We left wanting a threesome ;) x' with a follow up comment beneath from another visitor which said 'Amen!'

This freedom for people to express joy at seeing other LGBTQ people was one of the most moving parts of the experience, and confirms for me that facilitating queer people to have a space and a platform to exhibit themselves on their own terms in buildings that purport to be about our history, is activism.



Figure 5.10 The *Recycled Teenagers* working on banner with artist Jacob V Joyce

Over the summer of 2017, *Sutton House Queered* continues with a season called 'School of Anarchy' which celebrates LGBTQ activism. We have commissioned a black, non-binary artist Jacob V Joyce to work with our community groups to build an exhibition around the house. They have been working with our *Recycled Teenagers*

group to create a banner using pictures of activism and queer and black history, which will be exhibited in the Wenlock Barn.



Figure 5.11 The *Recycled Teenagers*' banner

Like the workshops with Kev Clarke, while for many of the *Recycled Teenagers*, LGBTQ rights are not an immediate concern, by working closely with communities of all kinds, LGBTQ artists and activists can tease out common threads and empathy for other people, and can transform a seemingly fusty, irrelevant historic house into one of direct action, queerness and activism.

126 was a pivotal moment for Sutton House . It marked the first time that crowdsourcing was used on this scale to produce an exhibition of any sort. It incorporated online behaviours, which are often enacted in a queer safe space, within historic walls, and made strange the familiar, it queered Shakespeare, in a playful and accessible way. In *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums*, Vagnone and Ryan note that for historic houses to survive, they 'must be turned upside down and inside out' (2016: 41). This is precisely what 126 aimed to do. I began on a ghost hunt, but as my research has unfolded I became less intent on hunting for queer ghosts of the past, and instead inviting and facilitating community involvement from the living. 126 helped to build new relationships and create traces of LGBTQ narratives in an autonomous and authentic way for the future.

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Appendices

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Appendix 1: Sutton House LGBT History Month press release

Exhibition and event at Sutton House for LGBT History Month

Master-Mistress: passion, desire and ambiguities in Shakespeare's sonnets

*Celebrating Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) History Month at Sutton House
6th Feb until 7th Mar*

In the Tudor spaces of Sutton House we pose questions about desire, sexuality and gender through readings of four of Shakespeare's sonnets, originally published in 1609. Shakespeare's sexuality has often been contested, based largely on the series of sonnets known as the Fair Youth Sonnets (sonnets 1-126), which were seemingly addressed to a man known only as 'Mr W.H'. It might be that to read these sonnets as an indication of same-sex desire is to see them through a contemporary lens, and therefore not an accurate reading. It might also be true that these sonnets are not autobiographical, and are fictional, in which case, both the speaker and the subject of the sonnets are in question. It is often disputed that Shakespeare had even intended these sonnets to be published. In 1640, publisher John Benson notoriously changed all of the pronouns in the sonnets to suggest that the subject was always a woman, suggesting discomfort with the implied love- platonic or sexual- for another man. To celebrate LGBT History Month here at Sutton House, we have decided to remove four of the sonnets from their context and present them throughout four of the Tudor rooms by the disembodied voices of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or queer. By doing so, we hope to raise questions about desire, gender and sexuality. Rather than questioning whether or not Shakespeare would be considered part of the LGBT community in contemporary terms, we instead address the universality of desire and the ambiguities of gender and identities.

Challenging histories: what place do lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer identities have in museums and historic houses?

Panel event

Thursday 13th February 6:30pm – 8pm

Speakers: Jan Pimblett (Principle Development Officer, London Metropolitan Archives, founder of the annual LGBTQ History and Archives Conference and LMA monthly LGBT history club), Claire Hayward (PhD student exploring same-sex sexualities in public history, Kingston University), Oliver Winchester (Curator at the Design Museum, associate lecturer in curating at City Lit- *not confirmed*), Ivo Dawney (*not confirmed*)
Join us for an exciting discussion about including lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer narratives in heritage spaces, chaired by exhibition curator and National Trust volunteer Sean Curran and featuring four experts from the heritage world. The evening will also be a chance to see the exhibition beforehand.

Appendix 2: Feedback from 126 guest books

4 Feb 2015 Beautiful, evocative... and something almost creepy about the overlapping voices. Tess Whitehouse, Whitechapel.

Wonderful exhibition, thanks Sean and Sutton House. This is what I pay my National Trust membership for. Claire

4 Feb 2015 Wonderful! Thank you.

Amazing Queer Beauty! Soirai and Rosa Mojo x x x

Calming, Alison 6/2/15

Well put together Philip 6/2/15

Saturday 7th [Feb] 2015

What a treat, calm, TRUE! LGBTQ is AMAZING! The NTRUST & SUTTON HOUSE are so great for having this!

Hope to see a lot more from Sean, his vision is BOLD & powerful.

Let's hope change comes & there shall be acceptance for all!

X

Yay Queer! [heart]

Beautiful!

Profound and wistful

However the sound needed to be better sometimes it was hard to hear the sonnets!

Love [heart] Kate xxx xxxx

PS: I would love to see this outside on a big screen on a summer day!

What a joy to hear these love poems of all love poems in such an unexpected place- not looking for them today but how great to find them here. Thank you.

A wet day made full of all seasons, so positive to see LGBT history month celebrated with 126 sonnets in such a beautiful venue. Lukas Scott 13.2.15

As a member of the LGBTQ community and a National Trust member. I am delighted that this artwork is here at Sutton House. It feels like we are entering into a space where presence is welcomed and voices heard. I think the potential around this art installation is huge. I can see lots of possibilities for schools and young people to connect with Shakespeare, creative media and LGBTQ lives.

The viewing down in the chapel was really moving and mesmerising and captivating.

Thanks to all who contributed to the art work x x

Thank you. This is exciting and beautiful and welcome. Jan, St Albans.

Beautiful film, beautiful people, beautiful artist!

It's really great to see so many queer voices and faces in a historic building. I was taken to many NT buildings as a child, and it would have been great to see something like this 😊 well done x Felix x

I've never come to a National Trust before – if they have more like this, I will! Well done x x Alex x x

It's fabulous to see lots of life's most exciting people in a display. I also quite liked being involved, so thank you. It'll make me visit more NT places- at least they have 1 new member.

Very moving- loved every minute- especially my minute! Alex x

Fabulous exhibition, beautifully filmed and great contrast of topics! Well done

Well done. I happen to think this is a rather lovely and important project for LGBTQ but also for the National Trust @jontyh 😊

Wonderful exhibition! Ties in beautifully with the deliciously full history of the property. Fun, thoughtful and very sensitively produced with real feeling of devotion to the importance of the subject. Great job Sean and Sutton House! Ashley (Kindred Spirit Magazine 😊)

I've never seen the National Trust actively engaging with LGBTQ etc issues before but I hope to see them making their properties/events more inclusive and accessible in the future.

Rly rly gr8

This was fantastic. Thank you for all the hard work!

This is the second year I've come to National Trust event. It's become a yearly pilgrimage, there's no place for 'us' to come for 'our' history. LGBT history month at Sutton House/ The National Trust should continue. Next year, who knows. Love, Adam x

Beautiful. Made me laugh and cry. Everyone should see this especially younger visitors to Sutton House [heart]

I am so happy that the National Trust has SOMETHING to do with the LGBTQ community

Me too [separate comment with an arrow pointing at the above]

Good to see the National Trust acknowledging the LGBT culture in history. Thank you! 😊

A most enjoyable visit- can't wait to see further discoveries and disclosures! Frances Gray

Inspiring and beautiful. Thank you. Martin Timson, Liverpool

LOVELY SEAN x AJAMU 14/2/2015

Yay thank you for the opportunity! Rachel Sparks

Thank you, wonderful project! 14/2/15

15/2 We made a special trip for the exhibit but the projector wasn't working ☹️

18/2/15 very enjoyable 😊 Matt

19/2/15 Is my reaction supposed to be 'who's that guy in pink-lit night club and where do I find him?' BT

19th Great Stuff! We 'outed' Shakespeare in 2005 to great disapproval. It's more or less accepted now. Onwards and upwards. Tony Fenwick CEO LGBT History Month.

26/2/15 Thank you 😊

26/2/15 Very interesting and creative!

I thought it was GREAT!

Thanks for your work- just a shame all the vices and images seem to be young, white, able-bodies etc. Where are the rest of us?

A wonderful creative piece, that whetted my appetite for the full sonnets!

28.2.15 Great

5 March 2015 Intriguing concept. Wish the image was projected in smaller size so it could be viewed in its entirety!

7 March 2015 A marvellous idea. It is really really important that the National Trust does more to engage LGBTIQ people and to tell our histories.

Very good! A triumph.

Thoroughly enjoyable.

Lovely.

Great piece- amazing to see it here!

10/3 I really liked the piece, both hopeful and mournful. Works brilliantly against the battered wall.

SUPERB!!

Great! Awesome! And Fantastic!

Revelatory ☺ but some of the sonnets are too quiet to hear

Well done! Really absorbing and raises questions. I came with Martin, Daniel and Fiona who cranked up the volume and interacted with the work. Frances

I only bore witness to the recorded video. Too quiet, poorly edit, incomplete sonnets and this room is too cold.

Very nice. Proud to be a part of reclaiming Shakespeare! Thank you!

[Irish one]

Interesting! We enjoyed it. ☺ The Mrs Jarmans'

I liked how you got a sense of each performer's distinct personality. It would have been nice to see more BME and older people. But the overall effect was very compelling and moving.

Second time I've come to see it. Wonderful pleased it will be online. Great job Shaun!

I enjoyed all your faces!

Too many good teeth for my liking...

Good

Lovely! But needs signposting at front desk! Thank you for queering the NT!

We left wanting a threesome ;) x

[comment below with arrow] Amen!

Thank You Sean x

Great video piece and atmosphere
Nick

Appendix 3: Survey questions for 126 participants

Survey questions for participants of 126.

The exhibition '126' will form a case study in my PhD research looking at the invisibility of queer identities in National Trust historic houses. I'm really interested to know what the participants of the project think about it, and this short survey will be a really useful tool in forming my argument that the National Trust needs to more actively engage with the LGBTQ communities, as well as in understanding the successes and failures of the project.

Please answer as many of these questions as you feel comfortable answering. It is fine to leave any that you don't wish to answer.

All answers will be anonymous if mentioned in my research.

At the end there are some demographic questions about you. Again, these are completely optional. I have included them to get a feel for whether or not the project has successfully engaged a broad cross section of the LGBTQ communities, and the answers given here will not be assigned to any of your other answers.

If you have any questions about the survey, please email me at _____, and if you have any additional thoughts after submitting your answers, feel free to email them to me separately.

The survey will close on [GIVE DEADLINE]

1. How did you hear about the opportunity to participate in the '126' exhibition at Sutton House?

[free text]

2. What made you want to get involved?

[free text]

3. What were your perceptions of the National Trust before this project? (I am aware that some of you might not have had any, and some of the international participants might not be familiar with the National Trust, if this is the case, just leave this empty)

[free text]

4. Have these perceptions changed? If so, please explain how:

[free text]

5. Had you visited Sutton House before getting involved in the project?

[yes/no]

6. Have you visited since, or do you plan to?

[yes/no]

7. What was your favourite thing about the project?

[free text]

8. What would you change, or do differently if you were running and curating the project?

[free text]

9. If you have seen the exhibition, what did you think of it?

[free text]

10. If you are not planning to see the exhibition, or are unable to, please say why:

[free text]

11. Is there anything else you want to say about the exhibition, or the experience of being involved in the project?

[free text]

Demographic questions

(please only answer these if you are comfortable doing so)

(I have not provided tick-boxes as I am keen for people to be able to define themselves in a way that they feel comfortable)

What is your gender identity?

[free text]

How do you define your sexual orientation?

[free text]

Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

[free text]

How old are you?

[free text]

What is your nationality?

[free text]

Which city and country do you currently live in?

[free text]

Is there anything else about your identity you would like to disclose?

[free text]

Finally, if you would be willing to be contacted to elaborate on some of your answers if necessary, please include your email address, again, this is optional:

[free text]

Thank you for taking part in the survey, and for taking the time to be involved with the '126' exhibition.

Appendix 4: 126 participants survey results

53 of the 126 participants responded

How did you hear about the opportunity to participate in the '126' exhibition at Sutton House?

- Via Claire Hayward/Sean
- A friend posted the information on social media.
- My friend asked me to.
- facebook
- I met Sean at a conference and we talked about the project.
- from Sean's facebook
- I answered an appeal for volunteers on Thingbox, a social networking site for LGBTQ people
- Through a friend
- Thingbox.
- Probably Twitter
- A link was shared on the Facebook page of UCLU LGBT+ Network
- via Sean Curran
- On Twitter, I think Gays the Word retweeted one of Sean's tweets.....
- Email at work.
- From the curator
- Saw it on my friends Facebook page
- I was asked to participate.
- a friend fwded me a link. said she thought it would be my kind of thing. she was right!
- Through you on Twitter
- A link to the dedicated website, through Sean's Twitter account
- Post on Thingbox I think.
- From a friend
- social media (Facebook)
- Sean invited me to participate.
- Email
- I read about it on Sean's blog.
- Tweet RTd into my feed
- Invite from a friend to participate
- I think I came across the project through my friends, Felix and Gregory, from Open Barbers.
- From the MA in galleries and museums in education, seminar with Sean.
- A retweet of a call-out from Sean.
- Facebook, I think one if my friends shared it
- Through my friend Gilly Langley
- On Facebook
- Through a friend who worked with Sean Curran on her MA at Institute of Education. (Amanda Forde)
- Facebook, I think one if my friends shared it
- The information was forwarded to me by the Equality & Diversity Manager for my Organisation.

- Saw it on Sean's blog, which I read regularly
- from Sean
- I heard about it from my good friends, Marion Wasserbauer
- A friend posted this event through an email.
- My aunt linked me to it on Facebook! Said she'd seen it and thought of me. I don't know where she saw it originally...
- A friend on facebook wrote about his involvement. I read up about the project and submitted last minute. Thankfully there was one sonnet left. Sonnet 123, just for me.
- Through Twitter - queer friend retweeted.
- through a friend
- A Facebook friend linked to the project
- Word of mouth - a friend asked if I wanted to participate.
- I got notice from a facebook share, via Zia Forrai, who is a sort of London epicenter of Queer activity.
- Directly from the curator.
- Felix Bear
- Email from Sean
- A friend in the LGBT choir The Pink Singers mentioned it on Facebook.
- Though a friend.

What made you want to get involved?

- Queer/gay community, art and literature - what's not to like about that?
- I thought it was an interesting idea and gave me a creative outlet that I enjoyed. One of the great things about a project like this is so many people who would never otherwise have "met" in the social media sense collaborating on something.
- 1) I suppose the fact I was asked.
2) I think there are questions I find really interesting about history and linearity; that because of a hegemonic straight telling of history, the only way to recognise the queer possibilities that must have existed and been erased we must, in some sense, travel back ourselves and interject.
- the necessity to leave traces of trans and queer existence expressed in art
- My love for literature, the general idea behind the exhibition and my own research into LGBTQ lives and culture.
- the opportunity to be part of LGBTQ collective. make history, contribute towards stronger LGBTQ voice in heritage. interesting brief
- The irresistible combination of Shakespeare's beautiful and brilliantly crafted sonnets, and a project aimed at my sexuality
- Though the exhibition sounded fun, interesting and important from an LGBT history perspective.
- I thought I could help. It's not at all like anything I've done before, but perhaps like things I ought to do more often. But mostly it was unusual and not particularly strenuous (or so I thought until I tried recording "lively veins" without laughing, lapsing into a daft accent or sounding very odd).
- To increase LGBTQ visibility
- I like poetry and Shakespeare, and I think art provides ideal opportunities for the visibility of the LGBTQ community
- the combination of heritage & LGBTQ+
- I love speaking Shakespeare and often feel there is no voice for my sexuality in my work as an actor, primarily because there are so few gay women characters.

- Interesting idea. Like the sonnets. Like Sutton House. Good to increase visibility.
- The curator
- it sounded like a good project
- I like Shakespeare and historic houses and queers, and this brought all those things together! It's also nice to take part in stuff with a whole bunch of other people, and to be part of something that will be seen by lots of folks.
- i like the idea of being part of something bigger. and i've not done anything like that before.
- I thought it sounded like an interesting project - I like Shakespeare and I like you.
- Interest in Shakespeare and queer visibility
- Seemed like an interesting project that wouldn't take much time / effort but allowed for a bit of creativity.
- Sounded really interesting and unusual. And I love Shakespeare!
- I'm a writer and performing artist, and I like the inclusive and community natured focus of the project
- To support Sean, also I am fully in support of his doctoral project.
- Great idea
- I thought it sounded like an interesting idea, and I think that many heritage spaces (particularly The National Trust) are not very good at including queer voices and stories in their displays.
- Felt very worthwhile, and it's always good to raise LGBT awareness!
- I really liked the idea of presenting a variety of queer voices in a context which is, or has been, generally heteronormative.
- I'm queer. I enjoy co-creative projects. I have a background in poetry and theatre.
- Invitation.
- I like reading out loud, I'm LGBT, I'm quite shy but at the same time quite like the idea of being in a performance/art installation. Also I know and am fond of Sutton House and liked the idea of taking part in something happening there.
- I loved the notion of queering the traditional works of Shakespeare and of the National Trust. I was not familiar with the sonnets and so I was interested to learn about them and I appreciated the informal way that we were able to participate- it was well organised and professional but organic enough that it wasn't intimidating or anxiety inducing!
- Just really liked the concept and am happy to be involved in anything
- I love the Sonnets and thought the project sounded interesting.
- Sounded like a really unique way to express my LGBTQ identify with a (virtual) community of like-minded people.
- I loved the notion of queering the traditional works of Shakespeare and of the National Trust. I was not familiar with the sonnets and so I was interested to learn about them and I appreciated the informal way that we were able to participate- it was well organised and professional but organic enough that it wasn't intimidating or anxiety inducing!
- It just seemed like a wonderful opportunity to do something creative, and to be part of something collaborative.
- Working for the NT already, I think its great that Sutton House is willing to take a little bit of a risk and try something like this, so I thought I'd like to help!
- i think queer visibility in the arts and in general is very important and it seemed like a fun thing to do also - as well as helping Sean
- Sounded like fun. I'm a big fan of Shakespeare, and the opportunity to get involved in something that combined the bard with LGBT-art was a no-brainer.

- To be part of something that will reach a wider audience. I like to try and not leave this to other people and try do things as much as possible.
- Love Shakespeare, love queering literature generally, love performance, love art. Just my kind of a thing.
- I loved that it was going to be at a national trust site. I've never seen anything to do with the LGBTQ community at any NT site (crazy as that is; because let's face it, our British history is rife with all kinds of shenanigans). It should be represented, displayed, celebrated.
- I'm from an English Lit background, so the poetry appealed, and the entire idea of (re)queering the sonnets was a lovely one. It was also really simple. And I'm a bit narcissistic, so the picture-of-me part appealed!
- I felt ethnic people tend to be under represented at LGBT events
- Interested in bringing queer culture to new people and places rather than staying in an echo chamber
- I thought it would be good to be part of a project where queer faces and voices could be seen - and in an unlikely setting. And it was a bonus that it showed the universality of Shakespeare's sonnets - how they can resonate with many different types of people.
- I am poet and I love Shakespeare, especially the sonnets. I also love historical residences and thought it might be a good opportunity to see one I with which I was not familiar.
- It was a privilege to contribute to the installation and to be part of an queer presence at the house. Using the sonnets linked to the historical scope of Sutton House and brought us into contact / made us part of a continuous history / commentary. It felt like we and the installation belonged.
- I like Shakespeare and queer stuff
- It sounded great... I'm also a poet, so always great to see poetry appear in different formats... and to have an LGBT focus
- If I hadn't been a pianist I have always fantasised that I would have been an actor! And my late mother loved Shakespeare and it felt like a private tribute to her.
- Because I believe not enough is done to promote LGBT histories, lives, people etc. so I will support anything that looks at those issues in the thoughtful and creative way. And, I LOVE Shakespeare!

What did you enjoy most about taking part in the project?

- Re-reading the sonnets and the launch event itself.
- I enjoyed the process of deciding how to present my video and what I wanted it to say about me and my experiences.
- The piece I was asked to read was very beautiful;
- making the sonnet work from a queer perspective
- I never made a selfie-video of myself before, and I must admit that I quite enjoyed that. Also, I don't particularly like my voice on record, so I was pleasantly surprised when I saw and heard myself in the montage/exhibition and was not bothered by my own voice. More generally, I enjoy the idea of queering literature and being part of a project which joins individuals into a community. (this is more clear in my head than it looks like on paper).
- getting the chosen sonnet (and happened to be one of my favorite!), thinking creatively about how to record both visual and audio.
- Choosing the side of me I wanted to show in the video
- Being part of something unusual and queer.

- The idea of it. Helping and contributing.
- Getting to see the final result, and share other people's experiences
- recording a sonnet
- It was nice to speak the words as if I was in love with a woman. Also Sean made it very easy to participate and open to everyone, which was very welcoming and freeing.
- The complimentary glass of wine... Er, feeling part of something interesting.
- Seeing the film in situ
- The sonnet challenged me
- Seeing the final film all cut together at the private view.
- seeing everybody's different contributions. and trying to think of something to do with my moving selfie.
- Learning the sonnet.
- Recording the sonnet, and considering the implications of the 'fair youth' in that context
- Thinking about how to subvert or challenge the text I was reading!
- Seeing the clips and hearing the audio recordings of other people.
- seeing it in production
- Having to do something a bit different.
- Thinking more about the sonnets and their meanings
- I enjoyed the idea of being part of something larger, that brings queer people together.
- The reading itself
- I really enjoyed seeing the video clips from other participants.
- I enjoyed the surprise of the sonnet. I enjoyed interpreting those old words. I enjoyed being a part of a visible queer community.
- Thinking about how I would represent myself as a gay man and thinking about how other people might perceive that representation.
- I enjoyed the process of recording both the audio and visual.
- Knowing that I had contributed creatively to the continuation of the story of Sutton House
- I wish i had been a little more creative my video and am looking forward to seeing everyone elses
- Reading the sonnet.
- Creating the video self-portrait - really like how Sean encouraged participants to be creative, it was clear that Sean's goal was for each individual to express themselves however they saw fit.
- Knowing that I had contributed creatively to the continuation of the story of Sutton House
- The reading itself, Sonnet 47 is Beautiful, and actually represented how I was feeling at the time - I was embarking on a new and exciting relationship.
- The fact that I've contributed to something that lots of people will see, and supporting the fact that Sutton House is prepared to try something like this.
- seeing it at Sutton House
- I don't get all that much chance to do anything even vaguely creative in my current occupation, so it was nice chance to contribute to something a little less stuffy.
- The fact that there are so many of us taking part. I hardly know any of them, yet we are linked through a team effort.
- Feeling like part of something positive and creative.
- The non conformity and freedom of self recording as the end result was a patchwork quilt of ideas and interpretations (real art).

It was great to see the diversity and it made me feel even more aware of vast differences in all of us, yet the commonality that we all share. No matter how vast the difference we are all brothers and sisters of the same kin.

- Seeing the end product - at the launch, and at the V&A - and the other participants.
- trying to be creative and I do love Shakespeare
- Other than getting to go on a day out to a National Trust property? ;) It was cool to feel part of a community of sorts
- Seeing the finished film in Sutton House and the contributions of all involved - it felt like a snapshot of current time in an evocative space with a history.
- Just know that there were so many others taking a few minutes out of a day to read Shakespeare...in the 21st century...not for academic reasons. I wanted to be a part of that.
- I liked making the recording and little film but really enjoyed seeing it all together as a created piece and discovering who else had been involved and what they had done as their contribution.
- Getting the chance to read the sonnet.
- filming it
- The challenge of trying to understand the very complex sonnet that was assigned to me, and of reciting it in a way that would make it as clear as possible for a listener - both rather harder than I anticipated.
- I enjoyed reading my poem. It was much easier and more fun than I expected. It was fun to meet Sean, too. We were visitors to London from NZ so it was an enjoyable thing to do, anyway.

What were your perceptions of the National Trust before this project?

- Middle English, walking slowly around a fountain, stopping for tea, sniffing flowers. Old houses, old stories - usually about rich white folks!
- Whilst I've visited properties that they own the driver would be the place itself, not the National Trust per se. I was aware of its role in the preservation and maintenance of places of historical interest but had no negative or positive thoughts about it as an organisation.
- I suppose I think of beautiful and ancient grounds and buildings, but definitely not places where I would see people of a similar age, class, or race to me, unless school kids are being forced on trips... and again, still a little out of my range of parity. I can definitely imagine queer men and women accessing these spaces, but dominantly not, and near-to-never being represented and discussed within them.
- not sure if I had many as I'm an immigrant
- Lady who lunch! tacky tea towels!
- Fairly neutral, really. Being very much part of an educated middle-class demographic, I'm generally supportive of their broad aims, and I visit quite a few National Trust properties. I tend to find their intellectual rigour perhaps wanting when it comes to history (they can be a bit 'Ladybird Book of Simple History'), and there's also just the feeling that they're a bit oriented towards the nice-pot-of-jam-and-a-tea-towel market.
I'm not sure whether I'd have expected them to back an LGBTQ project - I can imagine a fairly neutral approach, though, as they don't seem to be a particularly inimical organisation. I'd imagine such an exhibition would have more appeal in Sutton House (located, as it is, in London - and in the 'trendier' end of the city), than, say at Stourhead or Stoneywell.
- Fusty

- A grand institution. Very variable depending on which staff or volunteers one encounters. Often rather stuffy and detached from context; quite prone to a single interpretation of any event or era—unaware that they are making an interpretation—so to paraphrase poorly "it was thus", with no acknowledgement of the variability of lives, no hint of plurality.
Also rather more given to focussing on things than people.
- That the National Trust is excellent at preserving history and historic sites but that they tended to focus on the "Downton Abbey" type of experiences, that is until relatively recently much of their content was about the aristocrats and wealthy family who lived in their properties. Very little of the real social/working class experience was included in their content despite that this represented more a body of experiences than that of the limited number of upper class people. They also tend to be quite traditional.
- a bit 'dusty'
- A good thing but a bit heterosexual upper middle class families orientated.
- Stately homes in the country patrolled by posh retired folk channelling their inner Nazi.
- Not much but definitely something I would associate with queer politics before now.
- I always thought of the national trust as looking after parks just the conservation
- I have been visiting National Trust houses since childhood and have never seen any queer stuff in any of them before, I guess I think it's a bit stuffy and old fashioned, but I enjoy the preservation of things.
- good. like. eventually i'll get my act together and get a membership.
- Broadly positive - I think they're good guardians of heritage - but I don't necessarily see them as forward thinking or particularly progressive. But perhaps that's not their job.
- Traditional, conservative.
- haughty, exclusive and expensive
- From my childhood - stately homes, model farms etc - big rooms, big furniture, big dresses, big grounds, an idealized form of history
- They manage large old houses
- My perceptions were/are that it plays an important role in protecting our built heritage, coast and countryside, but that it is inherently quite conservative; it doesn't seem to be very good at attracting people outside its stereotypical White British middle-class image.
- Very high. Grew up with a life long awareness and it was an honour to be involved.
- I generally regard the National Trust as middle class, white-dominant, and potentially staid in some contexts, although trying to make an effort in others.
- Having visited many properties and environmental areas, an organisation to protect and preserve sites of national or environmental importance.
- A general perception of it being a body to protect stately homes and historic properties in the country, not much of a presence in London, its members tending to be middle-England types.
- An organisation that seems worthy although I can't say that I find it especially accessible or relevant to my own personal life
- Of an institution much more conservative & less culturally engaged. (I thought it was just concerned with parks and woodlands).
- I've been a member of the National Trust on and off for most of my youth and early adult life. I'm not sure why but I always presumed they were very traditional and wouldn't want to take part in a project that celebrated LGBTQ culture.
- An organisation that seems worthy although I can't say that I find it especially accessible or relevant to my own personal life

- As a child, I was lucky enough to have been taken to many National Trust managed properties and gardens by my father who was an Architect, and member of the National Trust, so I have always been very fond and supportive of the National Trust and the vital work that they undertake.
- I work for them so its a bit difficult to say! Certainly working for them myself, I would be nervous of initiating something like this as I wouldn't be sure how it would be received both internally and externally, and I wouldn't think the property team would get behind it.
- I thought of them as being quite conservative
- Stately homes, country parks & gardens, afternoon tea - very twee and middle England.
- To be honest. I was quite aware about what they did. I would say its been educational and thought provoking.
- They own and protect sites of interest across the UK. I've done arts and performance type stuff in national trust spaces before.
- I am a member of the national trust and have been for a couple of years. I feel that the LGBTQ community is vastly un-represented.
I am glad that sutton house is open to these things. I just wish that it was level across all the NT sites.
They should have more detail about homosexuals etc who frequented certain places and what they should be revered for.
- I'm very fond of them, particularly of a few key sites (e.g. I visit Stourhead a few times a year) but I think I do associate it with my family and my past, rather than my future and my current chums. I'll visit an NT property given the chance, but I don't drive, so often end up at them as a passenger. I think they do very useful things.
I liked the recent attempts to add a more human story at Stourhead with the story of the Hoare family losing their son to war. I do worry that 'universal' and 'humanising' often don't overlap with 'queer'.
When living in Brighton a friend returned from one of the Bloomsbury houses and said 'It's amazing - it's built in the shape of an enormous closet...' (To be fair, I think this was Charleston, so not an NT property).
- Slightly stuffy but well-meaning historically significant sites with excellent tea rooms
- That it is an important custodian of national history and spaces - but that it can be staid, fusty and for a certain very middle class audience. That the modern world and different groups are not really accommodated.
- I had visited a few places and always enjoyed the spaces and history but been unimpressed with the public programming.
- Making progress but still a bit staid and very traditional on the whole.
- not sure
- Very positive - I believe that it has had its problems but I think it does good work and I loved visiting NT properties as a child.

Have these perceptions changed? If so, please explain how:

- Always in reference to the sutton house projects which Sean has created.
- Other than a slight feeling of being pleased that they would host - and I hope encourage - an event such as this my experience of taking part hasn't impacted on my impression of the national trust.
- Somewhat. This seems like one intervention, but I'd say my larger perception has remained.

- not quite sure about that. from very little, to just a tiny bit more doesn't seem like a huge increase.
- also includes: Gay people who lunch! kick ass tea towels!
- Not really. The experience was pleasant and interesting. I'd never visited Sutton House before, and, beyond the exhibition, I had an informative time.
- Yes - willingness to reach out to the LGBT community has detracted from my perceived fustiness.
- This project is not something I would expect from any part of the National Trust. Despite being a member, it's not something I would have heard about had I not seen the call for volunteers.
I haven't seen the installation yet, can't comment on how it ties in, or not, with the rest of Sutton House or the institution.
- A little, I was impressed that they were supporting and hosting this project which is definitely not their traditional type of content and/or audience.
- perhaps a little more contemporary
- A bit, though I fear Sean's project was very unique, great it happened though and action tends to bring change....!
- Sutton House is the only NT property I've been to that has been different from that.
- See above
- Yes, I never thought that this kind of thing would be something they would support, I like that it is.
- I think it's great that this exhibition went up, and they should definitely do more queer interventions across the country.
- nope! though i am pleased that they've hosted an LGBT exhibit - that i haven't heard of before.
- It was nice to see/hear the guy in charge of Sutton House at the private view - he seemed like an approachable guy, and not someone austere or distant.
- Yes - it's challenged my stereotype about what the National Trust is interested in.
- seeing Sutton House in 'use' as a community hub with unusual and exciting projects
- Sean's project has made me look back over those Sunday afternoons and to recognize the stately homes' contribution to idealized heteronormativity - the games they made me want to play when I'd got home were all invested in heterosexuality. It would be good if more of these places could include an imaginary space for children to imagine a different possibility for identity.
- Not really as I knew the NT value diversity and inclusion
- Slightly. The work at places like Sutton House seems to be quite groundbreaking for the Trust, but I don't know whether or not this is being replicated elsewhere. My parents and I have been members for a long time and the properties that we have visited relatively recently (within the last year or so) do not seem to be deviating much from the standard heteronormative, White historical displays and stories that they have always shown.
- Nope! If anything, increased.
- I am very pleased that the National Trust were willing to host a LGBTQ+ project, and I hope that this has made some of their work accessible for those who wouldn't normally encounter it. However, I still feel that the NT has work to do in terms of accessibility - both in a physical sense, and in terms of widening their audiences.
- No.
- I would perhaps see the leadership of the organisation being more open-minded than I might have thought.

- If the Trust continues to demonstrate an interest in really making the properties sites for exploration and education of non- normative culture, It's relevance to me would be increased and is be more likely to access it
- Seeing the Trust get involved in an LGBT project impressed me.
- Really happy that they are welcoming LGBTQ community to be part of the National Trust (even by association) Its made me think that they are more liberal, creative and community focussed than previously thought.
- If the Trust continues to demonstrate an interest in really making the properties sites for exploration and education of non- normative culture, It's relevance to me would be increased and is be more likely to access it
- I am still as grateful for the Existence of the National Trust as ever, but am also heartened by the statement of support that I believe their hosting of this project at Sutton House shows, towards the LGBT Community.
- From above, having said I wouldn't be sure of doing it myself, I think its great that it has happened, and really impressed. I'd be fascinated to know how it is perceived higher up the National Trust and by the "traditional" NT visiting audience. I was impressed that a piece from Sean was included in the NT magazine as I would have thought the readership of the magazine is very much the traditional 'curious minds' bunch.
- a bit - though i was a bit disappointed that the exhibition wasn't advertised boldly outside Sutton House (on the street entrance) and in a more pronounced way at the reception desk.
- It makes me think that perhaps the NT is making more of an effort to keep up with the times.
- I'm now more aware of how the national trust isn't some seperate body run by our of touch folk. I can see it reaches out to everyone as much as it can.
- Not especially! Had a fairly positive image to start with.
- I will be popping in to sutton house a LOT, as I feel that they actually represent OUR nation... Unlike the rest of the NT.
- I was really impressed with Sutton House - initially that they were hosting / co-creating '126' but then, looking round, the way they'd kept the squatter's art in the attic room. It felt like a small but genuine attempt to include the full history of the house. My sense of what the NT might be interested in has shifted.
- Pleasantly surprised by the effort put into a Queer Season
- Definitely. The fact this film is being screened in a National Trust property feels progressive and right. The past connecting with the present.
- I definitely think that he National Trust agreed to have a Queer-focused programme means that someone on staff is interested in widening participation and innovative access to the public.
- Sutton House is leading the way in terms of inclusion and acknowledgement. The NT has wonderful opportunities to mark a wide range of experience and heritage and they should embrace that.
- no
- Not really. But, it is heartening to know projects like this are going on.

Do you often visit heritage sites? (such as historic buildings/houses) If so, please name any that you have visited recently:

- Amsterdams joods historich museum and synagogue, Somerset house for a blonde exhibition

- Recently I have been to Kirkstall Abbey, Burton Agnes Hall, Gievor Tin Mine, the Yorkshire Mining Museum, Hampton Court and Saltaire Mills.
 - I'm currently out of the UK, but when I was in the UK, yes, I did often enough in a passing way, and sometimes I did deliberately. The last deliberate trip was to William Morris's old house up in Walthamstow.
 - hardly.
 - I enjoy visiting heritage sites, but the ones I have recently visited are abroad.
 - most house museums in london. (not quite sure does this include the V&A? I suppose IOE is also historic as it is listed?) Leighton House, Sutton House, Kemscott Manor, etc etc.
 - Probably three or four times a year.
 - Penshurst Place
 - Stourhead
 - Stowe
 - Eltham Palace
 - Intermittently.
 - Since the summer:
 - Watts Gallery, Chapel & Limnerslease (often as I volunteer there and am designing the gardens for Limnerslease).
 - William Morris House, Walthamstow [NT]
 - Petworth House & Park [NT]
 - Chichester Cathedral
 - Bosham Church
 - St Aldhelm's Chapel, near Worth Matravers,
 - The Abbey, Bury St Edmunds
 - Eileach an Naoimh near Mull (and assorted other sites in the Inner Hebrides, mostly in caves).
 - Stirling Castle
 - St Mungo's Cathedral & Necropolis, Glasgow
 - St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh
 - And wherever a Gerrywalk happens upon, such as the church at Clayton.
 - In or near Guildford (mostly for choir, though there's usually a guide or time to explore).
 - Loseley Park
 - Shalford Mill [NT]
 - The Guildhall
 - St Martha's Chapel
 - St Mary's
 - Guildford Cathedral
 - And if galleries in old buildings count:
 - Pallant House, Chichester
 - Guildford House
 - The Smith, Stirling
 - Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art
 - Scottish National Gallery
 - Kelvingrove
 - Tate Britain (Modern not old enough to count?)
 - Royal Academy
 - Museum of London, Docklands
 - V&A
- I better not start on the list from America, right?

- Yes, quite a few. In the last few weeks, I've visited the Royal Society, London; the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford; Waterperry House and Gardens, Oxfordshire; the Royal Engineers Museum, Library and Archive, Kent; and the Royal Signals Museum, Blandford Forum.
- Benjamin Franklin House
- Stonehenge
- Not specifically, but I do go to galleries and theatres a lot and are often in impressive old buildings!
- Yes, but not very often. I went to Knole House in Sevenoaks last year.
- Rarely
- I do but can't remember the last time I did
- Recently I have been to Hampton Court, and Kew Palace.
- not very often - and not recently. but i do visit them!
- Several times a year.
In the previous few months I visited a lot of the Shakespeare sights in Stratford upon Avon and St Bartholomew's Church in the City of London.
- Yes: Boston Manor, Pitzhanger Manor, Marble Hill House
- No, unless I'm traveling on holiday or something.
- Blickling Hall, Godrevy Head.
- no
- Not anymore!
- Not as much as I'd like to but this is partly due to lack of wheelchair access
- Anglesey Abbey
- I visit heritage sites on an occasional basis. Most recently, I visited Knowle.
- Yes, Benjamin Franklin house, watts gallery, Sommes house, Sutton house, variety of major London museums.
- I would say occasionally, maybe a few times a year when I get the chance. I recently visited Dennis Severs house in Spitalfields for an exhibition, also the Houses of Parliament.
- I visit heritage sites approx every 2-3 months. Recently I visited Ham House, London.
- I do not get to visit Heritage sites as often as I would like, the last that I visited (in 2013) was the Tower of London.
- Yes frequently, although not so much over winter. I work for the NT so am always popping along to other NT sites. Most recently Polesden Lacey, Hinton Ampner and Basildon Park (all NT) over the Christmas period.
- no.
- As a child, I was a member of English Heritage and The National Trust and regularly visited heritage sites at the weekends and on holidays.
- Oh. I can't say, I probably visit them more than I think.
- Yes! Most recently probably Windsor castle. Planning on Ely Cathedral soon.
- Chesterfield house
Little Morton hall
Galsworth hall
A lot, at least 1/2 a month.
- Yes - have been to these in the last year:
Weald and Downland Museum
Temple Place
Greenwich (various buildings in the Naval College)
Eltham Palace
Stourhead Gardens

- rarely
- Not often, but I've spent a fair amount of time around Saltram in Plymouth, and Mt Edgecumbe in Cornwall.
- No.
- Wray Castle; Chartwell House, Fenton House, 2 Willow Road
- Yes. Sutton House, York Minster
- Occasionally
- not visited recently but, yes, sometimes
- Only occasionally but I have been to Cardiff Castle and Arundel Castle in the last year.
- Yes, often. The list is too long and I'm not sure I can remember how to spell all the names.

Had you previously visited Sutton House?

Yes: 11

No: 42

Have you visited since, or do you plan to?

Yes: 38

No: 15

If you have seen the exhibition, what did you think worked best about it?

- The way it created environment of peaceful contemplation in the chapel
- Geography and a lack of time mean I may not have a chance to see the exhibition.
- the gusto of the participants, both in the readings and the videos. Also the quick paced editing was a wonderful invention and prevented tedium and loss of concentration.
- the people
- I liked the fact that it was self-contained - in a part of the house that was otherwise fairly uninteresting
- Very inclusive. Plus managed to quite seamlessly combine queerness and Tudor-ness. Which is quite a feat.
- The minimal editing of the video/audio materials. It really gave a sense of them being very personal contributions.
- moving pictures in a very 'still' building; old and new reflecting each other and becoming one; queering a space enables reading it anew
- I loved being able to hear it in various rooms, I'm not sure if that was just for the launch, I hope not. I loved the editing of snippets of sonnets, that the voices and videos were varied. Also it was nice to be able and sit and watch it with others, the sharing was good, especially as LGBTQ sexuality can often be isolating
- The wide variety of styles, matching voice to image made it more involving than if that had not been the case. The short duration of the individual segments kept it constantly fresh and interesting - most observers seemed to stay until they'd seen every video.
- The projection of it on to a brick wall
- The chapel was a good setting because folks sat down and listened and watched, rather than popping in and out.
- i still have to go. i'm really looking forward to seeing it
- I quite enjoyed the fact that it utilised a part of the building, that (and forgive me if I'm wrong) probably didn't have much about it otherwise.
- N/A

- the reflection of diversity, and marriage of sound and images, past and present it encompasses
- planning to visit v soon
- I cannot access the exhibition and was not able to make the PV
- I have not seen the exhibition but am going to see it soon.
- Fast pace, variety of faces and voices. The variety of situations people posed in were limited, although there were a few images that could give a snapshot of lgbtqi life in 2015, other than people just nesting. It showed surprisingly how normal the lgbtqi are. That could be beneficial to a crowd unfamiliar with the lgbtqi community.
- I think the setting worked well, and it was a compelling piece listening to all the different voices and seeing the different snapshots.
- The diversity of interpretations and the originality that people brought to their piece. Also The screening space was excellent intimate and atmospheric.
- I've still not seen it and hoping to get to london asap
- I haven't seen it sorry!
- The diversity of interpretations and the originality that people brought to their piece. Also The screening space was excellent intimate and atmospheric.
- I have not yet had the opportunity to See the exhibition due to my working hours.
- Sorry not made it yet! But plan to hopefully.
- it worked well with the space, i liked the uneven surface of the wall onto which it was projected
- Sadly couldn't make it to London to see it, but my friends enjoyed it.
- I loved the fact it was held in such a place.
- Haven't managed to see it yet! I live in Cambridge and work a full time job as well as studying part time..
Still hoping to get down before exhibition closes..
- The space is beautiful. Projected on the exposed wall, the echo up the stairwell and through the house is haunting. It really came together in a beautiful way.
- Definitely seeing everyone's self-picture and hearing the voices - every little snippet was interesting. The similarities between the texts and the ways people read created this weird sense of community, despite nobody (to my knowledge) collaborating. The diversity was good. I always worry with queer projects that they'll be dominated by white thin youngsters. Although there were a bunch of white asymmetric-haired boy-dressed types (like me), we weren't (I hope) overwhelming. I don't know if this was achieved through deliberate publicity/recruitment or was a happy accident, but it was really important.
- Very glad that it's all online- I was able to share it widely without expecting people to schlep all the way to Hackney!
- The number of contributors - seeing the diversity of contributions and seeing an evocative snapshot of queer life at this present time. It also showed the universality of love and desire through the use of Shakespeare's sonnets - queer lives have importance and can be described through these words too.
- The audio recordings.
- I thought it was beautiful and engaging. Seeing people in their films set against the sonnet lines was also moving. It was queer but all about humanity, humour, involvement and just being. Lovely.
- not yet seen
- I was unable to see the exhibition because I have returned to NZ.

What would you change, or do differently if you were running and curating the project?

- Tour it across a few of the different NT properties across the UK
- not so much. but more immigrant voices, and variety of accents would have been fun.
- put the visual and the voice together!
- It may have been deliberate, but the fact that the wall the project was projected on was incomplete (and didn't really fit the projection) was, after a while, a bit annoying. Sometime the features on the wall added an interesting dimension to the films, but at other times (and more often than not) they cut out parts of the picture - heads were lost, or bits of background. It seemed to me that when you ask people to film themselves doing something, many of them will (and, indeed, had) think hard about what they choose to show on a video - which makes the project a participative one, and involves an aspect of creation from the participants. Then to exclude some of that by projecting in a space that, by its nature, will edit some of the film out, seems a little unfair on the participants, who, if they had known the limitations, might have chosen differently.
- Seemed fine. It was me that was the difficult bit.
- Perhaps move the main exhibition to a different room in the House?
- better signposting at exhibition
- Nothing. More publicity perhaps, I think it's really important that it is known about. Is it going to other NT places? Hope so! A friend said she'd read about it in her NT Members magazine which is brilliant. That must reach a far few people!
- Maybe there'd be some way to smooth progress technologically (at least for those without i-Phones) though I've no idea how you'd do that.
- I'd give it a run somewhere in the North if possible
- Make the exhibition in an accessible space.
- Nothing
- inclusion of whole sonnets rather than clips
- As a professional artist and curator myself I thought it was run and curated very well.
- More explanation of what queer actually means. I think many non-lgbtqi people might be confused by the term and turn away before trying to understand. I found myself having to explain to friends what queer is.
- Not sure I can think of anything really! I kind of wanted to hear all of each sonnet, but see why this wasn't very practical.
- Technically, it could have been better. The image didnt fit on the screening area and the sound quality was poor.
- Sean was lovely no changes to be made!
- i would have liked to see it in a main, central room in the property rather than quite so 'tucked away'
- Nothing springs to mind. Communication has been very good.
- I found the room a little out the way. But it helped to achieve a cosy effect.
- Not sure. Participant forum to share experiences with each other online might be nice?
- I would perhaps -for a future project- have multiple rooms with sonnets/monologues recorded by the LGBTQ community and divide the videos in to groups/categories and see how the audience responds to the segregation and separation. A stright room. A homosexual room. A lesbian room. A transgender room. A blak room. A Jewish room. It would hit home how disgustin "categories" and "labels" are for EVERYONE. I think it would make you feel more human and humane.
- I realise that it's due to space constraints and the age of the property, but a basement really wasn't an ideal place to put the project in terms of accessibility. It also felt a little bit 'out of sight and out of mind', especially as there weren't too many prominent adverts around the house.

- If time and resource permitted, encouraging contributors to connect with their sonnet and think of interesting ways to portray it visually (yet still retaining a strong personal element). Some people did this very well - with hindsight I would have taken more time and thought with mine.
- I would have given participants more specific instructions about the video images (which mostly seemed uneven and unrelated to the texts) and I would have ensured that the projection was on a single, two-dimensional frame (when I saw the exhibition, the images were enlarged and broken by the ceiling and two windows in the chapel).
- The installation should tour. perhaps it should show at the 2015 LGBTQ History and Archives conference ...
- Nothing.

If you are not planning to see the exhibition, or are unable to, please say why:

- Geography and lack of time - but it's something I will try and free a weekend to come and see.
- I'm abroad :(
- I live and work in Oxford so although I make it to central London I probably won't be able to make it to Sutton House during the exhibition run.
- I would really like to, but my weekends are really busy at the moment. I'll have to check when it finishes in case I can find the time!
- I live in Cambridge and just didn't have time to get there. But would have gone if at a different time of year (e.g. summer holiday)
- I can't access the venue and have very limited support available to get to Sutton House at all.
- Health reasons
- I hope I will be able to see the exhibition, but as I live outside of London it may be difficult for me to do so.
- I'm currently living in Pittsburgh, US.
- I am hoping to get to London and see the exhibition asap
- I wasn't able to.
- I very much hope I will, the only reasons I don't see it will be if I run out of time to get there, and getting to London is annoyingly expensive from deepest darkest Surrey... I know it's not that expensive but I grew up within the travelcard zone so now I resent having to pay more!
- I live abroad.
- I will see it before it ends
- I live in Glasgow
- I was unable to see the exhibition because I have returned to NZ.

Is there anything else you want to say about the exhibition, or the experience of being involved in the project?

- Quite white, like London's gay scene
- communication with Sean was always very pleasant and quick, and I simply love their enthusiasm!
- you are amazing Sean! its been a pleasure/honor to be part of your project. :)))
- Not really - it was an enjoyable thing to participate in.

- amazing idea, great curatorship, fun launch reception (wine!) , a memorable experience
I hope National Trust is going to support similar projects in the future.
- Very pleased and proud to have contributed, and the launch was lovely, really nice atmosphere.
- Though it took some determination to get over technological barriers, in the end it was satisfying to take part, and the evening at Sutton House was fun and welcoming. The exhibition itself was engaging and interesting, looked professional, and was in a great setting. Some food at the event (I'd've paid for it!) might have meant people stayed and mingled a bit more.
- I enjoyed being part of the project, I like that it gave LGBT people a way of expressing themselves, if I'd seen other people's 10 seconds moving Selfie then I may have made mine more interesting but never mind!
- thanks for keeping us updated throughout. and also thanks for inviting the 126 to a private view. i couldn't make that and i was gutted - it would have been really interesting i think!
- Thanks for curating and organising: I'm looking forward to attending!
- It was fun, I'd do something like it again. I would also like a chance to speak to some of the other contributors.
- Thank you!
- very exciting, and would love to see/be involved of more of these projects in the future
- I appreciated the efforts that were made to provide information about access and find alternative ways of accessing the exhibition
- More like this please.
- It was fun to meet up with friends and discuss lgbtqi issues. Many questions were raised about our individual and collective identities.
- I enjoyed it and am very proud of the small part I played.
- I really enjoyed being involved and would definitely be interested in being involved in future LGBTQ projects
- I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to have been part of the project.
- Would love to see the NT embrace more of their LGBT history and not shy away from it. I visited one property in Wales (Tredegar House) where it was dropped into the guided tour that the man of the house (I think in the 1920s or 30s?) had a string of male lovers that was all a big secret... I really wanted to know more but they just glossed over it and hurriedly moved on. When there is a LGBT story to be told, I wish it would be told more. But saying that, I work in a house with a portrait of Henry Wriothesly and we barely even mention any speculation on the relationship with Shakespeare, because the paintings are owned by our tenant and we are restricted on what he'll let us say - so I'm part of an example of something I'm saying I don't like!!
- well done Sean for putting this on the map, and I look forward to seeing more big stuff happening in future!
- It was good fun and very easy to contribute. Communication with Sean was very easy and my friends that saw it thought it was a great final result.
- I loved it. Loved the concept and well done to Sean for putting so much time and effort into it.
- Thank you for having me.
You have a great vision and I can't wait to see where you propel to next!
- I did feel really invested in it being a success, despite my contribution being really simple and tiny! This seems like a fantastic way to get people involved and represented.

This may sound like a whinge, but I'm including it anyway: I know there are a lot of venues and events where QUILTBAG stuff is visible. I've done event organising/stall staffing stuff (mainly as a bi person). However, there's often a kind of threat that if a minority doesn't give its all, they'll be entirely invisible (e.g. one of the LGBT history month organisers dropping by the stall at a busy Pride event and saying 'You MUST give us more material. - you must MAKE people give us stuff'). I sympathise with the problem - organisers want to be inclusive and often can't represent people *for* them. But It was so nice to be included in something so creative and inspiring without getting knackered!

- keep me in mind for future projects
- My partner and I made a special trip to Sutton House one weekend to see the exhibition at Sutton House. Unfortunately, there was a concert taking place in the building at the same time, so there were crowds of people hindering access. Furthermore, the projector for the exhibition didn't seem to be working, and there was nobody available to ask, so there was no way of seeing the videos. It was super disappointing but not the fault of the curator/creator :)
- Definitely an interesting project and I was glad to be offered the chance to participate. It was great to have a portrayal of real queer faces and voices.
- Though the entrance fee was cheap, it would have been nice if the National Trust would have allowed participants of the project to view it for free. I, unfortunately, couldn't make it to the opening.
- Thank you for the opportunity. Thank you to Sutton House for hosting.
- BRILLIANT IDEA - DO IT AGAIN!

How would you describe your gender identity?

Nonbinary or genderqueer: 6

Trans: 3

Male: 19

Female: 15

Other responses:

- Primarily Camp, Mutating, ambivalently male-bodied.
- female, enjoying to play with different dimension of gender reaching from tomboi to lipstick vamp.
- Cis gendered
- male, 21st century, not especially macho but i do have a small chip on my shoulder about being manly.
- Lesbian
- I identify primarily as a cis woman, although I feel I have non binary aspects to my identity. This means my identity hovers between cis woman and queer femme.
- queer (cis)male
- Homo normative.
- post-gender
- Meh'

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

Gay: 16

Queer: 12

Lesbian: 10

Homosexual: 3

Bisexual: 2

Other responses:

- gay/bi
- Gay/lesbian
- bisexual/queer
- Reluctantly straight
- Queer or bisexual: I use bisexual in terms of an attraction to people of my gender and people of all other genders.
- I sleep with Women.
- Gay, but I like to have sex with girls. But gay... Mainly gay.
- I am attracted to women
- Probably pansexual, but I say bi because it's hard enough for people to understand that.
- Homoflexible

Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

No: 44

Yes: 5

Other responses:

- I am dyslexic and have borderline.
- No. Dyslexic enough to be covered by the DDA, but it's not usually an issue, and currently depressed enough to qualify for ESA, but I'm not sure that's what the question means.
- Although I have a Mental Health diagnoses, I do not consider myself to be disabled.

How old are you?

Under 25: 2

25 and over, under 30: 17

30-39: 17

40-49: 11

50 and over: 5

Age range of those surveyed: 23-56

What is your nationality?

British: 33

Other responses:

- UK
- British/Hungarian
- I reject this question.
- Austrian
- Thai
- Irish
- Italian
- do you mean which passport(s) I have?
- rainbow nation queer
- American
- Australian/ UK

- Australian
- Australian/ UK
- I am English
- Dutch
- UK
- English
- American
- New Zealander

Which city and country do you currently live in?

London England: 31

Other responses:

- Leeds, UK
- Budapest, Hungary
- Belgium
- Bangkok, Thailand
- UK
- How terribly metrocentric; not all places are cities (would that they were). Godalming, UK.
- Oxford, England
- Manchester England
- Stevenage, England
- Brighton, UK
- Cambridge, UK
- Coventry UK
- Coventry, England
- Pittsburgh, USA
- Leeds - United Kingdom
- Brighton, UK
- Village outside Guildford, UK
- Leuven, Belgium
- England
- St Albans
- Glasgow, Scotland
- Auckland, New Zealand

Is there anything else about your identity you would like to mention?

- Midlands, vague whiff of Jewishness, married
- I grew up working-class and mixed-race in a squatted community in Brixton. I was raised by my mother, as a single parent. I have been university educated up to BA level within the British system.
- i'm a secular catholic immigrant.
- hybrid of cultures and genders and coolness
- my cultural/ethnic/heritage background is much more important here than my passport(s) i.e. nationality
- i am comfortable with who i am - but i also find myself trying to 'be the change i want to see in the world' which means i'm frequently re-evaluating how i do that (being who i am).

- In a Civil Partnership
- I'm white.
- Within each term things are always less clear cut than they sound!
- I'm Scottish. Middle Eastern routes, artistic and open.
- I'm ethnically Jewish.
- I am just me. Take it or leave it.
- South Asian - BAME
- Black
- I am a writer.

Appendix 5: Descriptions of video portraits for 126

1. Close up selfie, short hair, feminine
2. Spinning round selfie, beanie, facial hair. They scratch their nose, bookcases in the background, beats from electro music play.
3. Walking selfie, with a scarf, in an urban area, with graffiti in the background [shot in the Netherlands]
4. Selfie, uncomfortable smile, large glasses, facial hair and lip piercing, shirt and tie, a dark background
5. Camera spins around person, they smile and wave, lots of bookshelves in the background and a piano. Short hair and glasses
6. Smiling, short curly hair and glasses, cat lying down and pawing at face, person kisses cat
7. Sitting on a rock outdoors, wearing tall black boots and monochrome outfit, short hair and glasses, they wave and mouth 'hello'
8. Pan of a bookshelf, academic books and fiction by lesbian writers, a small figurine of a rainbow with legs and arms
9. Clouds from an aeroplane window and blue skies, followed by a shot of a dog on a train looking around [assistant dog called Precious]
10. Selfie, blue sky and windy, looking coy and chewing gum [me waiting for one of my lovers to come play in Lesbos]
11. Selfie, glasses, beard, hipster looking, woolley jumper, they smile and blink
12. Selfie, short hair and glasses, dark top, pulling silly faces then laughing
13. Walking through woods with a white dog, dressed in royal blue, looking glamorous, hair and makeup done, not looking at camera [at local woods, in a place where they are most happy and relaxed]
14. Selfie, long hair and glasses, smiles, pouts, then looks away sadly, but glances back at camera
15. From behind, tramlines shaved into short asymmetric hair, typing at a keyboard, with a laptop raised on books above, wearing glasses
16. Eyes up close, edited to be flickering at great speed in a jarring way
17. Wearing 'It Starts With Me' Terrence Higgins vest and short shorts, shelves in background containing DVDS, figurines and trinkets. Holds up note bad with hand written 'COULD NOT GIVE A FUCK ABOUT MARRIAGE' turns page 'WTF WOULD SHAKESPEARE KNOW ANY WAY? (except scansion obv)' shrugs and turns page 'THOU SINGLE WILL PROVE FUN!' (fun is emphasised with little lines around it) they do a cheesy grin, bearded [the text in the video was a direct response to the themes in the sonnet]
18. Wearing a small flowery hat and outdoor coat [they had lost their hair at the time to cancer treatment], not looking at the camera, collecting pears in a bowl, from a tree. Says to person filming (not seen) "as if by magic"

19. Head and shoulders shot, dark top and dark hair, holds up small chirping and flapping finch towards camera, smiles, then moves bird away
20. Sitting on broken wall, looking dapper in a straw hat, shirt and waistcoat, full length shot, trees in background. They flick through a small look, close it and look at camera
21. Selfie, no expression, facial hair. London Underground train can be seen passing over the wall in the background
22. Selfie, moving back and forth, pictures on wall and ledge in background
23. Selfie, sat at desk, lights in room change from blue to red to green, they pull a funny uncomfortable looking face
24. Selfie, from below, wearing waistcoat, tying tie, they straighten their fringe with their hand
25. Selfie, glasses, shirt and hoodie, waves and smiles
26. Selfie, in gingham shirt, facial hair, looking stern
27. Collaboration, wide shot of sofa outdoors in wooded area with broken windows in background, one person, in dress and leggings sat on the arm of the sofa, the other, in vest and trousers walks towards them, sits next to them, they play 'rock, paper, scissors', laugh, then high-five, then they both walk towards camera
28. The above 20 second clip was a collaboration between two participants
29. Wideshot of country path, person in shirt, jeans and boots walks away from camera, 2 small black dogs follow behind. They stop and turn sideway to let the dogs catch up.
30. Full length shot, jeans and jacket, leaning against a wall, large graffiti behind of person in red coat with a dog
31. Black and white with flickering effect, person painting a large nude witch on a broomstick on a wall, cuts to outdoor shot, topless, long dark hair, a quick flash of breasts from the side
32. By the river with the O2 building in the background, person with short white hair blowing in the wind, wearing glasses and smiling. Camera person says 'are you not supposed to say anything?' they reply 'well no, not really' then laughs and disappears off camera [asked me to edit out the laugh, but I asked if I could keep it in]
33. Selfie, shows face then moves camera to show a kippah on their head
34. Lying on a bed with colourful cushions behind, they have long hair, they wave
35. Static shot of object hanging on a plain white wall [It's curious isn't it - it's one of my favourite things. I bought it in South Africa about 20 years ago, I just liked it, I'm keen on sculpture and find it quite inspiring. It's not meant to be anything specific but I think it symbolises all sorts of different things.

- Struggle, water, connections, environment, love, and so it goes on! It's carved from one piece of wood which is pretty incredible.]
36. Short pale green hair and glasses, shakes head to make hair stick out in slow motion, a glass case containing taxidermy birds
 37. Riding a bike in front of the Institute of Education, short hair, glasses
 38. Walking, wearing a big coat and a back pack, by a wall of colourful graffiti
 39. Selfie whilst riding a bike and smiling, scarf, glasses, short hair
 40. Wearing a hoodie and jacket, leaning against the door of a conservatory, smoking. They smile
 41. Stood outdoors in red cardigan, short hair and glasses, smiling
 42. On a bridge, spinning round, short dark hair, steel drums playing in the background
 43. Close up, filmed by friend, pulls funny face and laughs, short fair hair and glasses
 44. Selfie, wearing a hat, smiling, there are star wars prints on the wall
 45. Selfie, sea gulls and the sun in the background, fringe blowing in the wind, a pan out to reveal Margate Pier in the distance
 46. Close up of Elvis video playing on a TV, it pans out to show someone with short dark hair in a shirt drinking red wine
 47. Close up of the MGM Lion roaring on TV, camera pans out to show someone with short grey hair drinking white wine, they turn to face camera
 48. Selfie, glasses, woolly jumper, looking uncomfortable, abstract print of coloured swirls on the wall
 49. Close up of four photobooth pictures in a verticle strip – black and white showing person with long hair. The photos are leaning on a table, camera pans out showing a cup full of pens, a candle, a little elephant figurine, pictures, books, a sea shell, jewellery, a Buddha figurine, a picture of a topless woman in black and white, two large elephant candle holders. A picture saying 'alone but not lonely', Billie Holiday's 'Having myself a time' is playing in the background
 50. Very close up selfie, wearing glasses, long hair, pulls a funny face and smiles
 51. Static shot of a clock calendar on a window ledge, tree branches visible through window, the clock says SUN 22 DEC, the time is not clear
 52. In greenery, filming bike handlebars, and shadow of person filming, they turn the camera around to show their smiling face, there is a pylon in the background
 53. Shot of 'Barberette' [gender neutral hair salon] sign on the wall, camera pans to show short haired person in glasses, and a white apron/coat combing the beard on a mannequin head

54. Wandering around at night on a brightly lit bridge with city lights in the background, they are wearing a coat and a black beanie hat, camera the focuses on their feet on the wet tarmac
55. Static close up of a hairy chest showing mastectomy scar [top surgery]
56. Selfie, short hair and red lipstick, they smile. A black and white picture of people dancing is in the background
57. A Profile view, they turn and smile and wink, their tshirt is of the phases of the moon, and they are against a green leafy background [shot in Australia]
58. An older person standing leaning against a wall in Sutton House, looking at the squatters' graffiti in the attic, then a shot of them sitting by the fire in the Tudor Kitchen [this was one of the Sutton House elders, who is in their 80s, I filmed them as they didn't have a smartphone, they asked to be filmed in their two favourite rooms]
59. Person standing still looking at camera in noisy club, smiling, others try to get into the frame thinking it's a static picture
60. Static picture of three children in a school photo, next to a flickering candle, there is a sofa in the background and muffled voices in another room [their youngest daughter had died from a severe asthma attack, they were eager for this and their campaigning work for asthma to be recognised]
61. Lots of short clips: holding an empty wineglass, at a silent disco with headphones on, posing with friends outside, a selfie in a supermarket, on a pogo stick with comedy music playing, topless selfie with a sideways cap on, a quick shot of a purple skirt
62. Selfie, wearing a tiger onesie, they take the hood down, ruffle their short fair hair and smile
63. Selfie, from below, on a bus, overhead tannoy voice says 'Packington Street'
64. Selfie, upside down, looks confused, turns camera sideways and smiles
65. Very close up, from below, looking up, looking away then smiling, facial hair
66. Selfie, spinning around outside, long tree-lined green in the background
67. Close up selfie, yellow background in glasses, short hair and pouting, looks sideways then smiles
68. Selfie from below in autumn woods, then from above and spinning around, they are wearing a long coat and have long black hair
69. Person in Adidas tshirt and a back to front cap dancing in a large club with strobes and flashing lights, singing along to the song playing and holding a plastic drink cup above their head
70. Naked person lying face down on bed typing on a tablet, the curtains are open and it is daytime. A Close up shot of the tablet screen, they are typing

- 'Don't you realise, I say, that the scratches on your ankle', then wide shot sitting cross legged on the bed and looking at camera, then continuing to type on tablet
71. Close up of photobooth picture strip in black and white, resting on someone's lap, they are wearing denim, black and white pictures show, two people holding up beer bottles, them drinking from the beers, them kissing, one licking the others ear while the other pulls a funny face
 72. Close up of hand writing 'Sonnet 47' on lined paper
 73. Selfie, grey background, dressed in black, hair in cornrows wearing glasses, smiling
 74. Selfie, close up of eye, camera zooms out, the person is wearing a hat, they smile and wave and the mirrored wardrobe in the background can be seen, reflecting bookshelves and a sign above a door saying 'Camden Town'
 75. Stylised black and white flickering film with stark contrast effect person in dark cape and hat moving around the graveyard, almost like a dance
 76. Topless tattooed person drying short violet hair in slow motion
 77. Camera pans up from feet to head, person with walking stick their tshirt has a My Little Pony on it and the words 'Love' and 'Tolerate', they have peach hair in a side pony tail and a lip piercing and glasses, they smile
 78. Selfie, glasses, smoking and smiling with an abstract grey painting in the background
 79. Smartly dressed person walking along looking at Hogarth prints hanging on a wall [at the London Metropolitan Archives LGBTQ History and Archives conference]
 80. Close up of white hands moving over a black body with sensual music playing
 81. Person with short grey hair and grey goatee walking around a very nice house sped up very quickly
 82. Timelapse showing a blank page and then a portrait of a topless person with short hair being drawn in reds and oranges, and then disappearing
 83. Selfie, moving around face, showing framed street map on wall in the background, smiling, with long dark hair
 84. Close up of book cover 'The imp of the mind: exploring the silent epidemic of obsessive bad thoughts' pans out to show tattooed, pierced person in cap reading in café, chatter from other patrons in the background
 85. Selfie showing 'Pits and perverts- lesbians and gays support the miners' t-shirt and tattooed arms, pans up to show person snarling with long blue hair against a blue Morrissey poster, 'A Sudden Death' by the Organ is playing

86. Close up of someone blowing on and then eating bread, an inaudible voice in the background asks a question, person responds 'is it good? Funny isn't it? It's a bit weird' the reply is 'I quite like the texture' to which the person on camera responds 'hmmm, baby food' and then they laugh. The TV or radio is playing in the background
87. Close up of hands typing at a computer keyboard, camera moves and focuses on the screen and zooms in, it says 'Shakespeare, Shmakespeare, Shmakesqueer...' the word queer is highlighted in rainbow colours. [Taken in one of the offices at the IOE Library]
88. Close up static selfie, bookshelf in background, no expression on face
89. Wide view of trees, pans down to show waterfall [I opted to video the River Sherbourne at the back of my apartment as a 'favourite place'. The Sherbourne flows into the River Avon further down in Warwickshire, so I'd like to think that there's a closeness to Shakespeare.]
90. Wide shot of someone posing in front of rock formations looking from left to right, it's a windy day and they have long hair [Calanais standing stones on the Isle of Lewis, their mother filmed it for them]
91. Selfie, in large collared brown coat against a plain white wall, facial hair, moving head and looking around them
92. Someone striding through a green space in a city wearing a fitted blazer, skinny jeans and red high heels, change of shot to a passing car, and the person walking in the distance behind it
93. Selfie, short asymmetrical hair and glasses looking down, guitar leaning against sofa in the background, they hold up their necklace which says 'They', they laugh and ruffle their hair
94. Very close selfie, yellow rollneck and short hair with blue and purple lipstick, they smile
95. An arm laying a sword on a red cloth with a formation of red candles around it, they tilt the sword to catch the light
96. Selfie, plain white room in the background, short hair, they smile
97. Close up of a tattooed foot, camera pans up tattooed leg, they are standing on one leg in a meditation pose, they are wearing a vest with a parrot on it and the wall behind them is covered in maps
98. Selfie, using a selfie-stick, person in glasses with long hair tied back, spinning around room, TV on in the background and a Christmas tree, a person [their fiancée] says 'can I have a go please?'
99. Selfie, blue top, short bleached hair, plain background, looks around and smiles
100. Close up of dog lying down and blinking
101. Very dark shot of feet moving around on the ground outside casting shadows. The sound of a train going past

102. Selfie, person taps on screen, waves does a peace sign and smiles. Short hair, lip piercing, facial hair [filmed in Mexico]
103. Very close up of an eye reading from a screen
104. Topless hairy person with tattoo with a pink wig on which they cover their mouth with, they move wig to show beard and black lipstick, they take of wig to reveal short bleached hair and hairy chest, they stick their tongue out
105. Person in beanie and cardigan puts a small hat on a stuffed cat and places it on their shoulder, it falls off, they laugh. Bookcase in background and puffin figurine
106. Person with short purple hair with their eyes closed in the bath
107. Yellow beanie, flamingo jumper and glasses, stroking a tiny Chihuahua
108. Person sitting outside with glasses, coat and scarf holding a tiny Chihuahua, they kiss it on the head
109. Panning shot of a park on a grey day
110. Person with short hair, dressed smartly with red lipstick, chatting to friends in a restaurant
111. Person in glasses and large colourful scarf listening to friends speak in a restaurant and laughing
112. Person standing with short hair and a scarf under a flashing red neon sign saying ID PHOTO
113. Person all in black with short hair doing a headstand barefoot against a yellow wall covered in postcards, they move towards the camera and smile
114. Selfie from above, lying down moving the camera back and forth and following it with their eyes
115. Short hair, filmed from behind, in the reflection of an ornately framed mirror they are applying mascara
116. Selfie, long brown hair, smiles, they are sitting against cushions, one of which is shaped like a life ring
117. Person reading from a tablet on a train, they turn to camera, unaware they were being filmed, and laugh
118. Spinning selfie, purple tshirt shaved head, they are in a garden, a shed with an open door can be seen
119. A still full-length mirror selfie, sat by desk in wheelchair, short hair, glasses. A cat wanders in and out of shot
120. Person sat behind counter in Gay's The Word bookshop, with shelves in the background and a Gay's The Word poster. They pick up a book and read from it.
121. Someone filmed from behind with long red hair, they pick up a children's book from a shelf called 'The Family Book' and flicks through it. Titles that can be seen on above shelf are 'Born Gay' and 'AIDs'

122. Person leaning on bookshelf under POETRY sign in Gay's The Word reading from Sappho book, they look up and smile
123. Selfie, in a desk chair in a shirt, tie and waistcoat, they straighten their fringe, they have no expression on their face
124. Selfie from below while walking, they look ahead, then to camera and run a hand through their hair
125. Camera pointing at ceiling, they move it to their face, they have a beard and are wearing a shirt, they're in a bookshop, they spin around to show more of the shop behind them
126. Static selfie, lying down looking at camera in a stripy top, they have facial hair

Appendix 6: Letter from Ivo Dawnay

From Ivo Dawnay, London Director of the National Trust (writing in a personal capacity)

Welcome to Sutton House and this excellent event conceived by Sean. Regrettably I can't be with you, but I can from a distance, congratulate you all on shining a light on the engagement of LGBT communities with the National Trust, and, indeed all aspects of the nation's heritage.

It is fair to say that the diversity of sexual orientations of people involved in this world is something universally known-about but little discussed or celebrated. Perhaps the single most important person in the 20th Century history of the Trust was James Lees-Milne whose tireless work at acquiring country houses threatened with destruction or decline gave us an enormous part of our portfolio.

In an age when homosexuality was illegal, Lees-Milne was as 'out' as it was possible to be and even married an 'out' lesbian to everyone's surprise. Many of the rather Grand Trustees of the old Trust – mostly public school educated aristocrats – themselves had distinguished gay backgrounds, though these were largely confined to the elaborate Chippendale closets that they kept in their draughty stately homes.

And many of our donors too had credentials. William Banks, who conceived and built the magnificent Kingston Lacey house in Dorset from abroad was driven there in exile after a scandal involving a young man. He was said never to have seen the fantastic house/art gallery he created – unless, as one legend has it, he snuck back into Britain, dressed as a woman to inspect it.

Then there was Harold Nicolson and Vita Sackville West at Sissinghurst – hardly discreet about their own same sex liaisons.

Dozens of brilliant staff through our 119 year history have come and will continue to come from the LGBT community – we would be lost without them. It is perhaps time that all this and all of them were better acknowledged.

I hope you all have a brilliant evening.

Appendix 7: Letter to volunteers about *Master-Mistress*

Dear Sutton House volunteers,

LGBT History Month exhibition

I thought it would be useful to give you all an overview of some of the thoughts behind the LGBT History Month exhibition in case there are any questions from visitors. LGBT History Month, like Black History Month was established in order to give an impetus for various institutions, including museums and historic houses, to address often overlooked voices and stories in history. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans) history month started in 2005, and it's great that Sutton House are celebrating it for the first time this year.

The exhibition consists of a number of sound installations across four of the rooms in the house, (the Linenfold Parlour, Little Chamber, Great Chamber and Tudor Kitchen). Each of these is the voice of someone who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or queer, reading a Shakespeare sonnet that was thought to have been written to a man. I purposely haven't identified which voice belongs to which contributor (though the names of the contributors feature on the introductory text panel and in the guides for visitors) as I felt this would undermine the idea around ambiguity in the exhibition. Some of these voices belong to trans people, trans is a blanket term for people whose gender identity do not align with the gender they were assigned at birth. Because of this, I would ask that you avoid, if talking about the recordings, using the terms "he" and "she" as I feel it would be unkind to the contributors who gave up their time to help with the exhibition if we accidentally mis-gender them, instead refer to them as 'they' or 'the speaker', this will avoid identifying people incorrectly. If visitors ask whose voice is whose, feel free to say that you don't know, and that the ambiguity is part of what the exhibition is about.

Language around sexual and gender identities is still evolving very quickly, so please avoid the terms 'transsexual' and 'homosexual', the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans are the best to use, but again, please don't make any assumptions about how the contributors identify.

Another word worth addressing is 'queer'. You might know 'queer' to be a pejorative term used for LGBT people, but it has since become a reclaimed term, and some people (including yours truly) identify as queer, both as a blanket term for LGBT people, and also as a political term that rejects identity politics.

If you have any questions about this, now or at any time throughout the exhibition, please get in touch. Likewise, if any visitors have any questions or problems with the exhibition, please pass them on to Robynn, Helen, Gemma or Chris in the first instance, and they can put them in touch with me if necessary.

Most of all, we hope you enjoy the exhibition, and it's more than okay to say to visitors 'I don't know' if they ask questions about the identities of the speakers, we would rather that than accidentally identifying people in ways that may be insensitive or hurtful to them. The whole point of the exhibition is to raise questions about how ambiguous gender and sexual identities can be!

Many thanks,

Sean Curran

NT volunteer and *Master-Mistress* curator

Appendix 8: Sutton House Queered interpretation panels

Sutton House Queered

What does Sutton House mean?

Sutton House has always had a bit of an identity crisis. Even its name is unusual. The house was named after Sir Thomas Sutton, who never even lived here, he lived next door in a now-demolished house. It's had many names previously: Bryk Place, Milford House, Ivy House, Picton House, 'the Old House at the Corner', St John's Institute, and 'the Blue House'. This variety of names shows that Sutton House has been through many changes, which brings us to another reason why it is unusual. While we like to boast that Sutton House is the oldest house in Hackney, throughout its near 500 year history it has been so much more than just a house. It has been a boys' school, a girls' school, a church institute, offices, and a squat.

What's more, Sutton House does not just tell the story of rich people with connections to royalty, but retains traces of our more recent past too, namely the squatters who made this their home in the 1980s. Even country house expert James Lees-Milne, who organised the acquisitions of many National Trust properties from the 1930s to the 1970s, did not know what to make of Sutton House. When he visited in 1946 he described it as 'no more important than hundreds of other Georgian houses!' Lees-Milne was fooled by the alterations made in the 1740s, that were actually a Georgian mask on a Tudor face.

#SuttonHouseQueered



What does Queer mean?

The word Queer has many different meanings which are continuously contested, debated and shifting. That is part of what makes Queer such an exciting idea to explore at Sutton House. Queer was originally used to mean 'strange', but many will recognise it as an offensive term used to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. From the 1980s onwards, some LGBT people began to reclaim the word Queer to take back control from those who used it to oppress, bully and further marginalise. Although it is becoming more widely used, Queer can still be an upsetting word for many. In the 1990s, Queer entered academic language as a way of thinking about things differently.

There are two main ways the word Queer is used today:

- as an umbrella term for LGBT people, or anyone who does not identify as heterosexual or cisgender (cisgender refers to people whose gender identity is aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth, in other words: not trans). Some people choose to identify themselves as Queer, which is why the Q sometimes appears at the end of the LGBT acronym.
- as a necessary way of challenging and questioning normative assumptions about sex, sexuality, gender and race.

In a nutshell, Queer challenges the idea that identities are fixed or certain, and that sexuality and gender are binary (one or the other).

As a verb, Queer becomes something we *do*, not something we *are*. Sutton House Queered is a year-long programme that aims to question and disrupt, to challenge and celebrate. Much like Sutton House's varied and colourful history, Queer is fluid and ever-changing, and presents a great opportunity for us to explore the National Trust's *Prejudice and Pride* theme, marking the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of sex between men. We think that Sutton House is Queer.

#SuttonHouseQueered

