[Journal of Feminist Scholarship](https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/jfs)

Volume 19
Issue 19 *Fall 2021*

Article 4

Fall 2021

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Recommended Citation

Flavelle, Genevieve. 2021. "Erotic Fever in The ArQuives: Imagining a Queer Porn Paradise in Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer's Exhibition Tape Condition: degraded." *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* 19 (Fall): 42-65. 10.23860/jfs.2021.19.04.

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Erotic Fever in The ArQuives: Imagining a Queer Porn Paradise in Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer's Exhibition *Tape Condition: degraded*

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Abstract: Focusing on Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer's site-specific exhibition *Tape Condition: degraded* (2016) at the ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ+ Archives, this paper explores reparative and desire-driven approaches for working with partial and missing histories within archives. Focusing specifically on artists working as archivists, I consider how the limitations of evidence-based histories can be addressed through creative practice. The essay unfolds in two parts. The first examines a selection of objects from the exhibition to draw out the historical context of The ArQuives, grounding my analysis of the conditions that have created and perpetuated specific archival gaps; in this case, pornography made by or featuring lesbian and trans-identified people. I consider how the animation of specific historical narratives anchors the exhibition as an archival intervention that positioned The ArQuives broadly as a site of community, conflict, censorship, and activism in the past and the present. The second part of the paper examines key elements of the exhibition that exemplify McKinney and Meyer's reparative approach to archival practice. Drawing on Eve Sedgwick's (2003) theorization reparative reading practices as a strategy of creative resistance and resilience in queer life and Eve Tuck's (2009) definition of desire-based community research, I argue that McKinney and Meyer practiced a creative methodology that supplants the paranoid position of archive fever with an erotic reparative impulse, or *erotic fever*.

Keywords: contemporary art, queer theory, archives, porn, lesbian, sexuality, activism

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> Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama.
> —Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power."
>
> I recognize that queer archives are as much a matter of fantasy as they are of shelving.
> —Catherine Lord, "Ink on Paper Lecture."

Late in the summer of 2016, I made the sweaty pilgrimage through Toronto's downtown core to see an exhibition about porn—on VHS. Arriving at The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives, I stepped through a jagged hole based into a false wall (covering the gallery's usually generous entrance) to arrive in artist Hazel Meyer and media historian Cait McKinney's atmospheric exhibition, *Tape Condition: degraded*. The exhibition was the culmination of McKinney and Meyer's deep dive into The ArQuives' collection of approximately 1000 VHS porn tapes. The false wall I had just stepped through evoked a chapter of the archive's history when the board of directors was so fearful of police raids that one member proposed building a false wall to safeguard their growing collection of porn and other "illicit" materials. This history was unknown to me, I came of age (and came out) in Toronto in the mid-2000s. I'm of a specific generation

that grew up with porn online but also retain childhood memories that predate the internet. Despite my first tentative forays into porn being conducted on the web, well after the heyday of porn on VHS, I do remember the "tapey-ness" of VHS (McKinney and Meyer 2016). However, the heart of my engagement with the exhibition was not the nostalgia of VHS but another familiar feeling—my fantasy of finding historical representations of desire that mirror my own as a queer woman. As it turned out, McKinney and Meyer shared a very similar fantasy in creating *Tape Condition: degraded*.

Tape Condition: degraded began with an absence and a fantasy. As long-time archive volunteers, McKinney and Meyer began watching, rewinding, and reporting the condition of the VHS porn tapes in The ArQuive's Moving Image Collection as a preservation measure and preparation for the ongoing digitization of the archive's holdings. During this process, they were struck by the notable absence of lesbian and trans representation in the collection, representation that might reflect their own subjectivities, desires, and lived experiences. They began to fantasize about finding their "dream tapes" among the abundance of commercially produced gay cis-male porn from the 1980s and 1990s. For example, while playing a tape titled *Close Shave 2*, they hoped that, "it might be some perfect fantasy scene in which earnest, newly awakened lesbians give each other their First Gay Haircuts, maybe in a locker room after basketball practice. But it is not that thing, not even close" (McKinney and Meyer 2016). Their stash of dream tapes would feature female, trans, and racialized performers engaging in kinky, creative scenes. They looked for "the kink (there is some), the home-made (there is less), or anything made by or depicting women, performers of colour, or trans people (there is almost none)" (McKinney and Meyer, 2016). During their encounter with this absence of lesbian and trans porn, McKinney and Meyer's compulsion to archive—famously described as "archive fever" by Jacques Derrida—was supplanted by *erotic fever* as their fantasies grew from finding their dream tapes to imagining a different kind of community archive that would contain them, a multifunctional space for watching porn, digitizing tapes, concocting fantasies, and of course getting off.

The ArQuives' gallery provided an ideal opportunity to realize this hybrid pervy queer sex zone/community recreation room/porn archive/digitization suite. From 2009-2016, The ArQuives ran a dedicated gallery space at their main building at 34 Isabella St. Curated by a volunteer committee, the gallery provided space for artists and researchers to create exhibitions that engaged the public with the archival material in its collection. *Tape Condition: degraded* went beyond the gallery's typical exhibition format by transforming the white-walled room into a colourful immersive counter archive. As a counter archive, *Tape Condition: degraded* engaged with essential questions about the formation of gay and lesbian community archives, the status of sexually explicit materials in these archives, and the notable absences of representation in The ArQuive's VHS porn collection. Counter archives are often embodied differently than traditional archives with the explicit intention of historizing the past from minoritized perspectives (Haritaworn et al. 2018; Springgay et al. 2020). *Tape Condition: degraded* drew on the ArQuives' local history while imagining what a queer archive might look like outside of the archives' current disciplinary logic. By focusing on porn as an archive rife with questions of sexual representation, cultural memory, affect, and censorship, the exhibition explored the challenges of queer archives through the lens of sexual desire and fantasy.

Using *Tape Condition: degraded* as a case study, this paper explores reparative and desire-driven approaches for working with partial and missing histories within archives. Focusing specifically on artists working as archivists, I consider how the limitations of evidence-based histories can be addressed through creative practice. The essay unfolds in two parts. The first examines a selection of objects from the exhibition to draw out the historical context of The ArQuives, grounding my analysis of the conditions that have created and perpetuated specific archival gaps; in this case, pornography made by or featuring lesbian and trans-identified people. I consider how the animation of specific historical narratives anchors the exhibition as an archival intervention that positioned The ArQuives broadly as a site of community, conflict,

censorship, and activism in the past and the present. The second part of the paper examines key elements of the exhibition that exemplify McKinney and Meyer's reparative approach to archival practice. Drawing on Eve Sedgwick's (2003) theorization reparative reading practices as a strategy of creative resistance and resilience in queer life and Eve Tuck's (2009) definition of desire-based community research, I argue that McKinney and Meyer practiced a creative methodology that supplants the paranoid position of archive fever with an erotic reparative impulse, or erotic fever. I examine this shift through the exhibition's disordering of time, use of queer aesthetics, mobilization of porn as an affective archive, and positioning of fantasy as evidence. Finally, I conclude with the story of how McKinney and Meyer's research did, in fact, lead to finding their dream tape—only on Super 8 and outside of the archive. I examine how McKinney and Meyer extended their "daisy chain" methodology to devise a process of mediating this film for contemporary audiences. Throughout the paper, I show how, by playing on the material limitations and theoretical aspirations of the archive, artists can open new possibilities for queer histories.

Part 1: Through the False Wall: Historical Context

As a counter archive within an LGBTQ2+ community archive, *Tape Condition: degraded* is a particularly rich case study because it draws out the tensions between traditional evidentiary knowledge paradigms and creative counter archival strategies. One of the primary counter archival strategies the exhibition employs is the use of ephemera—materials such as posters, VHS tapes, magazine clippings, props, buttons, and (fabricated) artifacts—to create what Ann Cvetkovich (2003) has termed an "archive of feeling." Ephemeral materials have arisen as a key source for challenging and expanding the definition of an archive. In *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma Sexuality and Public Cultures,* Cvetkovich writes, "Lesbian and gay history demands a radical archive of emotion in order to document intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism—all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of traditional archives" (241). Cvetkovich has greatly influenced how scholars and artists have approached assembling materials from archives, personal collections, oral histories, and performances to create archives of feelings. Because queer publics operate through shared feelings and ephemeral events such as dance parties, performances, and activist meetings, the queer archive has had to embrace new forms of evidence.[1] Cvetkovich highlights that by insisting on the value of "apparently marginal or ephemeral materials, the collectors of gay and lesbian archives propose that affects-as-associated with nostalgia, personal memory, fantasy, and trauma—make a document significant" (243).[2] *Tape Condition: degraded* drew heavily on associated affects by mobilized queer ephemera directly in its focus on VHS porn tapes and atmospherically in its staging of a counter archival space steeped in archival ephemera, community lore, and erotic fantasy.

As a site-specific exhibition and archival intervention, *Tape Condition: degraded* acknowledged the cultural conditions and events which have shaped The ArQuives as a whole, and the porn collection in particular, as a primarily white, cis-male, homonormative archive. McKinney and Meyer specifically consider the ways The ArQuives has come into "being in and as history as a result of specific political, cultural, and socioeconomic pressures—pressures which leave traces, and which render archives themselves artifact of history" (A. Burton 2005, 6). However, rather than write a study or use significant amounts of didactic materials in the exhibition, McKinney and Meyer instead evoked the historical shaping of the ArQuives through gestures such as: the false wall covering the entrance to the exhibition, a sheet of archive letterhead loaded in an 80s era typewriter, a megaphone hung on a wall of pink pegboard, and copies of *The Body Politic* magazine casually stacked on the table and shelves. By incorporating critical moments from the history of gay and lesbian activism in Toronto, *Tape Condition: degraded* acknowledged the

archive as a site that emerged from specific sociopolitical conditions and employed creative strategies to respond to the representational absences and excesses in the archive's holdings.

Picture 1. Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer. *Tape Condition: degraded*. 2016. Toronto, The ArQuives. Photo by Toni Hafkenscheid. Used with permission. https://www.hazelmeyer.com/Tape-Condition-degraded-w-Cait-McKinney-2016

McKinney and Meyer's first tribute to the history of the archive is the realization of the false wall once proposed as a safeguard against police raids (Picture 1).[3] The false wall was proposed by Chris Bearchell (1952-2007), an important figure in both the archives' early history and pro-sex activism in Canada. Throughout their research for the exhibition, McKinney and Meyer's constant querying—where was the lesbian smut—led to Bearchell's legacy. Bearchell, McKinney and Meyer learned, was a white lesbian feminist activist who was an openly pro-porn, non-monogamous, leather dyke during the height of the feminist sex wars in the 1980s. An intersectional activist who worked across feminist, lesbian, gay, and labour movements, Bearchell has been described by her contemporaries as a central and "towering figure in the history of gay liberation in Canada" (Nicol 2007).[4] As McKinney and Meyer (2016) write in the exhibition essay, Bearchell became their "diamond:" an embodiment of the intersectional lesbian feminist, sex-positive representation they were searching for. By building Bearchell's false wall, the exhibition opened with a speculative fiction—what kinds of porn might Bearchell have stashed behind the wall if the archive has built it in the 1980s? Would McKinney and Meyer's missing dream tapes be found concealed behind it?

Once through this irregular threshold, the gallery space was not immediately recognizable as an art installation or an archive. McKinney and Meyer discarded gallery conventions such as wall text proclaiming the show's title or artworks in favour of small handwritten tags identifying some of the artworks. Contemporary artworks were integrated into the room's décor alongside VHS digitization equipment, posters, magazines, and clippings from the archive. Within the space, McKinney and Meyer held the past and future of the archive in tension. A large table dominated one side of the room, on top of which sat a working VHS digital transfer station constructed from several generations of technology (Picture 2). Next to a contemporary desktop computer sat VHS porn tapes, blank DVDs, floppy discs, and a 1980s era typewriter loaded with a piece of letterhead for the Canadian Gay Liberation Movement Archives. The

functional digitization station had several purposes: visitors could use it to digitize tapes from their personal collections, the different generations of technology contributed to the staging of a timeless environment, and the presence of older technologies prompted viewers to consider the archive's past material forms as it works towards its future through digitization.

Picture 2. Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer. *Tape Condition: degraded*. 2016. Toronto, The ArQuives. Photo by Toni Hafkenscheid. Used with permission. https://www.hazelmeyer.com/Tape-Condition-degraded-w-Cait-McKinney-2016

The Canadian Gay Liberation Movement Archives letterhead was not, in fact, an original from the archive but a custom risograph print by artist Anthea Black made from a composite of several sources in the archive (Picture 3). The letter is addressed to "TO ALL THE GAY PEOPLE OF TORONTO, THEIR FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES." The print served to recall how activists founded the archives to document and support a political movement. The letterhead in the typewriter specifically recalls the archive's radical origins as an initiative born out of the energy of the gay liberation movement. Founded in 1973 by *The Body Politic,* Canada's national gay liberation newspaper, as a reference collection, the archives were initially named The Canadian Gay Liberation Movement Archives. Two years later, in 1975, "Liberation Movement" was dropped from the name to reflect a shift in focus from movement-building to gay and lesbian life more generally (Jennex and Eswaran 2020, 24); and the subtitle, "For lesbians and gay men," was added after concerns over the name's gendered nature were raised (25). Finally, in 1993, "Lesbian" was officially added to the name to reflect women's long-standing involvement in the archives (Taves Sheffield 2019, 16). Over the years, the archive has grown from a single drawer to a collection that fills a public heritage building at 34 Isabella St and offsite storage locations. At the time of the exhibition, the archive was still named The Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA). As the exhibition explores, this name change did not directly result in a fulsome or compensatory shift toward collecting lesbian materials. According to their website, the archive's most recent change in name to The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives reflects a five-year strategic plan (2018-2022) to address historical inequities and diversify collections, staff, and volunteers.

Picture 3. Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer. *Tape Condition: degraded.* 2016. Toronto, The ArQuives. Photo by Toni Hafkenscheid. Used with permission. https://www.hazelmeyer.com/Tape-Condition-degraded-w-Cait-McKinney-2016

In the gallery, across from the worktable hung a mundane bulletin board adorned with clippings from newspapers and a small piece of paper listing the names of the artists and writers involved in the exhibition. Among the clippings were advertisements for porn tapes, VHS equipment and services, and an article by Bearchell titled "Art, Trash & Titillation: A Consumer's Guide to Lezzy Smut," from 1983. During her tenure as an archive board member and volunteer, Bearchell was also a member of *The Body Politic*'s governing collective and frequently wrote about lesbian pornography and the feminist sex wars.[5] In the article, Bearchell (1983) begins with an assessment of the lesbian content in mainstream offerings such as *Penthouse* and *Playboy*, sharing that, "despite the obvious shortcomings of these mags, most dykes I know—beggars one and all—still have *Penthouse, et al*, in their collections" (29). She then goes on to examine the pornographic appeal of widely available erotic books of photography and ends with a summary of books and magazines made by women, concluding that "our own images are not perfect yet, but they're getting better all the time. The authenticity of most of the sex is beyond dispute and that is not to be sneered at" (32).

As Bearchell's writing documents, the 1980s were a significant decade for pornography made by and for lesbians. Pioneering lesbian feminist sex magazines *On Our Backs* and *Bad Attitude: A Lesbian Sex Magazine* were both founded in 1984 (Bearchell was an enthusiastic fan). In 1985, members of *On Our Backs* also founded Fatale Video to produce and distribute porn made by women. However, pornography and sex work were lightning rod issues in feminist and lesbian communities. In the November 1984 issue of *The Body Politic*, Bearchell's review of *On Our Backs* and *Bad Attitude* ran on the same page as an open letter from The Toronto Women's Bookstore. The letter stated that the store had decided not to carry the publications because "the material often utilizes traditional pornographic format in that it stereotypes women as enjoying violence and degradation and perpetuates an industry that exploits all women." As Bearchell's writing documents, many women, particularly lesbians, were vocal in their desire for diverse

pornographic representation, including sadomasochism and subsequently found themselves the target of anti-porn organizations such as Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) and Women Against Violence in Pornography and in the Media (WAVPM) (Duggan and Hunter (1995) 2006, 20-21).

The sex wars took place within the larger currents of homophobic oppression and censorship roiling across courthouses, police stations, and federal legislatures in North America (Duggan and Hunter [1995] 2006; Rubin [1982] 2012; Cossman 2013). Throughout the 80s, the active censorship and confiscation of porn and other "illicit" materials such as gay and lesbian publications were part of the Canadian government and police targeting LGBT+ communities. One of the pivotal events in the history of gay and lesbian activism in Canada is the Bathhouse Raids protest in 1981, when 150 officers of the Toronto Metropolitan Police raided four different bathhouses (The Barracks, The Club, Richmond Street Health Emporium, and Roman II Health and Recreation Spa) in one night and arrested 286 men as "found ins" at a bawdy house and charged another 20 staff members with operating a bawdy house (*The Canadian Encyclopedia* n.d.). In the exhibition, hanging on an entire wall of pegboard painted pink, three objects alluded to a particular narrative from the Bathhouse Raids (Picture 4). A framed portrait of Bearchell, a megaphone, and a print by Meyer of a hand holding five buttons with the slogan "No More Shit" printed over a pink triangle, the date on the button reads "6 Feb 81" (Picture 5). These objects work to narrate the Bathhouse Raids from a queer feminist perspective.

Picture 4. Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer. *Tape Condition: degraded*. 2016. Toronto, The ArQuives. Photo by Toni Hafkenscheid. Used with permission. https://www.hazelmeyer.com/Tape-Condition-degraded-w-Cait-McKinney-2016

After the Toronto Metropolitan police carried out "Operation Soap" on the night of February 5th, 1981, immediate community organizing drew thousands of protesters to the corner of Younge and Wellesley Streets the next night to protest the mass arrest. Angry protesters confronted unprepared police officers who assumed the raids would deter the growing public presence of the gay community. Instead, the protesters marched down to 52 Division police station, demanding an end to police persecution. At one

point during the night, Bearchell delivered a legendary speech, declaring, “They think that when they pick on us that they’re picking on the weakest. Well, they made a mistake this time! We’re going to show them just how strong we are. They can’t get away with this shit anymore! No more shit!” (Nicol 2007). As the button documents, “No More Shit” became one of the rallying calls of the protest.[6] While the raids targeted gay men having sex in bathhouses, a practice which many lesbians did not share at that time, the community came out en masse and confronted the police—refusing to be shamed into silence by the police. The megaphone hanging on the wall in the exhibition gestures to Bearchell’s legacy and invites activation as a prop for a sex scene or a tool for leading yet another protest through the streets of downtown Toronto. Through gestures such as the attribution of “No More Shit!” to Bearchell McKinney and Meyer demonstrate how historical events such as the Bathhouse Raids, which are important to account for in the shaping of the sociopolitical landscape for LGBT2Q+ people but are most often narrated from a white gay male perspective, can also be portrayed in other, often small ways, to contest, expand and rewrite these histories.

Picture 5. Hazel Meyer. *No More Shit (for Chris Bearchell)*. 2015. Photo by Hazel Meyer. Used with permission. https://hazelmeyer.com/No-More-Shit-for-Chris-Bearchell-2015

The false wall, archive’s letterhead, copies of *The Body Politic*, and the “No More Shit!” buttons give a sense of the ArQuives as a community collection formed in the wake of nearly constant political repression, censorship, police violence, and community conflict. These historical gestures and inclusions evoke the radical origins of the gay liberation movement in Canada, specifically including lesbian voices, labour, and activism in these histories. As Bearchell’s legacy shows, the history of the ArQuives is intimately connected to the history of lesbian activism and advocacy concerning sexual subjectivity. So why is lesbian pornography, one of the most important records of sexual subjectivity, not be found in the ArQuives’ VHS collection? Between 1979 and 1986, the feminist sex wars bitterly divided feminist and lesbian-feminist communities across North America and had a lasting impact on lesbian sexual discourse. The absence of lesbian porn in the ArQuives’ collection is more than likely in part symptomatic of this history. Nevertheless, this historical context does not answer the question of why—during this unprecedented period of lesbian

porn production—the archives did not actively collect and seek donations of lesbian porn? Why is Bearchell's personally curated, highly researched lesbian spank bank not in the collection?

The archive's limited presence of lesbian pornography can be contextualized by the feminist sex wars, the gendered divide between gay men and lesbian women throughout the 70s and early 80s, and public conflicts over sexual practices such as viewing pornography, S/M, intergenerational sex, and sex in public. The exhibition gestures towards these histories, raising these absences and conflicts while also paying tribute to the women such as Bearchell, who championed the archive and the porn collection as an important document for the history of sexuality—despite not adequately reflecting their own sexuality. By centring Bearchell in their research method, McKinney and Meyer (2016) rooted their questions "about the archives' digital future in a reverence for its past, and in a longer history of queer appropriations of media." Through Bearchell, they were able to "think through what it means to be feminists advocating for access to sexual expressions in which we don't recognize our own desires" (2016).

In researching the exhibition, McKinney and Meyer were interested in the over-representation of gay male sexuality in the collection. They considered how this reflects who donates to the archives and who has the means to purchase, collect, and keep pornography. McKinney and Meyer pose a revealing question, why is dyke porn, which did indeed exist in the 1980s, absent? Moreover, why has its collection has not been part of the vision and collecting practices that make up the community archive (Meyer, McKinney, and Flavelle 2020)? Archival absences can speak volumes about how collections have been built and shaped over the years. While this archival gap could be remediated by sourcing more materials from trans, queer, and lesbian-identified donors and purposefully collecting tapes from production companies such as Fatale and SIR, the ArQuives have yet to undertake this work. Counter archival projects such as *Tape Condition: degraded* reflect a deep appreciation for the archive—the critique of the archive is centred in the desire for the archive to be more hospitable to and reflective of marginalized populations. In the following section, I consider how the exhibition moved beyond a critique of the archive to develop a reparative methodology for generating new forms of representation to occupy the archive's absences.

Part 2: *Erotic Fever* on Tape: Reparative Gestures

In her foundational essay, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading: or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You," Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) argues for the importance of a reparative reading practice for anti-homophobic inquiry. Responding to the dominance of a paranoid reading position, which seeks to expose the hidden workings of oppression and power, Sedgwick queries what aspects of queer inquiry might be better carried out by a different kind of methodology. She argues that while a paranoid analysis, as a strong theory of negative affects, does some things well, such as revealing complex structures of power, it does others poorly and can, and should, be used by scholars in tandem with other modes of inquiry.

As Sedgwick describes it, a reparative practice does not deny the bad (the reality of oppression), but it is receptive to encountering surprises and pleasures. In this way, a reparative analysis enables strategies of creative resistance and resilience in queer life. For Sedgwick, reparative reading is, as Robyn Wiegman (2014) puts it, "about learning how to build small worlds of sustenance that cultivate a different present and future for the losses that one has suffered. You could say that it is about loving what hurts but instead of using that knowledge to prepare for a vigilant stand against repetition, it responds to the future with affirmative richness" (11). Similarly, in "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," Eve Tuck (2009) argues that minorized communities are often studied using a damage-centred research framework which, "operates, even benevolently, from a theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to

achieve reparation" (413). Tuck advocates for a shift to "desire-centered" research, which reverses the flattening effects of damage-centered research and avoids the repetition of harm by focusing on the "complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (416). For Tuck, desire is key because, "it is an assemblage of experiences, ideas, and ideologies, both subversive and dominant, necessarily complicates our understanding of human agency, complicity, and resistance" (420). Reparative reading and desire-centered research are methods through which minoritized subjects can respond differently—richly—to the daily grind of oppression and psychic wounds of history.

If McKinney and Meyer had been working with a paranoid analysis, they would have packed it in after the absence of lesbian feminist and trans porn (always suspected—because "paranoia is *anticipatory*") had been confirmed and exposed (because "paranoia places its faith in *exposure*") (Sedgwick 2003, 130). Instead, their exhibition responded with a reparative impulse to affirm lesbian, trans, and queer women's histories of sexual desires. By constructing alternative forms of representation to occupy the archive, *Tape Condition: degraded* took a step towards publicly challenging and remediating the erasure of lesbian, trans, queer, and two-spirit sexual desire in this The ArQuives and queer history more broadly, not by focusing on the harm that this absence of representation has caused but instead by amplifying their desires for varied and complex sexual representation.

Sedgwick writes that the reparative position is, "No less acute than a paranoid position, no less realistic, no less attached to a project of survival, and neither less nor more delusional or fantasmatic," but that the reparative reading position instead, "undertakes a different range of affects, ambitions, and risks" (150). The following analysis of *Tape Condition: degraded* considers the different risks, ambitions, and affects McKinney and Meyer centred in the exhibition to create a counter archive of desire. Specifically, I analyze McKinney and Meyer's staging of a temporally ambiguous atmosphere to create a queer temporality within the exhibition space. I consider how by drawing on porn as 1) a genre that unsettles the respectability of the archive, and 2) as an archive of affect, the exhibition activated a different kind of archive of queer desire. I then turn to the promiscuous forms of evidence the exhibition generated to remediate the absence of trans, queer, lesbian porn in the archive. I conclude with a description of the afterlife of the exhibition to consider how McKinney and Meyer extended the reparative methodology they generated in *Tape Condition: degraded* to their recent film, *Slumberparty 2018*.

The Temporality of Queer Desire

In her analysis of the reparative turn, Wiegman (2014) argues that in queer feminist criticism, *time* itself has become a reparative affect (14). While traditional historiography follows linear time, queer historiography disorders time. The understandings of queer time and history prosed by queer theorists such as Jack Halberstam (2005), Carolyn Dinshaw (1999), Elizabeth Freeman (2010), Heather Love (2007), and Christopher Nealon (2001) demand a different archival logic and queer historiographical method. They propose methods of queer historiography structured by shared feelings across time, feeling outside of one's time, and the layering of very different historical periods with similar resonances. Queer historiography looks at the past through the present, analyzing absences and blind spots, often interrogating what is considered a given, such as the positive progress of LGBTQ2S+ rights.

Queer and trans artists have been working with archival research and speculative historical fiction as tropes for decades.[7] The past ten years, however, have seen a marked increase in queer and trans artists critically exploring and expanding on historical and archival representations. This swell of interest in queer history is in part due to the expansive theorization of queer time, the archival turn across disciplines (including contemporary art), and the headway made for LGBTQ2S+ rights over the last decade. Key events

such as marriage equality being passed after years of advocacy in the U.S. in 2015, a "Transgender tipping point" being declared in 2014 by *Time* magazine as the visibility of trans celebrities increased rapidly, and the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots being celebrated across the world in 2019 narrates an arc of progress. However, these events and others have given rise to complicated questions about queer history, movement-building, and the nature of "progress" for many LGBTQ2S+ people and communities. These concerns can be seen reflected in queer artists' interest in mining archives for different political ideologies of queer liberation and alternative representations of queer activism.[8]

In her study, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order,* Kate Eichhorn (2013) theorizes that the widespread turn to the archive is directly tied to the rise of neoliberalism. She argues that rather than a desire to "unequivocally recover the past," the archival turn has been motivated by an economically and politically precarious present (5). Eichhorn explains that "since the mid 1990s, the archive has presented itself not only as a conceptual space in which to rethink time, history, and progress against the grain of dominant ideologies but also as an apparatus through which to continue making and legitimizing forms of knowledge and cultural production that neoliberal restructuring otherwise renders untenable" (10). For queer and trans artists, history and the archive are spaces in which to recover different political ideologies and representational modalities—to think beyond the constrictions of the neoliberal present.

Neoliberalism has not only triggered increased interest in feminist and queer archives, but it has also affected how these archives are themselves structured and run. Over the years, the ArQuives has moved away from the grassroots community archive structure embodied in *Tape Condition: degraded* to a more professionalized and institutional archive with paid staff. While these shifts have sustained the archive, they have also sacrificed the opportunity to develop a uniquely queer archival practice. In her recent study of four gay and lesbian archives *Documenting Rebellions: A Study of Four Lesbian and Gay Archives in Queer Times*, Rebecca Taves Sheffield (2019), a former Executive Director of The ArQuives, considers the shifts toward neoliberalism within gay and lesbian archives, arguing this shift reflects the broader changes in the goals and ideology of the movements which built them. She writes:

> The gay liberation movement and lesbian feminist movement, for example, have been in decline since at least the mid-1980s, overwhelmed by the impact of AIDS on gay and lesbian communities. The result was a lesbian and gay rights movement buoyed by neoliberalization that shifted its focus toward human rights and non-discrimination and away from social transformation. (9-10)

By disordering time and bringing forward the radical and DIY ethos of earlier moments of gay and lesbian feminist activism, *Tape Condition: degraded* purposefully embodied a queer sense time and considered how the past can be mobilized in the service of different futures.

As an immersive exhibition*, Tape Condition: degraded* played on the archive as a temporal and spatial construct. The exhibition proposed embodied desire and different generations of media as alternative frameworks for accessing queer history. The exhibition also drew on the past in various forms (moments of radical activism, outmoded analog technology) to image different queer sexual futures—beyond what José Esteban Muñoz (2009) refers to as the "quagmire of the present" (1). As McKinney (2020) writes in their recent monograph, *Information Activism: A Queer History of Lesbian Media Technologies*, "Deciding to digitize an object imagines new queer networks in which it might circulate, along with a different kind of life for the object" (157). In particular McKinney draws on José Esteban Muñoz's reparative study of queer hope and futurity *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) to consider the connections between desiring history and desiring a future. In their chapter on the Lesbian Herstory

Archives (LHA) in Brooklyn, New York, McKinney (2020) writes that "José Muñoz's work on futurity further shapes my approach to the archives as a space of encounter between lesbian feminist and queer. Although Muñoz writes about futurity, his words provide a brilliant take on archives as sites of temporal rupture; queerness becomes an educated mode of desiring history in order to desire a future" (164). *Tape Condition: degraded* creates such a site of temporal rupture in which lesbian feminist and queer and trans histories are brought into the present for contemporary activation. The staging of a willfully timeless environment in the exhibition, and the focus on how digitizing older forms of media can creates different kinds of lives for archival objects, created a space of potential for queer history to inspire different visions of, and desires for queer futures.

Picture 6. Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer. *Tape Condition: degraded*. 2016. Toronto, The ArQuives. Photo by Toni Hafkenscheid. Used with permission. https://www.hazelmeyer.com/Tape-Condition-degraded-w-Cait-McKinney-2016

Exhibition as Atmosphere

Tape Condition: degraded was intended to be temporally confusing but also comforting, evoking the community archive aesthetic of bygone years, which has faded in The ArQuives' institutionalization and professionalization. McKinney and Meyer designed the exhibition space with two primary activities in mind—processing records and "getting off" (Meyer, McKinney, and Flavelle 2020). The exhibition space felt comfortable and domestic with cozy seating, curtains adorning windows, and a (fake) fern hanging from the ceiling in a macramé plant holder (on loan from artists Karen Frostitution and Cecilia Berkovic) (Picture 6). In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Derrida (1996) traces the origin of the word archive to the Greek *arkheion*, the home or residence of the *archons,* the magistrates who held power to make the law (2). In the installation, McKinney and Meyer subvert the archive's history as a residence of the powerful by creating an aesthetic of queer domesticity within the gallery space. The DIY crafty queer aesthetic recalls the work of other queer artists such as Allyson Mitchell and the Fastwürms, and lesbian spaces such as the Lesbian Herstory Archives. McKinney's work on and within the LHA served as a point of inspiration. In

Information Activism, McKinney (2020) describes how the LHA feels "unlike a conventional archive in that there are cozy reading nooks, macramé adornments, a kitchen with where coffee is often brewing, and visitors are allowed to access and handle any part of the collection without prior request" (160). The LHA has continued to function as an independent, hybrid private-public domestic space since the 70s and is a prime example of an archive that has devised its own lesbian feminist principles of archiving, which prioritize "tactility and in-the-flesh encounters with lesbian history" (160). The exhibition created a similarly inviting tactility, enticing visitors to interact with the space in ways usually unwelcome in galleries or archives.

Johanna Burton (2015), a curator and scholar, argues that the growing trend of staging exhibitions as atmospheres responds to the need to conceive of history differently. By allowing artworks, objects and signifiers to be free-floating, viewers could construct multiple non-linear narratives within *Tape Condition: degraded*. Burton, echoing art historian Rosalind Krauss (1980), argues that innovations in form allow innovations in thinking. While Burton cautions that the exhibition as atmosphere is not an inherently critical methodology—as a form it is neither good nor bad—it can be used to meaningfully reconstitute history by making historical conditions and context more available to present-day audiences. Making the exhibition space feel more domestic and sexual than the archives proper was a way of imagining what the ArQuives could have looked like today if it had not shifted towards a neoliberal social service model of access (Meyer, McKinney, and Flavelle 2020). The installation stages the archive as a space in which visitors can access archival materials and archival affects, allowing visitors the opportunity to form their own associations, narratives (historical or otherwise), and fantasies in the archive. By constructing the exhibition as an atmosphere, McKinney and Meyer work to activated what often exists in archives but cannot be seen. The things in archives that artist Ulrike Müller (2011) describes as "intensely felt but that cannot be pinned down. Iconographies of what could be, under other political conditions" (135).

Picture 7. Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer. *Tape Condition: degraded*. 2016. Toronto, The ArQuives. Photo by Toni Hafkenscheid. Used with permission. https://www.hazelmeyer.com/Tape-Condition-degraded-w-Cait-McKinney-2016

The Dream Tapes

In addition to staging a queer temporal space, *Tape Condition: degraded* drew on porn as an archive to further eschew the respectability of The ArQuives and activate an affective archive of queer desire. One of the most compelling reparative moves the exhibition makes is to consider how porn and the erotic more generally can be used as the basis for another kind of archival logic. In his introduction to *Porn Archives*, Tim Dean (2014) argues that a less paranoid approach to porn:

> would acknowledge that, in addition to archiving information, pornography archives pleasure . . . porn is itself an archive—of sex, of fantasy, of desire, of bodies and their actions, and of pleasure. Pornography, at least in its photographic forms, preserves evidence of something that is otherwise transient and ephemeral. It enables intimacy to enter the archive, and it is valuable for that reason alone. Indeed, pornography offers evidence about a whole gamut of social issues and desires by showing us things that otherwise tend to remain imperceptible. (9)

At the heart of the exhibition is a missing archive of pleasure—evidence of lesbian, trans, and queer desire. But desire, specifically desire for missing objects that we believe can make us whole, can only go so far, *erotics*, however, as Freeman writes, "traffics less in belief that in encounter, less in damaged wholes than in intersections of body parts, less in loss that in novel possibility" (14). Turning toward the erotic, McKinney and Meyer positioned this absence as a space of novel possibility and began to imagine creative ways of filling the gaps. To activate diverse histories of erotic pleasure and desire in the archive, McKinney and Meyer sourced material from outside of the archive's limited collections. They did this through two avenues; the first (as mentioned above) was setting up a working digital transfer station within the installation; the second was soliciting eleven artists, activists, and thinkers to contribute descriptions of their own Dream Tapes for the exhibition. Both strategies positioned community-sourced materials as additive solutions to the absences of the archives.

The digital transfer station followed the community archive's ethos by inviting the public to digitize tapes in their personal collections in exchange for having a digital copy added to the ArQuives' collection. McKinney and Meyer hoped that people might unearth the kinds of tapes they were looking for in basements, closets, and garages. They assembled the transfer station from "three pieces of consumer-grade equipment: a VCR, an analog-to-digital video conversion dongle with USB output, and a computer" (2016). Following the DIY ethos of the project, the station created "good enough" digital copies. Visitors could book an appointment to digitize their tape, leaving with their original tape and its digital copy. The digital transfer station activated the installation as a working archive by soliciting, collecting, and digitizing new porn tapes for The ArQuives' collection. The transfer station was a reparative strategy that worked in tandem with the archive's logic and processes.

Picture 8. Hazel Meyer, *Dream Tapes-drawings,* 2016. Ink on Paper, 7 x 10". Photo by Hazel Meyer. Used with permission. https://www.hazelmeyer.com/Dream-Tapes-drawings-2016

The Dream Tapes, however, worked against the logic of the archives by pursued fantasy and fiction as another form of evidence. Centring identities and desires underrepresented in the porn collection, McKinney and Meyer solicited contributions from Toronto's contemporary queer and trans communities to form a new archive of erotic desires. This fictional archive became a site of self-determination and resistance to the dominance of homonormativity in The ArQuives' collections by positioning fantasy as an alternative form of evidence. Through the Dream Tapes, McKinney and Meyer brought diverse perspectives, histories, and desires into the exhibition's narrative. The Dream Tapes were published as a free takeaway booklet and also present within the exhibition space as drawings (Picture 8). The drawing of the Dream Tapes came first, as McKinney and Meyer explain in the exhibition essay, "When Hazel isn't sure what to do about a problem she often starts by drawing it. She sketches out VHS tapes—some real, some imagined—and we decide to invite others into the project to contribute recipes for their own Dream Tapes" (2016). The eleven Dream Tapes are in no way uniform; they vary widely from compilations of actual porn scenes, poetic meditations on desire, half-remembered dreams, and snippets of lived experience. The forms of the Dream Tapes also vary; while most are prose, two of the tapes, by artists jes sachse and Jessica Karuhanga, are videos (uploaded on Instagram).

Meyer's black and white ink drawings illustrate the takeaway and are also present in the exhibition. The drawings depict multiple VHS tapes stacked horizontally and single tapes drawn from the side. Some tapes are labelled with titles such as "Dream Transexual Mixtape" and "Queer as the Sea," while others are labelled with snippets from the Dream Tapes' texts. The Dream Tapes, like every element of the installation, are integrated into the exhibition space. The drawings of individual tapes hang in frames on the pegboard wall. On the opposite side of the room, a tower of dream tapes is blown up and wheat-pasted on the wall. On the table, a pile of the takeaways sits next to issues of *Body Politic*.

Two comics by artist Morgan Sea, which are also in the takeaway, are displayed on the drafting table and wall above. In the first comic, "Transexual Dream Girls 2: A Sort of Film Review," Sea borrows a

tape from The ArQuives titled *TS Dream Girls #2* (2001) and reviews the four scenes. After watching the entire tape (and getting off), Sea bumps the batteries out of her remote and falls asleep. In the second comic, Sea wakes up on the back of a trans centaur porn star in "The Conceptual Archives of Queer Eros and Ephemera." Just as she finds her dream tape in this dream archive, the archive is threatened with degradation, and she awakens. The comic illustrates the gap—at the heart of the exhibition—between what one dreams of finding in the archive versus what one actually encounters in the archive.

The Dream Tapes take up space, both physically as Meyer and Sea's drawings and conceptually as an archive of fantasy, desire, and memory. Several of the Dream Tapes consider how sexual fantasy is linked to queer culture, activism, and world-building. In describing his Dream Tape, trans historian Nick Matte zooms out to ask, what are the material and social conditions necessary for "dreaming, imagining, and more specifically: for sharing one's most intimate or radical fantasies?" (Black et al. 2016). He writes:

> There is something so emotional about creating a new world with pleasure and finding refuge and relief through sex, in healing the damages done, over the years, if only temporarily. I hope to see worlds created through pleasure that meet the needs and rights of all to enjoy, to connect with sexual expression and pleasure, to have in all parts of life the support and capacity to talk, to create and recreate, to mourn, to rage, to enjoy, to heal, to share, to cum, to relish, to live, and to live well (Black et al. 2016).

Matte's tape directly references how the Dream Tapes and certain forms of queer porn, more broadly, might be read as archives of fleeting visionary queer worlds formed through pleasure.

In another Dream Tape, Black trans activist, artist, and scholar Syrus Marcus Ware describes how in the 1970s and 1980s Toronto, "was brimming with activism by QTBIPOCs, organizing around homelessness, LGBTQ activism, HIV/AIDS, education, anti-apartheid activism, disability justice, and challenging racism and other forms of systemic marginalization and oppression to name but a few examples," including "groups like the Gay Asians of Toronto [who] were supporting racialized queers found in the Operation Soap/ Bathhouse raids in 1981" (Black et al. 2016). Ware recounts how trans and queer people of colour were partying, falling in love, and fucking each other amid all of this. On his compilation Dream Tape, Ware included real-life scenes such as, "1. Footage of the black trans (sexxxy) vogue performances at Manhattan on Saturday nights at 2am between 1998–2004," "3. Footage of the black power S & M demos for Aslan Leather on the stage at Pride in 2005," and "4. Footage of the POC focused gay bar in 1940s/50s Toronto on Yonge Street where couples got hot n' heavy upstairs" (Black et al. 2016). Ware's scenes highlight the fact that often the only places where queer and trans people, especially racialized and indigenous queer and trans people, see our sexual desires and fantasies reflected are the spaces we make for ourselves. His tape also brings to light the under-documented but existing history of Toronto's QTBIPOC communities in this expanded archive of queer and trans desire. In his article on the subject, "All Power to All People? Black LGBTTI2QQ Activism, Remembrance and Archiving in Toronto," Ware (2017) argues that "by starting with QTBIPOC narratives, we gain a different entry point into trans and queer collective time lines of resistance and archives, and we interrupt the ways that these omissions produce a whitewashed canon" (172). The Dream Tapes create an avenue to start historizing queer and trans desire from different entry points, perspectives, and knowledges. The contributors do not need to rely on evidence beyond their own desires, fantasies, and lived experience and these, in turn, become evidence for the archive. McKinney and Meyer position the Dream Tapes as an imaginative erotic entry point for redressing the absences in The ArQuives' holdings.

Daisy Chains as Reparative Methodology

In *Tape Condition: degraded,* McKinney and Meyer continually privilege their own desire for history, representation, and community over archival or historical fidelity. Throughout researching and developing the exhibition, they developed a methodology that privileged a "good enough" ethos. This method draws on McKinney's (2020) experiences of researching the digitization initiatives at the Lesbian Herstory Archives and what Lucas Hildebrand (2009) has termed an "aesthetics of access" (15). McKinney and Meyer's experimentations in the exhibition's form are deeply connected to their creative research strategies. Borrowing from their technology McKinney and Meyer (2018b) describe their methodology as a "daisy chain." In the context of video, a daisy chain is a method of duplicating VHS tapes with several linked VCRs. As they describe it, the daisy chain is an imperfect method as each copy in the chain degrades in quality, the chain sacrificing fidelity for access. As McKinney (2018b) narrates it, throughout their research, they began thinking about daisy chains:

> as a queer theory of media, history, and of disrupting the archive . . . Daisy chains exist just a little bit outside of time. They exist to amplify and multiply what has already been recorded, so history, but with an ethos of sharing, circulating, and putting that history, in our case porn, out into the world. Even if the original content gets distorted in the process.

This methodology for working with, amplifying, and publicly circulating partial, incomplete, and fantasy archives has continued to shape the exhibition's afterlife.

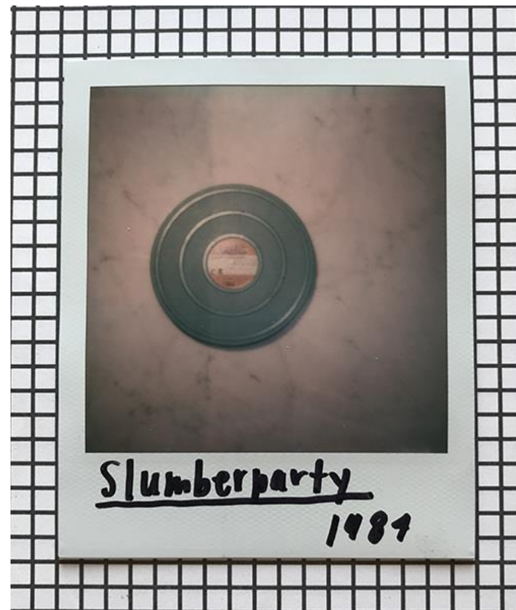
The primary way in which McKinney and Meyer (2018b) have continued to circulate their research is a performance lecture also titled *Tape Condition: degraded*. First staged at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre during the exhibition's opening weeks, they have since performed the lecture numerous times as their research has charted new territory. In the lecture, McKinney narrates their journey through the archive while Meyer visually reconstructs their roaming through images, documents, and web browsers on a projected screen. The archive is animate as McKinney and Meyer share their research. In watching a version of this lecture from 2018, I learned that during the making of *Tape Condition: degraded*, McKinney and Meyer did, in fact, find their dream tape—Chris Bearchell's DIY porn—however, it was not on VHS, and it was not in the archive.

Finding *Slumberparty*

In 1984, Bearchell gathered six friends and lovers in her living room to shoot a lesbian orgy scene on Super 8. The resulting 20-minute film, titled *Slumberparty*, documents an adult slumber party replete with dancing, clowning, stripping, and teasing. Against the backdrop of colorful scarves, blankets, and pillows tossed about the room, the six performers engage in sexual touching and "light bondage." The film's main scene is interspersed with abrupt cuts to an out of focus close-up shot of fingers with chipped black nail polish stroking a vulva. The Do It Yourself lesbian feminist qualities of *Slumberparty* were exactly what McKinney and Meyer had been hoping to find when they began working with the VHS porn tapes in the moving image collection at The ArQuives.

In their research for the exhibition, McKinney and Meyer began to suspect that Bearchell may have made her own porn. This hunch was confirmed when they came across an obituary for Bearchell that mentioned that, "In the early 80s, as part of one of the first series of erotica created by women, [Bearchell] made a small film of herself masturbating" (McKinney and Meyer 2016). Their query of—where was the lesbian smut—became specific, where was Bearchell's homemade porno? After asking around in Toronto's

queer art community for months, a friend of Meyer's followed a hunch and unearthed a reel in her neighbour's garage, which was labelled "Slumberparty, 1984, C.B." (Picture 9). Not knowing what they would find on the film reel or what state of decay it might be in, McKinney and Meyer waited until a queer filmmaker friend could play (and digitize) the reel with them. While the soundtrack recorded on cassette had long since been lost, the film was in reasonably good condition.



Picture 9. Hazel Meyer. *Slumberparty—imagined continuity*. 2018. Photo by Hazel Meyer. Used with permission. https://hazelmeyer.com/Slumberparty-imagined-continuity-2018

As McKinney and Meyer (2018a) pieced it together, *Slumberparty* was made in 1984 by a "mostly queer collective of Toronto-based artists, activists and sex-workers" who called themselves the Positive Pornographers.[9] The collective made the film for a workshop titled "Developing a Women's Erotic Language on Film" at A Space Gallery, an artist-run centre in downtown Toronto, which is why it was recorded on Super 8. As McKinney and Meyer (2018a) write in the description of the film, "*Slumberparty* was made as a direct intervention in Toronto's feminist porn debates. The Positive Pornographers wrote, 'we didn't set out to make a work of art. We set out to make something that might turn us on. Join us for what one previewer called 'Mary Poppins' first lesbian orgy'." Through further research in A Space's archives and interviews with some of the performers in the film, McKinney and Meyer learned about the film's collaborative production and its limited circulation. In making the film, the Positive Pornographers agreed that they all must consent to each screening of *Slumberparty*. However, after its initial screenings, Bearchell maintained custody of the film and continued to show it in her living room for any interested parties. Upset with this unauthorized screening practice, one of the other performers took the reel when she moved out of the house. This shift in possession is how the film ended up in Meyer's friend's neighbour's garage for the next thirty-odd years. Which presented the question, what should be done with the film now?

Slumberparty 2018 is McKinney and Meyer's "remake," a culmination of their research on the film and a product of their creative reparative methodology. As McKinney and Meyer were only able to speak to a few of the performers (the rest they were unable to reach or have passed away), they acknowledge they do

not have permission to screen the original film. Instead, they chose to mediate the film through the same political, formal, and ethical lenses as the exhibition. In *Slumberparty 2018*, the foreground is dominated by a film projector, which plays the film onto a wall—out of focus (Picture 10). As the film starts to play, a voice-over begins describing the context of the film's production and then the action taking place. Audio description is an accessibility tool designed for people with impaired vision, and as McKinney and Meyer learned, it is regularly used for many forms of media, including porn (Meyer, McKinney, and Flavelle 2020). The audio description, written by McKinney and voiced by Amy Fung, describes the film's setting, the performers, what they are wearing (or not wearing) and what they are doing. My earlier description of *Slumberparty* draws from this description rather than a first-person viewing of the original film. This strategy of making the original film available (in a mediated way) to contemporary audiences draws on McKinney and Meyer's "good enough" daisy chain methodology. The audio description is a way of still sharing this important film while preserving its makers' anonymity.

Picture 10. Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer. *Slumberparty 2018*. Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre. Used with permission. https://www.cfmdc.org/film/4629.

As a remake, *Slumberparty 2018* leans into controversies over visual culture and why the circulation of explicit sexual representations is obstructed. As a media historian McKinney is interested in how LGBTQ communities have tried to provide access to sexually explicit sources such as *On Our Backs* without making them fully available to the public (Meyer, McKinney, and Flavelle 2020). These methods have relied on forms of description that stand in for the images. *Slumberparty* recreates this dynamic—the film is playing, but since viewers cannot see it, is it still the film? McKinney and Meyer don't think the ethical decisions they made concerning how to show the film are a licence; they admit it may still be problematic for them to "show" the film (Meyer, McKinney, and Flavelle 2020). However, these are exactly the kinds of questions the film generates; what can be done with these kinds of archives? How can they still be used and circulated? Because so many of us, who have seen so little ourselves reflected in official archives, long to see them. In their description of *Slumberparty 2018* McKinney and Meyer (2018a) draw a connection between "the feminist 'porn wars' of the 1980s, and current feminist debates about the ethics of digitizing sexual imagery in archives," to rethink what it means to access these histories now.

Conclusion

Having written extensively on queer archives and counter archives, Cvetkovich asserts that "we need both, a passion for alternative collections and ongoing attention to absences that can't be filled," because what is at stake is "not just inclusion but transformation of what counts as an archive and innovative approaches to an engaged public history that connects the past with the present to create a history of the present" (Arondekar et al. 2015). In *Tape Condition: degraded* (2016), McKinney and Meyer transform what counts as an archive by developing a counter archival methodology that works both with and against the archive's logic to expand its capacity to hold manifold forms of knowledge and representation. By approaching the archive with a reparative desire-based methodology McKinney and Meyer's counter archive of erotic desire illuminated The ArQuive's gaps in representation while also working to fill them. In constructing an exhibition around what they desired to find, McKinney and Meyer created a space for other narratives and different forms of evidence to enter the archive. While the exhibition makes a strong argument for alternative forms of evidence, the discovery of *Slumberparty* (1984) also demonstrates the potential of creative reparative approaches to uncover, from oblique angles, traditional archival sources. Through their promiscuous production of evidence in the form of gossip, anecdotes, unofficial histories, and dirty desires, McKinney and Meyer expanded The ArQuives' collections and modelled a reparative approach to the archive that works toward more capacious queer sexual histories and futures.

Notes

1. Given the expansive queer theorization of the archive over the last three decades, and the proliferation of counter archives, Ann Cvetkovich (2015) recently noted that her original critique of the archive, "that inspired the concept of 'an archive of feeling' is no longer necessary in quite the same way." She argues that the archive, even as conventionally understood, "has been transformed by queer collections as well as by the creative methods of queer archival research" (xvii). Queer archival and counter archival strategies have melded, blurred, and shaped one another to the point that understanding what an archive is, or can be comprised of, has radically shifted.

2. José Esteban Muñoz (1996) similarly emphasizes the importance of ephemera to queer knowledge production, arguing that ephemeral acts convey queer structures of feeling that cannot be contained in other forms. In "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," Muñoz argues that queer knowledge mandates new forms and challenges hegemonic evidence-based knowledge paradigms. He positions ephemera as a modality of anti-rigour and anti-evidence that expands our understanding of materiality and archives (10).

3. Throughout the 1980s, archive volunteers were fearful of police raids at any time. The police had first seized materials from the archives in a raid on the archives' shared office in 1977 when four editorial collective members of *The Body Politic* were charged with using the mail to distribute obscene material. The offending article by Gerald Hannon titled "Boys Loving Men Loving Boys" explored intergenerational relationships, a taboo topic outside of gay male communities. The fear of police raids was part of the immense anxiety the gay community held of being erased from the historical record. As Rebecca Taves Sheffield (2019) notes in her study of the ArQuives, the publication of James Steakley's articles on homosexuality and the Third Reich in the late 1970s were incredibly motivating to many gay activists. Despite the gay liberation movement's recent successes, many worried about being wiped—again—from history by fascist forces (32-33). This distrust of broader society's commitment to protecting queer history is also one of the primary reasons the ArQuives has remained an independent community archive. The ArQuives has turned down offers from government archives and universities to house the collection for reasons including the impairment of community control, the loss of community access to collections, and the deep-seated fear that if political tides change, there is a risk of destruction.

4. Chris Bearchell was a member of many organizations and campaigns such as the Gay Alliance Towards Equality (GATE), the governing collective of *The Body Politic*, the Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT), the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Ontario (CLGRO), the Committee to Defend John Damien, the Coalition to Stop Anita Bryant, Lesbians Against the Right (LAR), and Maggie's Toronto Sex Worker's Action Project.

5. *The Body Politic* was founded in 1971 as Canada's national gay liberation newspaper. While primarily considered a gay men's publication by the lesbian community, some women, such as Bearchell, who bridged her life and activism between the lesbian feminist and gay liberation movements, wrote for the paper. Lesbians such as Bearchell writing for *The Body Politic* represented the pro-sex/anti-censorship side of the Feminist Sex Wars. In contrast, the anti-porn/pro-censorship side was often argued by lesbians writing for *Broadside: A Feminist Review* (McKinney and Meyer 2018, *Performing Tape Conditioned: degraded).*

6. "Operation Soap" was one event in a string of anti-gay campaigns which the police carried out against one gay community institution after another. As Bearchell notes in an interview, these attacks primarily focused on sexual acts and sexual representation. The gay and lesbian community's mobilization against this sexual repression and police violence had a lasting impact on the gay and lesbian rights in Canada. While police violence, censorship, and political repression against the LGBTQ2S+ community continued for many years after the Bathhouse Raids, it was a watershed moment that changed the public landscape of LGBTQ2S++ activism in Canada (The Canadian Encyclopedia" n.d.). Throughout the 1980s, diverse gay and lesbian community organizations such as Lesbians Against the Right, Gay Asians of Toronto, and Gays and Lesbians Against the Right Everywhere (GLARE) came together to fundraise, organize, and support each other in the face of rising violence, political backlash, and the onset of the AIDS crisis.

7. Two examples of artists working with archives and speculative fiction earlier on are Cheryl Dunye's film *The Watermelon Woman* (1996) and Millie Wilson's exhibition *Fauve Semblant: Peter (A Young English Girl)* (1989) at LACE gallery in Los Angles, California. *The Watermelon Woman* chronicles Dunye's discovery of and fascination with the "Watermelon Woman"—Faye Richards—a Black lesbian actress who performed in early twentieth-century plantation-era movies. In *Fauve Semblant*, Wilson similarly reconstructed the life of a previously unknown early-twentieth-century lesbian painter identified simply as "Peter." *Fauve Semblant* situated Peter as a contemporary of Romaine Brooks, Rosa Bonheur, and Gluck—other recently recovered twentieth-century lesbian painters. However, *The Watermelon Woman* is not a documentary, just as *Fauve Semblant* was not retrospective; both were fabricated from the artists' desires for predecessors who shared their identities and lived experiences. Wilson and Dunye produced the characters of Peter and Faye as believable historical figures through the creation of fictional archives, developed in collaboration with artists Catherine Opie and Zoe Leonard, respectively. Leonard also displays the photographs she created for *The Watermelon Woman* as a separate artwork titled *The Faye Richards Photo Archive* (1993-1996).

8. The works I'm thinking of include Allyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue's performance installation work *Killjoy's Kastle: A Lesbian Feminist Haunted House* (2013-2019); Chris Vargas's project *The Museum of Transgender Hirstory and Art* (MOTHA) and exhibition series *Trans History in 99 Objects* (2015-2019); Ulrike Müller, *Herstory Inventory,* (2009-2013); Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel's short film *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* (2012); Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz's collaborative work; Sharon Hayes, *In The Near Future* (2009); and Cassils, *Becoming an Image* (2012). For more on these works and others see Cvetkovich's (2011) analysis of artists engaging in what she terms "queer archival activism" in "Queer Art of the Counterarchive" and Catherine Grant's (2016) analysis of queer and trans artists employing strategies of re-enactment in "A Time of One's Own."

9. The Positive Pornographers. 1984. *Slumberparty*. Super 8. 20 min.

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