Queering the Archive - Queering the Exhibition (Tours/Bourges, 13-14 Mar 25)

Tours and Bourges, France, Mar 13–14, 2025
Deadline: Jan 26, 2025

Frédéric HERBIN

In France, 2023 marked a turning point in exhibition policies - and sometimes also acquisition strategies - of major cultural institutions. A proliferation of exhibitions ('Habibi, les révolutions de l'amour' at the Institut du monde arabe, 'Exposé.es' at the Palais de Tokyo, 'Over the Rainbow' at the Centre Pompidou, 'Au temps du sida' at the Musée d'art moderne et contemporain in Strasbourg) showed growing institutional interest in works and themes linked to non-heteronormative identities. Undoubtedly, this movement is a latecomer compared to many neighbouring countries. In this sense, it is all the more significant in terms of representation, for identities and issues that have been invisible for far too long. Beyond this particular timeframe of the French landscape, it is the effects and ways of doing, that are at stake in this institutional incorporation, that need to be carefully examined today.

Back in 2020, the organisers of the symposium Arts, cultures et activisms LGBTI et queer[1] noted that the creation and preservation of memories of cultural and activist legacies had become central to the struggles waged by LGBTQI associations[2]. The founding in 2017 of the Collectif Archives LGBTQI+ around the demand for a community archive centre was exemplary in this respect. Since then, the development of a network such as Big Tata, bringing together libraries and archive centres, shows the vitality of this movement. By proposing collaborative, affective and subjective experiments in self-management that distance themselves from the expertise of authorised knowledge production centres, this activism has a counter-institutional charge that opens the way to new practices. As the organisers of the Kandinsky Library's summer university put it, we are invited to rethink the gestures, 'to provoke the uses, the misuses, the situated knowledge, the unthought of, and the new ways of doing things[3]' that accompany collections relating to LGBTQI+ people and cultures. In the light of this movement, we might wonder about the capacity of institutions to take on subjects that they contributed to silence, without questioning and transforming their own inner structures and practices.

While the collection and compiling of documents and artefacts testifying to non-heteronormative identities is a crucial step in combating erasure and the lack of transmission, can they be carried out without calling into question the approaches that usually underpin them? As the students at the Institut national du patrimoine pointed out in their call for papers for the Trouble dans le patrimoine ? study day, 'minority cultural expressions - such as those of the LGBTQIA+ communities – understand themselves as forms of resistance to the norm, and are expressed outside official institutions[4]'. It is therefore necessary to reflect on practices that can accommodate, without excessively categorising and defining, freezing and institutionalising, gestures and ways of acting that are different and often dissident. Sam Bourcier refers, for example, to 'community compe-

tence, which makes it possible to index LGBTQI archives with the right keywords[5]'. We could also refer to artists who appropriate the archive to produce new narratives, challenging the relationships of authority involved in the use of documents and the writing of history, pointing out 'omissions, absences and what has been deliberately concealed or destroyed[6]'. All in all, it is the whole process, from collecting to mediating and exhibiting objects, that needs to be rethought from scratch.
Our symposium aims to contribute to this process by focusing on alternative practices relating minority collections, memories and heritages. It is about to consider ways of challenging the dominant norms in terms of heritage constitution, exhibition and the narratives they contribute to impose. Taking into account the diversities of gender and sexuality, as well as their intersections with other registers of discrimination, the queer field of thought plays a full part in this contestation. We therefore invite the contributors to the symposium to explore what the possibility of a 'queer agency' might mean, of an openness to 'the object that slips away[7]' for this set of practices that accompany archives and collections. Following Jennifer Tybuczy, we want to 'call for, describe, and enact queer display praxis[8]'. We encourage contributions from all fields of human sciences and archival, curatorial and artistic practices. Our aim is to fertilise a multidisciplinary and diachronic approach to the addressed themes.

Several axis seem to be important to be addressed during this symposium:
– Alternative, minority and queer collections:
What counter-institutional examples can nourish our reflections? What forms are developed by artists? What practices are deployed among these alternative examples?
– Collection, indexing and classification:
How can we rethink the life cycle of the archive outside of the current normative frames? What place for the sensitive facing conservation imperatives? How can we resolve the tensions between the historicity of the archive and the need to keep it alive and active? What are the limits of what can be documented, traced, classified?
– Dissident or missing stories and histories:
Can the diversity of identities continue to defy the norm, once integrating public collections and stories? How can we negotiate between visibility and recuperation within institutions? What solution can be found when no document can fill the gap? Are we able to bring out the narratives of people from disadvantaged and/or racialised backgrounds for example? Can we introduce these data into the rereading of existing collections? What forms of (interventions) are proposed by artists facing these different questions?

This conference is part of the Queering the Exhibition - Queering the Archive research project, run by the École nationale supérieure d'art de Bourges and the École supérieure d'art et de design de TALM-Tours, in collaboration with the InTRu laboratory (EA 6301 - University of Tours). It is supported by the French Ministry of Culture.

Submission deadline: January 26th 2025

Conditions of submission:
Proposals (title and abstract of no more than 3,000 characters), together with a brief presentation of the person(s)'s research (with contact details and title, institution or organisation to which they belong if applicable), should be sent to:

frederic.herbin@ensa-bourges.fr, andreas-maria.fohr@ensa-bourges.fr, fred.morin@talm.fr, sandra.delacourt@talm.fr and benoit.buquet@univ-tours.fr.
Answers will be given at the beginning of February. Travel expenses may be covered by the organising bodies in order to encourage participation by people with no institutional ties.

École nationale supérieure d'art de Bourges : http://www.ensa-bourges.fr
École supérieure d'art et de design de TALM-Tours : https://esad-talm.fr
InTRu - Université François-Rabelais de Tours : http://www.intru.univ-tours.fr

Organised by :
Benoît Buquet (Université de Tours – InTRu)
Sandra Delacourt (École supérieure d'art et de design de TALM-Tours – HiCSA)
Frédéric Herbin (École Nationale Supérieure d'Art de Bourges – InTRu)
Andreas Maria Fohr (École Nationale Supérieure d'Art de Bourges)
Fred Morin (École supérieure d'art et de design de TALM-Tours)

[1] « Arts, cultures et activismes LGBTI et queer », Call for contributions, Calenda, published on January 30th 2020, https://doi.org/10.58079/14bm.

[2] See also the more recent issue of Trou Noir, n'3, September 2024, « Enjeux historiques et conflits mémoriels des sexualités dissidentes ».

[3] « Introduction », Journal de l'Université d'été de la Bibliothèque Kandinsky, n° 9, 2023, « La Queerness face aux archives », p. 1.

[4] « Trouble dans le patrimoine? », Call for contributions, Calenda, published on October 18th 2023, https://doi.org/10.58079/1bx0.

[5] « Les archontes ont du souci à se faire », Sociocriticism [Online], XXXV-1, 2020, online on june 1st, 2020. URL : http://interfas.univ-tlse2.fr/sociocriticism/2740.

[6] Giovanna Zapperi, L'avenir du passé. Art contemporain et politiques de l'archive, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Ecole nationale supérieure d'art de Bourges, 2016, p. 7.

[7] Sara Ahmed, « Orientations: Towards a Queer Phenomenology », GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, Volume 12, Number 4, 2006, p. 566.

[8] Jennifer Tyburczy, Sex Museums. The Politics and Performance of Display, Chicago, Londres, The University of Chicago Press, 2016, xvii.

Reference:
CFP: Queering the Archive - Queering the Exhibition (Tours/Bourges, 13-14 Mar 25). In: ArtHist.net, Dec 18, 2024 (accessed Nov 23, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/43579>.