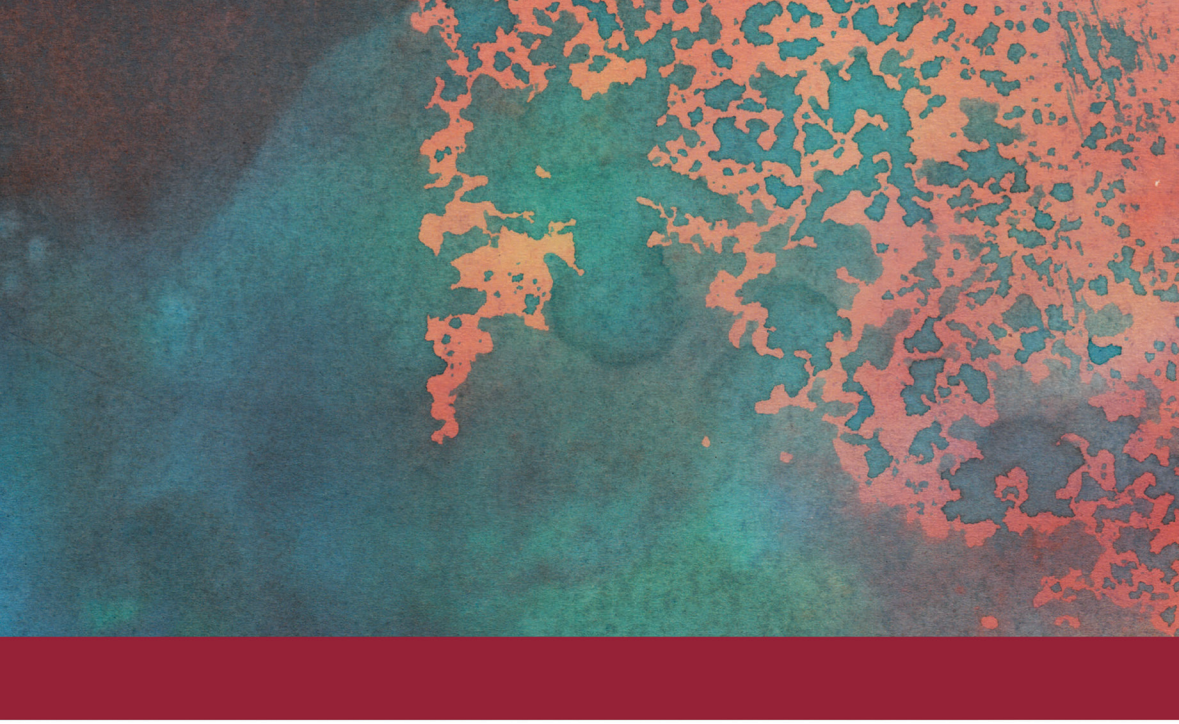

THE QUEER MUSEUM

RADICAL INCLUSION AND WESTERN MUSEOLOGY

Erica Elizabeth MacDonald Robenalt

The Queer Museum

The Queer Museum examines how relationships between institutions and LGBTQ+ communities function and how they help to define queer museum practice.

Analysing what it means to queer the museum in Western contexts, the book builds upon and challenges texts about inclusionary, activist museum practice and discusses the ways in which Othered communities are engaged with and represented. Arguing that an institution's understanding of queerness is directly related to the kind, and extent, of change pursued by the museum, the author clarifies that governance structures, staff hierarchies, funding and relationships to queer communities affect the way queering might be pursued. The analysis looks critically at exhibitions and institutions and particularly forefronts the experiences of museum practitioners. It argues that practical changes that positively affect museums' long-term relationships with marginalised communities are critical. The book also considers the future of the museum by drawing on queer theories of utopia, futurity, failure and amateurism to complicate understandings of the queer museum and its relationship to people and objects.

The Queer Museum will be of interest to students and academics in museum and heritage studies, art history and archival studies. It will also be an essential reading for museum and arts sector practitioners who seek to do and engage with this kind of work.

Erica Elizabeth MacDonald Robenalt (she/her) is a recent graduate from Newcastle University and an independent researcher. Her research focuses on intersections between queer theory and museology to better understand the 'queer museum'. Looking at museum exhibitions and programming, community relationships and institutional identity through the lens of queer utopia and futurity, her work critically engages with inclusivity and social justice oriented museal discourses.

The Queer Museum

Radical Inclusion and Western Museology

Erica Elizabeth MacDonald Robenalt

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACT UP	AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power
AAM	American Alliance of Museums
AfD	*Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany)
ALMS	Archives, Libraries, Museums, Special Collections
BAME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour
BM	The British Museum
BTTG	The Board of Trustees of Tate Gallery
CBS	*Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* (Statistics Netherlands)
COMCOL:ICOM	Committee for Collecting: International Council of Museums
DKLB	*Stiftung Deutsche Klassenlotterie Berlin* (German National Lottery Foundation)
GLBT	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender
GoMA	Gallery of Modern Art
HKW	*Haus der Kulturen der Welt* (House of World Cultures)
ICOM	International Council of Museums
IHLIA	International Homo/Lesbian Information Centre and Archive
LGBTIQ*	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans-, Intersex, Queer, * all other gender identities and sexualities not encapsulated by the previous terms
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans-, Queer, + all other sexualities and/or gender identities not encompassed by the previous terms
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans-, Queer, Intersex
LGBTTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer
MA	Museums Association
MMM	Merseyside Maritime Museum
MOL	Museum of London
MoMA	Museum of Modern Art
NMGM	National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside
NML	National Museums Liverpool
POC	People of Colour

SMU	Schwules Museum
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	United States of America
V&A	Victoria & Albert Museum
VAM	Van Abbemuseum

1 Introduction

A group of activists bands together in 1985 to create one of the first gay museums in the world. A master's student walks through Washington Square Park in 2014 asking herself, why do museums persist with and insist upon their omissions and careful language around LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-, queer, + all other sexualities and/or gender identities not encompassed by the previous terms) lives and histories? A rainbow flag is raised in 2017, flapping gallantly against the breezes of the Thames, signalling a promise for the present and future. In the years since the landmark LGBTQ+ exhibition *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* shown at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, DC, USA in the autumn of 2010 (National Portrait Gallery, 2023), there has been growing queer representation in museums around the world (if not yet in a majority of countries).[1] For example, in England and the USA the fiftieth anniversaries of the passing of the *Sexual Offences Act 1967* (decreeing the partial decriminalisation of male homosexuality in England and Wales) and the Stonewall Uprising[2] in 2017 and 2019, respectively, have prompted many museums, art galleries and heritage sites to engage with LGBTQ+ communities to an unprecedented degree. This book seeks to grapple with the nature of that representation and engagement now that it is being prioritised (to varying extents) by a growing number of institutions. However, this is not to create a rosy-hued narrative of progression from no representation to a pinnacle in which homo- and trans-phobia have disappeared. For example, the Schwules Museum (SMU) (one of the only LGBTQ+-focused museums in the world and the focus of Chapter 6) was shot at and damaged overnight in February 2023 and a further four times in the proceeding months (SMU, 2023d, 2023e). This kind of targeted vandalism has happened at the museum before – though luckily only damaging property and not harming any staff or visitors. This violence sits alongside increasingly extreme anti-LGBTQ+ and particularly anti-trans- rhetoric stemming from far-right ideologies and many conservative political parties in the West (John, 2021; Kane, 2022; Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2022). These disturbing and sometimes life-threatening events signal the increasing importance for museums to engage with and represent LGBTQ+ communities in a respectful and mutually beneficial way. As Conlan (2010) reminds us, visibility, representation and recognition in the museum can be 'urgent and life-giving'.

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With these contemporary events in mind, this book critically analyses what it means to queer the museum in a Western context by looking at four examples of queer-related museum programming and/or practice and introduces the idea of the 'queer utopic museum'. *Queer* is here used as a verb which signifies the subversion and/or deconstruction of often unquestioned ways of doing and being. In discussing these institutions and the queer utopic museum, I argue that there is not just one way to approach queering or to reach a queer institution, and equally, that queering requires a deeply critical and self-reflexive interrogation into all aspects of museum practice; that an institution's queerness is dependent on their engagement with and relationship to local LGBTQ+ communities and other marginalised groups; and that queering is an iterative practice which must continue indefinitely. The research is also grounded in recent trends in Anglophone museology which have emphasised a social justice-oriented, community-inclusive framework. These discourses forefront the need to understand the museum not as an institution which educates the public as a top-down directive but rather as a pluralised, open space which facilitates affective experiences for visitors and incorporates marginalised communities and ways of knowing (Crooke, 2007; Golding, 2013; Smith and Campbell, 2015; Janes and Sandell, 2019; Sullivan and Middleton, 2019). A subset of this scholarship focuses on the relationship between LGBTQ+ people and/or communities with museums and the ways in which this might queer the museum and our understanding of them (Mills, 2008; Winchester, 2012; Sandell, 2017; Sullivan and Middleton, 2019; Adair and Levin, 2020).

I have opted to use a queer theoretical framework to understand museum practice because it allows for a deep consideration of objects, displays, audiences, governance structures and community engagement through its use as an enigmatic, disruptive, elastic epistemology (Jagose, 1996; Hall, 2003). Anglophone museology often frames the way museums represent LGBTQ+ stories and engage with queer communities through the lenses of inclusivity and social justice. Alongside and in conjunction with these, I find queer theory an appropriate and helpful lens to adopt because it both foregrounds queerness and can challenge these framings where they are limiting as well. First established in the early 1990s, queer theory builds upon feminist, postcolonial, postmodernist and poststructuralist thought, to offer a unique theoretical position (Butler, 1990, 1993; Sedgwick, 1990, 1992; de Lauretis, 1991; Warner, 1993). It emphasises the intersectional lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people as both valid and inimitably important beings from which to learn while also insisting upon the necessity of destabilising ableist, capitalist, classist, colonial, homophobic, patriarchal, sexist and transphobic ways of doing and being. It is an open-ended and ever-evolving mode of thought rooted in activism and protest. These qualities make it an important alternative, though complementary, lens through which to consider museums especially as Anglophone museology and practice trends towards community involvement, institutional transparency and social justice.

The methodological and analytic framework of this research combines elements from both museology and queer theory as the best way to critically understand the queer museum. It utilises qualitative research methods including case

studies; semi-structured in-depth interviews with museum practitioners, activists, academics and artists; archival research; document, exhibition and programming analysis; limited visitor observation and institutional analysis to look at four museum examples each of which used 'queerness' as a way to frame their programming or ideological positioning. These examples include the queer/ing[3] practice of Tate Britain in London, UK, the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, UK, the Van Abbemuseum (VAM) in Eindhoven, the Netherlands and the Schwules Museum (SMU) in Berlin, Germany. In addition to focusing on practical means by which museums engage with queer communities and narratives, this book also utilises queer theoretical texts in order to understand queering the museum beyond identity-focused definitions. That is, it seeks to engage in an expanded view of queerness that moves away from essentialist definitions and instead challenges the idea of stable (if non-normative) identity categories like LGBT. As Jones argues, 'The idea that having a fixed or stable identity is a human need is socially constructed… While having fixed subjectivities is a social need, there is no reason to believe that having a stable identity is a human need' (2009, p. 5). Rather, as Duggan states,

> The continuing work of queer politics and theory is to open up possibilities for coalition across barriers of class, race, and gender, and to somehow satisfy the paradoxical necessity of recognizing differences, while producing (provisional) unity. Can we avoid the dead end of various nationalisms and separatisms, without producing a bankrupt universalism?
>
> (1992, p. 26)

Though queering was often understood and utilised to different effect at each institution, they all provide important examples of how museum practitioners try to reflect on or work through the relationship between LGBTQ+ representation and queer theory.

It should be noted that the institutions here discussed are situated in Western European countries wherein LGBTQ+ people are generally free to exist and enjoy legal protections not afforded in other parts of the world. However, prejudice and homo-, lesbo-, and trans-phobic acts still perpetuate in them. This persistent discrimination and its effect on societal institutions should not be underestimated. For example, in 2017 the UK-based LGBTQ+ rights charity Stonewall found that 21% of LGBTQ+ people in the UK (with over 5,000 people surveyed) had experienced a hate crime or incident due to sexual orientation and/or gender identity (with that rising to 41% when looking specifically at trans- people), 38% of LGBTQ+ people in the Netherlands (of 140,000 surveyed from 28 EU Member States and the UK, Serbia and North Macedonia) reported some form of harassment (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019), and Reuters reported that hate crimes against LGBT+ people in Germany increased 36% in 2020 with 782 crimes against LGBT+ people being reported (Anarte, 2021). These statistics may not be surprising given the relatively recent histories of the criminalisation of male homosexuality in the UK, the Netherlands and Germany nor with the recent rise of certain far-right ideologies and their assorted prejudices

in the West more generally. It is important to understand then, that despite the current rights afforded to most LGBTQ+[4] people in the West, male homosexuality was only partially decriminalised in England and Wales in 1967 (as discussed in chapters 3 and 4), in West Germany in 1969, in the Netherlands in 1971, in Scotland in 1980, in Northern Ireland in 1982 and East Germany (or the German Democratic Republic) in 1989 (Sweet, 1998; Moeller, 2010; Government of the Netherlands, 2018; British Parliament, 2020). The restrictions and definitions of male same-sex desire evolved differently in each country. The Netherlands was the first nation to legalise same-sex marriage in 2001, while it was only legalised in Northern Ireland in 2020 (Government of the Netherlands, 2018; The National Archives, 2019b). Lesbian sexuality has never been criminalised in the same way, though social prejudice against it was just as prevalent. The history of trans- rights and the freedom of gender expression in each country differs as well. However, since the early 2000s each country has legally enshrined some protections for trans- people and included anti-discrimination wording to their legal frameworks (ILGA-Europe, 2020). Unfortunately, this has not completely eradicated the violence done to and prejudice towards trans- people (Transgender Europe, 2018; van den Brink and Dunne, 2018). However, these histories and legal reforms make it possible for museums within each country to incorporate LGBTQ+ representation without fear of persecution, even if institutions and individuals must sometimes still combat homophobia and heterosexism.

Defining a Queer Museology

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s Western museologists and practitioners have criticised the lack of LGBTQ+ representation in museums (Liddiard, 1996, 2004; Burdon, 2000; Sandell, 2002; Vanegas, 2002). In practice, this trend is changing as there are many global examples[5] of museums which are starting to uncover previously 'hidden'[6] or unacknowledged queer narratives both in their display of objects and their public programming – though most often seen in a Western context. Levin's (2010) anthology includes several chapters concerning the lack of or the difficulty in producing LGBTQ+-focused exhibitions, however more in-depth discussions of such representation have only been published more recently (Tyburczy, 2016; Sandell, 2017; Sullivan and Middleton, 2019; Adair and Levin, 2020). These texts primarily discuss museums in the USA, the UK and Australia, though Adair and Levin's edited collection contains more global examples as well. This book, therefore, seeks to add to the limited literature concerning LGBTQ+ representation in museums and further elaborate on recent examples in the UK, the Netherlands and Germany.[7] Further, though the aforementioned texts describe important examples of LGBTQ+ exhibitions and mark calls to action for museum practitioners, few (with the exception of Tyburczy, 2016) actively engage with queer theoretical texts in their analyses. The following chapters seek to critically discuss recent examples of queer museum practice and important veins in queer theory – most prominently including futurity, failure and utopia – in order to widen perspectives of queer museology.

To understand what is meant by queering the museum, it is important to define what is meant by queer. It is often used as an identity term by people who feel disconnected from heteronormative understandings of gender and sexuality (Jagose, 1996). However, it is also used theoretically both in reference to LGBTQ+ people and to denote a radical, non-normative subject position in multiple disciplines. Heteronormativity can be understood as the Western social norm which assumes that heterosexual relationships represent an overwhelming majority of the population and further that it '…is the dominant sexual model of social, cultural, political, and economic organization, including the way it organizes identities, experiences, regimes of truth and knowledge, and ideologies of gender and sex' (Jeppesen, 2016). As Green (2007) articulates, the hallmarks of queer theory include on the one hand radical deconstructionism which questions sexual orientations and on the other, radical subversion which disrupts the normalisation of heterosexuality and casts non-heteronormative practices and subjects as sites of resistance. He finally argues that queer theorists are united in their deconstructionist orientation to destabilise the 'norm'. Jagose further summarises '…that queer is a "zone of possibilities" (Edelman, 1994, p. 114) always inflected by a sense of potentiality that it cannot yet quite articulate' (1996, p. 2). Finally, Killian states, 'Queering would be the deconstruction of normality without the goal of a new normal. We don't know what these structures might look like and they too will change' (2018, p. 7). In the context of the museum then, queering asks not only to interrogate the ways in which LGBTQ+ narratives are told but further to destabilise notions of what the museum is and can be.

In addition to the use of a queer theoretical framework, this book discusses the importance of 'queer communities' and how their relationship to a museum affects its queering practice. The term 'queer community' often refers to different groups of people in different contexts. There is no steadfast definition and at times those understood as 'belonging' from the outside do not consider themselves as such. As well, there is sometimes division within such communities as discussed further in Chapter 6. I here use it to speak collectively about groups of LGBTQ+ identified people who come together within the museum spaces of the case study institutions. This definition is not meant to imply any organisation or membership on the part of the community beyond their involvement with the museum. As Sullivan (2003) argues, queer communities are transient, evolving and locally contingent. The idea of a 'queer community' has its foundations in lesbian and gay organisations fighting to create a political entity, that is, to be recognised as a minority group requiring rights to privacy and equality (Duggan, 1992). Duggan further argues a queer community,

> …is often used to construct a collectivity no longer defined solely by the gender of its members' sexual partners. This new community is unified only by a shared dissent from the dominant organization of sex and gender. But not every individual or group that adopts the name 'queer' means to invoke these altered boundaries.
>
> (ibid., p. 20)

She points to the complexity of the term and how it is used differently by various organisations, and within them, individuals might use it differently still. Due to its varied use, it is important to remember that an institution's use of 'queer community' (or 'queer constituency' as in Chapter 5) may not be shared by those individuals involved.

Due to the mutable nature of queer/ing, there is no collective agreement on what it means to queer the museum or what a queer museum looks like. This book supports such a characteristic and views queering the museum as an open-ended project reliant on both auto-institutional and community critique that leads to practical change which benefits the museum and the communities it represents. It is important both that the museum is able to increase its relevance to and respect of marginalised communities and that those communities can make tangible, valuable relationships with the museum in the way they so deem. Due to the varying remits of different museums and the vastness of museum work, these changes and relationships will manifest differently at every institution. Mills argues that one should '[Transform] the question "Who is queer?" into *why* and *how* one finds queerness historically or culturally', as a '…means of responding to the gaps and omissions that condition museum practice, and of ensuring that the meaning-making structures of the museum are themselves subjected to evaluation and critique' (2008, p. 50, italics original). Similarly, Steorn asserts,

> Museums with ambitions to be queer need to reflect on their role as institutions and as producers and reproducers of both power and normative meaning. They should allow for queer presences to occur on their own terms rather than co-opt LGBT culture into their favored structures and forms of exposition.
>
> (2018, p. 72)

Sullivan and Middleton further this line of thinking by arguing, 'Queer curatorship…is not the basis on which to found hierarchies of queerness, but rather, a heterogeneous, open-ended process of creative critical praxis to which we can all contribute and from which we can all learn' (2018). In agreement with Mills (2008) and Steorn (2018), they argue that it is important to think critically not only about what a museum does, but how practitioners know to do what they do. That is, it is important that queering the museum not only looks at practice but the way those practices come into being and why they are continued. For Sullivan and Middleton, '…it is the intersecting, often contradictory nature of multiple approaches employed by museums that enhance their ability to participate in critical self-reflection and achieve previously unimaginable outcomes' (2019, p. 9). In accordance with these practitioners, I assert that it is necessary to look at multiple areas of the museum (including, for example, curatorial practice, governance and community engagement) to see the ways processes might be hindered by heteronormative assumptions.

Sandell (2017) too argues that one must look more broadly at museums as institutions with capacity for change. He contends that museums can no longer

claim a neutral position but must instead work to denounce instances in which people are treated unfairly due to issues of gender or sexual differences. He argues,

> Museums…have moral agency as sites within which the ethical norms that frame human rights negotiations are articulated, continually recast and disseminated – a capacity to contribute to broader processes of social and political change that is relatively underexplored and poorly understood in both museum studies and the field of human rights.
>
> (ibid., p. 7)

Both Sandell (ibid.) and Sullivan and Middleton (2019, 2020) lay out an ethical framework by which to understand why museums should tell LGBTQ+ stories. Sandell (2017) utilises a humanitarian lens which characterises inclusive museum practice as a moral obligation for the museum. Whereas Sullivan and Middleton argue that though this standpoint is

> …commendable…in practice, inclusion strategies often fail to really grapple with the complexities of difference, of lived, embodied histories and habituated dispositions, or to undertake the kind of critical self-reflection that is imperative if museums are to play an active role in radical change.
>
> (2019, p. 18)

Their subsequent scholarship expands upon this notion to argue it is queer to see ethics as a dynamic process of ongoing negotiation without a definitive solution (Sullivan and Middleton, 2020). They argue this is not nihilistic but rather a challenge to complicate what 'doing good' in museums looks like and is based upon. Both positions are critical when assessing what it means to queer the museum. In conducting my own analysis, I assimilate both positions by treating the inclusion of LGBTQ+ narratives in museums as an assumed baseline which all museums could and should meet (as underlined by an understanding of Sandell's (2017) moral imperative) but also that by highlighting and furthering Sullivan and Middleton's position that museological inclusivity discourses themselves need to be queered. That is, because this book looks at museums which are already on their way to fulfilling their moral obligation to be inclusive of LGBTQ+ narratives as Sandell describes, it also seeks to be critical of the way that inclusion is pursued by using a queer theoretical lens instead of the ethical one used by Sullivan and Middleton. Chapters 3–7 use queer theoretical ideas of futurity, utopia, failure and amateurism in order to think critically about instances in which queer representation has occurred.

In addition to broad calls to queer whole museums and our understanding of them, Tyburczy (2016) narrows the focus within queer museology to think specifically about display as a site for queering. Influenced by her own work as a curator for the Leather Archives and Museum in Chicago, IL, USA, she defines 'queer

curatorship' as 'a process of heritage making at public history sites dedicated to physicalizing the encounter with diverse sexual histories…' (ibid., p. 192). She further identifies,

> …queer curatorship as an experimental display tactic that stages alternative spatial configurations for two distinct purposes: (1) to expose how traditional museums socialize heteronormative relationships between objects and visitors and (2) to cope with ethically fraught objects of queer cultures… As a practice, queer curatorship approaches display spaces as sites for expanding the scope of the theoretical genealogy of performativity theory.
>
> (ibid., p. 175)

Though her work influences this book, her focus on sex museums and the telling of explicit queer histories limits the ways it can extrapolate on to, for example, art galleries, or queer narratives which do not deal directly with explicit queer desire. In comparison, Mills argues that queer history should not be presented as a linear progression from repression to visibility, but rather that museums should abandon such tactics '… in favour of stories that take as their point of departure sexual intensities, tastes and roles, gender dissonances, dispositions and styles, queer feelings, emotions and desires' (2010, p. 86). Both Tyburczy (2016) and Mills (2010) offer an alternative to understanding queer displays in museums. Ways of understanding the relationship between queer objects and visitors are important and are further discussed in reference to various curatorial projects undertaken at the case study museums in Chapters 3–6.

Queer Futurity and Failure at the Museum

Building upon the existing queer museological scholarship discussed earlier (and further in Chapter 2), this book works to argue that the museum, though a nebulous and collaborative institution that varies from iteration to iteration, can be a 'utopic' Muñozian space for queer memory and activity which unsettles common working practices and ideas of queer representation. It incorporates queer and performance theorist José Esteban Muñoz's (2009) ideas as a way to conceive of the museum as a critical site for queer and queering experiences, performances and remembrances. It holds that museums are '…places in which physical, cognitive and emotional experiences are to be had; as places that incite change and which are themselves changing' (Walklate, 2019, p. 215). I take Muñoz's understanding of '…queerness as a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity' (2009, p. 16) as a starting point to understand the queer museum as an evolving process which is self-critical of its past and present in order to strive for a queerer future. Applying Muñoz's postponement of queerness for the future has an important theoretical implication for the museum. There is a paradox more broadly within queer theory – how to maintain an anti-normative, radical position which promotes and celebrates difference without normalisation or co-option – that is especially tricky

to reconcile in institutional settings like museums. However, if we pair this idea that queerness is an impossibility for museums with Muñoz's conception of queerness as a utopic future which though glimpsed through instances of queer aesthetics remains intangible, then we can better understand how attempts to queer a museum do not make a museum queer in all instances and forever. Therefore, through the analysis of how LGBTQ+ representation occurs in four different museums and how certain practices can be understood as 'effective' or 'successful' queering museum work, I do not and could not make claims towards what a finalised 'queer museum' should look like. I further argue that if museums neglect these discourses and calls for change they become 'Out of step with the dynamics of changing ideas from both the academy and its neighbouring communities' and '…[are] in danger of not only being out of touch with the real, passionate and dynamic world of diverse and ever-changing opinion, but also of continuing to patrol a static world of petrified thought' (Lynch, 2013, p. 11). Finally, the book echoes museologist Janet Marstine's call,

> …for the transformation of the museum from a site of worship and awe to one of discourse and critical reflection that is committed to examining unsettling histories with sensitivity to all parties; they look to a museum that is transparent in its decision-making and willing to share power.
>
> (2006, p. 5)

In considering a future-oriented queer museum, it is important to understand how the museum can be understood as a place to be experienced affectively[8] (Golding, 2013; Varutti, 2023) in which to be exposed to new narratives and knowledges from both other cultures and one's own (Mason, Robinson and Coffield, 2018). The idea of newness can be related to futurity: new knowledges utilised to envision a queer future. Every museum visit is new to the visitor even when encountering historical objects or if they have visited before. That is, changes within the museum itself or with personal circumstance dictate or create a new experience with each visit. The museum experience can evoke new ideas and emotional reactions and provide a forum dedicated to investigating the parts of culture their collections represent (Molina, 2005; Sandell, 2007; Cole, 2014). As Whitehead (2009, 2016) argues, engagement with museum displays is bodily, sensory and affective. Bozoğlu (2020) furthers this to add that emotion is also part of the choreography of a museum visit. Recent museum studies and heritage scholars are turning to affect theory in order to better understand how museum displays are experienced, felt and interpreted. Witcomb, for example, explains,

> In using the concept of affect…I am interested in pursuing how sensorial, embodied forms of knowledge that express themselves though (*sic*) feelings in response to the material, aesthetic, and spatial qualities of the exhibition/interpretation play a role in the production of meaning rather than focusing on the more explicit rational, information based content of the display.
>
> (2013, p. 256)

I conjoin these understandings of museums with Muñoz's suggestion that

> …holding queerness in a sort of ontologically humble state, under a conceptual grid in which we do not claim to always already know queerness in the world, potentially staves off the ossifying effects of neoliberal ideology and the degradation of politics brought about by representations of queerness in contemporary popular culture.
>
> (2009, p. 22)

That is, a queer museum is one which plays with ideas of affect, temporality and certainty. For Muñoz, queerness is forever postponed, glimpsed, he argues, in a utopia which crests the horizon. As described further in Chapter 4, he uses 'ecstatic time' as a way to describe queer temporality and its ability to disengage from the 'stranglehold' of straight time. For him, it is intimately connected both to futurity and utopia, and can be felt in moments both of pleasure and contemplation.

In addition to the work of other queer museologists and Muñoz (2009), this book is also deeply influenced by scholarship around queer and failure and amateurism, specifically the work of Jack Halberstam (2011). He argues, 'The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being' (ibid., p. 88). Although failure is perhaps a strange or seemingly unfavourable lens by which to consider the museum, it provides an essential foundation from which to argue that the queer museum project is never finished, and indeed must be continually reiterated. Although each queer project or institutional change marks a step forward, it also represents an interminable failure in its inability to maintain the queer future or utopia which queer projects seek. In light of ideas about queer failure which Halberstam (ibid.) grounds in low culture and unbecoming,[9] Muñoz connects it directly to utopia. He argues, 'Utopia can never be prescriptive and is always destined to fail' (2009, p. 173). Therefore, though museums now strive to be 'inclusive' and 'community-oriented', or somehow utopically representative of as many communities and histories as possible, I argue they will always be destined to fail. Despite this, every decision, exhibition or experiment is something to be learned from and, however successful, will always remain in the past. Although this is a different attitude towards queer failure than Halberstam's (2011) incitement to radical unbecoming and anti-mastery, this book utilises both authors' ideas about the teachings of failure to understand how a museum might be queered.

Queer Research

In addition to understanding the foundations set by queer museologists and theorists, it is important to consider not only how to queer museums but how to do queer research about them. It is necessary to question what it means to conduct queer research on a queer subject as a queer researcher. Below, I address issues of researcher identity and assert the necessity of reflexivity for this kind of queer

qualitative research. As well, I attempt to further define how 'queer' is understood generally and how it is utilised in this research.

It is important to be both self-critical and self-reflexive in pursuing queer research (Namaste, 2003; cited in Manning, 2009). This is necessary because queerness is an elusive notion, intrinsically in flux. However, a queer subject and researcher fuse to lend a queer framework to the results and analysis of this research despite its reliance on 'mainstream' qualitative methodologies typically used in the humanities (Berg and Lune, 2012). This builds on Browne and Nash's (2016) assertion that there is no real 'queer method' because queer lives and ideas can be discussed using any method. By nature, queerness pursues the limitless. Following feminist ideology, Browne and Nash explain that 'methods themselves [have] no inherent epistemological or ontological qualities; rather how they are deployed in the pursuit of certain forms of knowledge produced data that supported feminist ways of knowing, and contested masculinist forms of knowledges' (ibid., p. 11). Additionally, they acknowledge, ' "Queer research" can be any form of research positioned within conceptual frameworks that highlight the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting power relations' (ibid., p. 4). Therefore, this research has utilised traditional methodologies while being influenced by queer ideologies with the goal that the end result both disrupts past knowledge of museums and is critical of museums' engagement with queer representation.

Defining Queer

In the hopes of gaining a shared understanding with the reader about what a queer museum might be, it is necessary to define how 'queer' has been used in and characterised by Western society and Anglophone queer theory as introduced earlier. Queer is inscrutable, variable and typified by transformation and contradiction. It has no concrete definition in any given discipline, though this proves its utility. However, it is helpful to clarify its different past uses so as to understand the context of its use in this research. Queerness can be divided into three categories: theory, identity and politics. These are never hard distinctions, and can overlap in a person, in practice or in a piece of writing. Within this book, all aspects are integral to the following discussions, analysis and the understanding of a queer utopic museum.

According to Hall (2003), key descriptors of queer include disruptive, tactical, performative, fractured and contingent. He argues, queering '…may not destroy… systems but it certainly presses upon them, torturing their lines of demarcation, pressuring their easy designations' (ibid., p. 14). The idea that queer might not destroy a system, but merely 'torture' it out of an easy acceptance is an important distinction from anarchism – though some queer theorists do take a more anarchic position, for example, Jack Halberstam (2011).[10] Queer might seek disruption but not necessarily total annihilation. This is useful in considering how certain institutions – here specifically the museum – or social structures may be re-made queerly. That is, its traditions are upended, tortured into something new, but

recognisable. This 'pressure' can manifest in many ways and is further discussed in Chapters 3–6.

More familiar might be queer's use as an adjective to describe individuals, whether positively or pejoratively. Today, its most prevalent use is as a term which covers a range of identities without forcing a specificity beyond not heterosexual. It is often tacked on to the end of LGBTQ (sometimes +) as an umbrella term for those who fall outside those limited abbreviations. However, it is not only used by those for whom LGBT does not apply, but as a further philosophical rejection of the ways in which human gender and sexuality is and has been defined and the limits of language which characterise the discussion. Mills summarises Edelman's position by arguing,

> In this definition, queer generates resistance to determinations of meaning, identity, and teleology. 'Never a matter of being or be- coming', in the last analysis it is a site of rupture and opposition, a 'violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law'.
>
> (2008, p. 46, citing Edelman, 2004, p. 25)

It is the emphasis on the *beyond* which roots queer identity in the political and theoretical as well. It is important to note that Sedgwick argues that queerness only garners meaning '*…when attached to the first person…*' (1994, p. 9, italics original) and becomes a matter of performance and 'experimental self-perception'. Finally, like Hall (2003), this research understands that queer is not the *only* identifier that an individual can or will have either at once or over their lifetime. This is an important reminder for both the institutions being studied and the researchers who study them.

Understood politically, queerness moves beyond identity politics and is vital to broaden an understanding of the museum as a forum or place of activism (as discussed in Chapter 2). Douglas Crimp (1989), Michael Warner (1993), Leo Bersani (1995) and Annamarie Jagose (1996) all assert that the political association of queer is a position of resistance and refusal. Using Foucauldian language, they insist that queer politics speak of the desire to counteract the governing structures of society. Warner argues that,

> [Queer] represents, among other things, an aggressive impulse of generalization; it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal… For both academics and activists, 'queer' gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual, and normal includes normal business in the academy.
>
> (1993, p. xxvi)

This quote is key to understanding queer as a political position because it explicitly moves away from identity (beyond the rejection of heterosexuality) and towards a tacit rejection of what he (among others) calls the normal. There are obvious

connections to queer identity – in its stance against, its rejection, its difference. However, it is a mistake to understand queer politics as concerning only those issues which affect LGBTQ+ people. LGBTQ+ issues are of interest, but queer politics can go further and be broader in their ideology and utility. As Hennessy argues, it is about targeting heteronormativity (not heterosexuality) because heteronormativity targets more than just the sexual as '…it is socially pervasive, underlying myriad, taken-for-granted norms that shape what can be seen, said, and valued' (2000, p. 114). Regardless of the political issue at stake, a queer ideology is one looking to subvert social structures which limit or threaten an individual's queer sense of being, and particularly in this book, how these ideas are understood in the museum.

Researcher Identity and Reflexivity

Throughout the production of this book, I became increasingly aware of how my own identity and understandings of queerness affect my position as a researcher. As Manning (2009) questions, if one qualifies a personal subject position with various associated identifiers, do they reproduce binary knowledges within dominant discourses and position themselves as a (more or less) oppressed Other? To what benefit, to what detriment? Further, Manning (ibid.) quotes Sullivan, to argue that 'we embody the discourses that exist in our culture, our very being is constituted by them, they are a part of us, and thus we cannot simply throw them off' (2003, p. 41). So, like Sandell (2017), I find it pertinent to disclose some of my embodied and cultural features as they have so indelibly influenced my positioning and abilities. I am a queer, cisgender, white, able-bodied woman approaching the museum space as someone who has both worked in and studied them closely. Further, not only am I affected by the power dynamics of a researcher–subject relationship, I am constrained because: I have never worked in any of my case study institutions; as an American I am part of a broader Western culture, but remain outside the British, Dutch, and German contexts; and most pertinently, LGBTQ+ experiences are so diverse that I cannot claim expertise in the lived experiences of all other sexualities and genders. There are undoubtedly other experiences and characteristics which inform this book, but hopefully just as apparent is the reflexive consideration pursued throughout this process. Keeping these limits in mind, this research does not intend to further marginalise or ignore anyone's identity through ignorance or silence. Though there are many facts and contexts outside my own subjectivity, this research is influenced by a broad range of opinions and world views. The intent is not to generalise or undermine experience, but to speak clearly about queer subjects within the context of museums in England, the Netherlands and Germany such as was observed.

It is important to preface the research with these qualities however they are understood and whether or not the stereotypes associated with such signifiers are fully realised in myself. Although as a researcher I try to maintain awareness of the reasons motivating my research, and the inherent biases I hold or have held at certain points, it is important to clarify my positioning as much as possible.

Objectivity is an impossible goal, but I believe transparency of method and positioning can work together to combat this limitation. Transparency allows for a deeper understanding whether met with empathy or disagreement. Self-criticality and reflexivity are imperative to the research process. However, it is important to remember Alcoff's (1991) assertion that being transparent does not excuse a necessary, deep engagement and unpacking of these identities or descriptors. She argues that a one-off confession should not offer an escape from criticism or be an apology that puts the onus on the reader instead. I have tried to be vigilant over the power relations and discursive effects that are working through me as a researcher and are present in the museum as subject.

Terminology Use

As is evident to researchers discussing gender and sexual identities, the need to label is fraught and changeable. Due to the historical and social vagaries of such identities, I use *queer* throughout the book as a generalised term in an effort to be descriptive without being limiting. Given the history of the word, used as it was in strange and sometimes vicious ways, it is important to acknowledge that 'queer' was not always used the way it is today and that there are those who still reject it as pejorative. However, I find it beneficial for being simultaneously specific and vague. Additionally, because this research centres more on the political and theoretical uses of queer, it is largely unnecessary to single out the identity claims of individuals. Throughout this book LGBTQ+ is used as a descriptor for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-, queer and '+' or all other non-normative communities and identities that might be relevant. Some variations of this acronym are used when quoting or discussing another's work. However, I also recognise that not all identities are represented in all examples and make every effort to point out when some identities (particularly trans- communities) are less foregrounded than, for example, gay males. Additionally, it is important to note that despite the largesse of a '+', intersex stories are largely absent from this research.[11] As noted by Sandell (2017), although there is a growing trend in museums towards telling more and more diverse LGBTQ+ stories, intersex stories remain neglected.

Book Overview

The questions which reverberate throughout this book include: What does it mean to queer the museum and what does a queer museum look like in practice? To address these questions, I utilise queer theory to analyse and critique queer narratives by paying attention to the way in which those stories and ideas have been presented and preserved in the museum. The analysis is grounded in the different definitions of queerness and how they are contextualised in academic, social and political settings. I further aimed to understand and explore current museology as it relates to work with marginalised communities – specifically LGBTQ+ communities – and the results of such engagement. The book relies on current threads of museum theory which help us to understand the theoretical background and

context in which displays are created and how community input is integrated. I explored prevailing practical methods and the hierarchies of power involved in the production of content within museums and delineated current challenges facing museums in terms of community engagement and the degree to which open discourses between institutions and communities lead to lasting change within the institution and its protocols.

Each case study is carefully presented in order to understand how they utilised queering and the context in which they do so. Within each case study it is important to understand the institutional history in order to contextualise how queer representation first manifested. As well, it was necessary to identify the staff responsible for initiating queer practice, define their ideological understanding of queerness, and their success in spreading it throughout the museum's hierarchy. Chapters 3–6 discuss the processes involved in and regularity with which queer content is produced, how queer communities were engaged and identify how this shift towards queer/ing has changed their institutional identity internally.

Finally, throughout the book I demonstrate how queer theory can help critique museal practice in order to widen understandings of an inclusive museum. To do this, I explore the growing literature on queer museology, identify the characteristics of what I term the 'queer utopic museum' and describe its importance for understanding museums' identities and practices. Within each case study, I analyse the practical iterations of queer museum practice and highlight the challenges, perceived successes and limitations of queer/ing work in the museum. All this helps highlight the inherent issues and inconsistencies in creating a queer museum and suggest ways in which this might be understood, challenged and theorised without ever settling on a definitive answer.

The chapters which follow give an account of the budding field of queer museology, discuss the complexities of queering the museum, engaging diverse LGBTQ+ communities and representing dynamic queer histories and finally describe the 'queer utopic museum' and encourage its use as the best framework by which to approach queer/ing museums. The book can be divided into three sections including (1) the introduction, (2) the case studies and (3) findings and analysis. The introduction includes Chapters 1 and 2. This chapter has helped clarify the context of this work, its purpose and approach. Chapter 2 provides a brief literature review of queer museum theory which specifically addresses LGBTQ+ representation in museums. This chapter helps position the contributions of this research by relating it to work which has already been produced in Anglophone museology.

The middle section describes each case study institution and the queer/ing work they pursued. Chapters 3–6 each describe one case study. Chapter 3 looks at the first of two exhibitions described in this book put on in England in 2017 to honour the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of male homosexuality in England and Wales. It describes *Queer British Art 1861–1967* displayed at Tate Britain in London. This chapter focuses on the importance of institutional and curatorial understandings of queerness and how these understandings will affect, and in some cases limit, how an exhibition and its programming may be perceived. *Queer British Art* is described as 'less queer' than some of the other institutions

investigated in this book due to its traditional organisation and display, its lack of queer experimentation and its limited engagement with local queer communities in London. However, it also serves as an important example for the way in which I theorise how a visitor's relationship to an object and its categorisation by the museum might induce a queer, affective, utopic experience through the application of Muñozian queer theory and affective museology. Chapter 4 looks at *Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender & Identity* put on in at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool. *Coming Out* stands in contrast to the largely un-queer *Queer British Art* described in Chapter 3. Its queerness is analysed by looking at its community engagement through creation of a community collaborative space called FORUM, the importance of its rhetoric and political understanding of queerness and the queer atemporality of its exhibition display.

Chapter 5 describes the queering project pursued at the VAM located in Eindhoven. This Dutch example places the queering project in relation to the director's other decolonising and demodernising practices. It looks at the way in which queerness is understood institutionally as a radical political and theoretical term and the way in which this affects most if not all facets of the museum's departments and projects. As with the Walker Art Gallery, there is a focus on community (in their case, 'constituency') engagement and the need for this work to be mutually beneficial.

The final case study, presented in Chapter 6, looks at the only LGBTQ+-focused museum of the research, the SMU in Berlin. The SMU is a unique example both because of its LGBTQ+ collections remit and because it is not only an art gallery as the other three case studies but also a social history museum, community centre, archive and library created through grassroots action by a specific community. Chapter 6 looks at how the institution has evolved its perspective from a specifically gay, German, white, male one to a queer, feminist one. This move created controversy within the museum, but also allows us to look at how queering an already gay institution broadens the definition of what queering the museum can mean. Through the lenses of activism, queer failure and amateurism, this chapter describes the museum's relationship to its visitors, its curatorial and collections strategies and the role of its archives in forming and preserving queer memory.

The final section of the book contains the findings and analysis of the research laid out in Chapters 7 and 8. Chapter 7 brings the findings from Chapters 3–6 together in order to discuss and define what this research calls the queer utopic museum. It focuses on the importance of queer community work, the need for the physical presence of queer bodies in the museum space, how the prioritisation of queer lived experiences broadens the expertise that a museum can offer, and finally, how experiences with queer objects can be understood as utopic horizons which brush against visions of a queer future.

Chapter 8 concludes the book with a final discussion of what it means to queer the museum. It relates the idea of the queer utopic museum to the work of other queer museologists and discusses implications for future research and practice. It stresses the importance of doing mutually beneficial, local community work and explores how upsetting knowledge hierarchies, traditions and binaries might help

the museum with both external programming and internal processes. It proposes that although there are no limits on how to queer the museum or strict definitions for the queer utopic museum, there are always areas of future research which can better solidify understandings of how and why it is important for museums to engage with queer narratives and communities.

Notes

1 Co-curated by David C. Ward and Jonathan Katz, *Hide/Seek* is considered one of the first major museum exhibitions to highlight sexual difference and its connections to modern American portraiture and is an important benchmark when considering the history of LGBTQ+ exhibitions in the West. For further description of *Hide/Seek* and the controversies surrounding it, see Sandell (2017).

2 The Stonewall Uprising, also known as the Stonewall Riots or just Stonewall, refers to the protests which arose in the summer of 1969 in which patrons of the Stonewall Inn (a gay bar in Greenwich Village) fought back against an unjust police raid. For a full account see, for example, Stein (2019).

3 'Queer/ing' is a shorthand used to refer to queer as both an adjective and verb at the same time.

4 Some of these rights are being threatened as seen, for example, in the various anti-trans laws that are cropping up in some states of the USA (American Civil Liberties Union, 2023).

5 Examples include but are not limited to, *The First Homosexuals: Global Depictions of a New Identity, 1869-1930* displayed at Wrightwood 659 in Chicago, Illinois, USA, during 2022–2023 (Wrightwood 659, 2022); *Spectrosynthesis: Asian LGBTQ Issues and Art Now* held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Taipei, Taiwan, in 2017 (Tsui, 2017); *Queermuseu: Cartografias da Diferença na Arte Brasileira* (Queermuseum: Cartographies of Difference in Brazilian Art) which was first exhibited at the Santander Cultural Centre in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2017 (where it was closed due to religious and anti-LGBTQ+ backlash) and later in 2018 at a public park in Rio de Janeiro (Simões, 2018); *HERE*, a photo exhibition held at the Silverbird Galleria in Lagos, Nigeria, in 2017 (Nwaubani, 2017; Okogba, 2017); *'27'* put on at the Shifteye Studios in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2017 (eNCA, 2017; Onyango et al., 2017); and finally *Rebellion and Subversion: 40 Years of Queer Art* at Comber Street Studios in Sydney, Australia, in 2018 (Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, 2018). It should be noted that Taiwan is the only Asian country in which same-sex marriage is legal (Pew Research Center, 2023). Similarly, in the African examples, it is important to point out that South Africa is the only country on the continent which has legalised gay marriage and indeed, many have criminalised homosexuality as a whole (*ibid.*).

6 'Hidden history' is a term first coined in the edited book *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (Duberman, Vicinus, and Chauncey, 1991). It is now often used within museum studies and exhibitions to reference the histories of marginalised peoples that have always been present in collection objects and archives but remained unacknowledged in the narratives presented to the public (Porter, 1996; Burdon, 2000; The New Art Gallery Walsall, 2004; Sandell, 2007; Levin, 2010; Vincent, 2014).

7 Sullivan and Middleton (2019) do briefly discuss one exhibition held at the Schwules Museum (discussed in Chapter 6) in 2017, *Odarodle: Sittengeschichte eines Naturmysteriums, 1535–2017* (Odarodle: An Imaginary Their_Story of Naturepeoples,

1535–2017). Additionally, Adair and Levin's (2020) book includes Dutch examples including one which discusses the VAM. The VAM is discussed further in Chapter 5.

8 The use of affect is becoming increasingly prominent in museology (Varutti, 2023). However, it is a nebulous term used in a variety of disciplines. Wetherell (2012) summarises how it stems from on the one side psychology and neuroscience where scientists research emotional states and, on the other, a much more general understanding of the word, where it, 'means something like a force or an active relation' (ibid., p. 2). The affective turn in the social sciences, she argues, it about 'infusing social analysis' with 'psychosocial "texture" '. In museology then, Varutti argues,

> Affect and emotions are intimately linked: affect is thought to be prepersonal and preconscious (it precedes personality and consciousness), a raw, 'direct sensation', whilst emotions emerge from the recognition of being affected and the labelling of that sensation as an emotional state (e.g., joy or sadness).
>
> (2023, p. 62, citing Baker, 2015, p. 69)

9 Halberstam (2011) describes unbecoming in psychoanalytic terms in relation to masochistic acts. Citing Bersani's (1987) 'self-shattering', it is described as a '…shadowy sexual impulse that most people would rather deny or sublimate. If taken seriously, unbecoming may have its political equivalent in an anarchic refusal of coherence and proscriptive forms of agency' (Halberstam, 2011, p. 136).

10 On the anti-social turn in queer theory, Halberstam argues:

> …we must be willing to turn away from the comfort zone of polite exchange in order to embrace a truly political negativity, one that promises, this time, to fail, to make a mess, to fuck shit up, to be loud, unruly, impolite, to breed resentment, to bash back, to speak up and out, to disrupt, assassinate, shock, and annihilate.
>
> (2011, p. 110)

11 There is an exception in Chapter 5 as the VAM hosted a trans-/intersex artist residency in 2018. However, analysis of this programme fell outside the scope of this research. It is briefly mentioned in Rensma, Neugebauer and Lundin (2020).

2 Queer Museology

Building an LGBTQ+ Museum Theory

Museums are no stranger to the calls which echo throughout society and within every sector to increase equality, diversity and inclusion. Whether thinking in terms of the activism of the Black Lives Matter movement, disability and/or queer rights, native rights in colonised countries or other critical activist work, it is increasingly clear that societal structures which prioritise the white, heteronormative, able-bodied, male perspective over all others needs to be dismantled so that a more equalised and truly democratic one can form in its place. While as a whole Western societies and governments are still far from implementing such huge structural change, small but incremental changes can be observed in some sectors and institutions. Museum practice and museology both are increasingly focused on social justice and community-oriented work and the ways in which they can represent and support marginalised communities (Janes and Sandell, 2019a; Museums Association, 2019a; American Alliance of Museums, 2019). This book rests on the foundations of such practice and academic thought and seeks to contribute to the ways in which we understand the relationship between marginalised communities and museums. Though I speak specifically about the LGBTQ+ community, it is my hope that the examples and viewpoints noted throughout can be extrapolated on to the way museums engage with other communities as well. Taken intersectionally, we can see how multi-faceted individuals and communities are and it is through this lens we must consider museum practice.

Queer museology itself is a relatively new branch of museum studies. Queer theory emerged from lesbian and gay studies and feminist thought as a distinct strand of thinking prevalent in some Western humanities university departments in the early 1990s. Its influence did not reach Anglophone museums and museology until the late 1990s and particularly the early 2000s (Liddiard, 1996, 2004; Burdon, 2000; Sandell, 2002; Vanegas, 2002). Today, there are a small number of contemporary museum scholars working on LGBTQ+ representation – though this is increasing as museums continue to pursue more LGBTQ+ programming, as noted in Chapter 1. These scholars' work includes Richard Sandell's *Museums, Prejudice, and the Reframing of Difference* (2007), the edited collection *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums* (Levin, 2010), Sandell's *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights* (2017), Jennifer Tyburczy's *Sex Museums: The Politics and*

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Performance of Display (2016), Maura Reilly's *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (2018), Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton's *Queering the Museum* (2019), Robert Janes and Richard Sandell's *Museum Activism* (2019a) and the most recent collection, *Museums, Sexuality, and Gender Activism* (Adair and Levin, 2020). Levin's (2010) collection was the first to bring together a number of scholars and museum professionals concerned with issues of feminism and LGBT representation in the museum. However, each of the aforementioned works is framed differently where: Sandell uses a humanitarian lens to examine inclusive activity; Tyburczy narrowly focuses on queer curatorship in presenting sexual histories; Reilly utilises her perspective as curator to look specifically at art galleries which propagate a white, Western, masculine, heteronormative and lesbo-homophobic art history; Sullivan and Middleton create a toolbox for practitioners to consider ways in which queering might affect their institution; Janes and Sandell discuss museum activism within the neoliberal, capitalist context of the West and those scholars included in *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums* and *Museums, Sexuality, and Gender Activism* consider feminist and LGBTQ perspectives of museum praxis. Additionally, Vincent's *LGBT People and the Cultural Sector: The Response of Libraries, Museums, Archives and Heritage since 1950* (2014) and Ferentinos' *Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Sites* (2015) provide descriptive overviews from a professional viewpoint detailing the UK and USA contexts, respectively.[1]

The above research informs this book in its collective call for museums and related cultural sites to think critically about where, when, how often and why they are approaching LGBTQ+ histories and stories. In this chapter I will discuss the work of the aforementioned theorists in order to situate my research within Anglophone, queer-related museum scholarship. I will illuminate the gaps in current research which is usually situated in the UK or USA (with some exceptions found in Adair and Levin, 2020) and relies heavily on practical examples over the incorporation of queer theory (though Conlan, 2010, Tyburczy, 2016, and Bissonauth, 2020, engage to varying degrees). Finally, I will identify how this book attempts to augment this lack by understanding more fully how museum staff and institutional attitudes are affected (or not) by queer theoretical ideas in a wider European context (specifically in England, the Netherlands and Germany).

A Human Rights Framework and Moving Past Prejudice

One foundational assumption of this book is the idea that museums *should* include queer and/or marginalised histories at all. Depending on one's subject position and understanding of a museum's purpose, this may seem like a more or less obvious assertion. However, given many Western museums' origins – saturated as they are with the collections and ideologies of both European royalty and/or American industrial wealth – this viewpoint should not always be taken for granted. It is helpful then to turn to Richard Sandell's (2017) recent work in which he argues (alongside Janes in their co-authored work [2019a]) that a museum can and should be a politically engaged actor and, due to this intractable characteristic, that it has a

moral imperative to address its blind spots and exclusions. In *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights* (2017), for example, he forcefully defines this moral imperative by using a human rights framework to discuss LGBTQ+ issues in American and British museum contexts by looking at a range of museums – from larger urban art museums to small historic houses. He asserts that 'Museums cannot operate as if separate from the inequalities that exist within the communities they aim to engage' (ibid., p. 140). Further, that because ethical and moral issues are embedded in museum work regardless, they should not perpetuate their reputation of objective authority. Instead, Sandell argues,

> …the museum's capacity to build awareness and understanding of human rights relies, in large part, on its potential to engage audiences in a collaborative process of thinking through challenging moral and ethical issues that are undeniably complex and subject to a variety of legitimate views.
>
> (ibid., p. 161)

This plurality is reflected in an increasing move by museums to engage in community co-curation which attempts to showcase a multiplicity of perspectives.[2] While Sandell's use of a human rights lens is influential and innovative, it overtakes a deeper engagement with queer theory to instead rely on broader human rights scholarship. However, a humanitarian focus coincides with this book's utopian influence in that we both hold that museums are capable and necessary to the project of creating a better world for societies which build and visit them. Despite the fact that his case studies have a British and American focus, his arguments are widely applicable across different contexts and certainly the European focus of later chapters in this book.

In cementing a foundation by which to claim the necessity of LGBTQ+ representation in museums, it is also important to look at recent history in which this notion was not as widely accepted. Sandell's (2007) earlier work further considers LGBTQ+ representation in museums by concentrating on negative reactions to it. He frames his research in terms of this prejudice and the museum's ability to privilege certain knowledges, cultures and objects over others which can impart unintended prejudices to visitors. He describes the social power of museums and how 'the "combating of prejudice" most accurately and concisely describes the roles and practices which…museums can fulfil. Moreover, "combating prejudice" implies a purposeful, explicit and political goal – one that suggests the active removal of something that is socially undesirable' (ibid., p. 18). For Sandell, prejudice is a discursive practice that allows individuals to Other, hierarchise and make inferior distinct communities in order to sustain unequal social orders and the power relations which govern them. He argues convincingly that museums are a valid avenue by which to create a less prejudiced society. This is a utopian goal specifically aimed at dismantling the prejudices against minority groups and identities. This understanding of museums forms another underlying assumption upon by which I frame the idea of a queer museum. The queer utopic museum, as discussed in depth in Chapter 7, is one which

welcomes and represents these Othered communities in a meaningful and productive way.

A further consideration which underpins this book is the understanding that museums, by nature, are exclusionary – limited by, among other things, their very space and collections themselves. Despite these parameters, I argue that experimenting with the context, presentation and display of an object can open up new possibilities for new narratives to be told (examples of this are discussed in Chapters 3–6). The given context of an object (or lack thereof), whether through written interpretation or the objects around it, does essential framing work for the visitor. Bishop (2013), for example, argues that through the juxtaposition of art objects alongside ephemera and/or other media (in her example, the display of Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, Spain, alongside contemporary propaganda posters, magazines, war drawings and documentaries) can ground the narrative in the relevant social and political history over an art history which can promulgate the idea of a lone (male) genius. Sandell (2007), too, highlights the importance of context. He argues that the locally, historically or socially contingent nature of prejudice can provide opportunities for the museum, despite their limitations. He illustrates how museums can seek connections to the present with the histories they tell and how those stories are already embodied in their collections. However, he also highlights how the nature of engagement with exhibitionary technology forces museums to privilege certain types of information. Further, that this has led museums to 'engender feelings of belonging and worth in some and, in others, a sense of inferiority and exclusion' (2007, p. 3).

Sandell remains optimistic about the museum's ability to partake in the discourse of Othering in a meaningful and potentially life-changing way. He maintains that,

> Museums can enable and facilitate conversations about difference, providing a forum (and one with unique qualities) in which disputes, arising from the conflicting values held by different communities, can be addressed and explored. They can inform and (re)frame the character and substance of these conversations by offering resources – material and conceptual – which privilege concepts of social justice, which nurture respect for difference and challenge prejudice and discrimination, opening up opportunities for mutual understanding and respect.
> (ibid., p. 26)

Sandell's claim that museums can act as forums is widely held in museology (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Keene, 2006; Mason, Robinson and Coffield, 2018). If they are restricted by nature to privilege certain knowledge, then the social justice and inclusive turn in museology advocates privileging modes of knowledge which encourage visitors to question the museums' and their own positions in relation to prejudice and, as proposed in this book, queerness. However, it is important to note that more research is needed to better understand how working within a social justice framework actually affects the visitor. Contemporary Anglo-American museum theory and some current museum practices evidence the desire to eradicate

past prejudices in favour of a more diverse and inclusive model (MuseumsEtc, 2009; Bishop, 2013; Middleton, 2017; Sandell, 2017; Janes and Sandell, 2019a; Sullivan and Middleton, 2019).[3] This book furthers this line of thinking within a queer framework to think about how a museum might be more transparent about how knowledge-making functions within the museum, how past binaries were upheld and what can be done to dismantle them (as discussed in Chapters 3–6).

Gender and Sexuality in Museums

In order to appreciate the ever-evolving practice of queer museology, it is necessary to understand the limited nature of queer museum practice in the last two decades. The amount of LGBTQ+ representation in museums has been increasing rapidly – as seen, for example, with the number of exhibitions put on in England in 2017 for the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of male homosexuality in England and Wales (as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4; see also Appendix A), or those put on in the USA in 2019 for the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising, or even with the creation of specific LGBTQ+ museums such as Queer Britain in London, UK, which opened in 2022 or the forthcoming American LGBTQ+ Museum in New York, NY, USA.[4] However, this plethora of representation was not always the norm, as seen in Levin's (2010) *Gender, Sexuality and Museums*.[5] It serves as a snapshot of Western museum work in the early 2000s. Its chapters are collected from various museum professionals and scholars and charts the struggles faced by individuals seeking feminist and/or LGBTQ+ representation in American and British museums. For example, in it Mills (2010, originally published in 2006) critiques a 2006 Museum of London (MOL) show, *Queer Is Here*. He argues it presented a diachronic LGBT history that relied too heavily on the dichotomy of liberation and oppression, facing homophobia and being outed over and above any other experience. Further, that it neglected trans- issues, and how race and class affect the lived reality of queer people. He ends his chapter with a call for visitors to '…consume their histories queerly – interacting with exhibits that self-consciously resist grand narratives and categorical assertions' (ibid., p. 86). The kinds of close case studies found in this volume are useful as a comparative measure to this book to gauge changes not just in the amount of programming, but how the challenges in mounting such projects have changed (or not). Notable changes include, for example, the increase in England of LGBTQ Staff Networks (for example, at Tate or the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A))[6] and that museums engage more with LGBTQ+ content as a whole (as with the exhibitions and programming put on for the 50th anniversary or the increased engagement with Pride and/or LGBT History Month).

Vanegas (2010, originally published in 2002) gives insight into English collecting and cataloguing habits from the mid-1990s to the 2000s in her chapter, 'Representing Lesbians and Gay Men in British Social History Museums'. She argues that there were several barriers to increased LGBT inclusion during the period. First, she cites Section 28[7] for inhibiting representation. She then turns to the institutions themselves, arguing that there is evidence of self-censorship from

curators and that some museums were not actively collecting LG stories (let alone BTQ+) and felt they did not have any objects in their collections already to tell these stories (ibid.). All this despite the fact that Vanegas found LGBT exhibitions to be generally well received even then. For example, she mentions that a survey of visitors to the *Pride and Prejudice* exhibition in 1999 at the MOL found that 95% of those surveyed thought the museum was right to stage such an exhibition and 87% agreed LGBT history should be integrated into permanent displays (ibid.). These high percentages (though representative of visitors at a particular time and place) alongside increasing legal and social equality for LGBTQ+ people in many Western countries (Stonewall, 2016) highlight how today's increased representation falls in line with public appetite and challenges the notion that it is risky for museums to tackle LGBTQ+ inclusion as will be explored in chapters 3–6. However, as noted in Chapter 1, homophobic and heteronormative thinking persists in Western cultures and institutions and should not be neglected in analysing and/or realising queer museological practice.

Finally, in an early melding of museology and queer theory titled 'Representing Possibility: Mourning, Memorial, and Queer Museology', Conlan (2010, originally written in 2007) discusses the works of Judith Butler (2004), Douglas Crimp (1989, 1995) and Jose Esteban Muñoz (1996) in relation to LGBTQ+ representation in museums. Conlan discusses a photograph of Gertrude Stein's lover, Alice Toklas, gazing at Picasso's portrait of Stein in an exhibition after Stein's death and her personal reaction to first seeing it. This, Conlan argues, provides an example of the type of queer utopian longing that Muñoz describes in 'Ghosts of Public Sex' (1996) and later in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) as referenced throughout this book.[8] Similarly to Sandell (2007, 2017), she argues that LGBTQ+ representation in museums gives 'institutional support' to those often cast against the norm, though admittedly not in the same way that legal recognition does. She asks if museums can begin this representation as they are or if they need to be reformulated to do so. Citing Crimp (1989, 1995), Butler (2004) and Muñoz (1996), Conlan makes connections between mourning for a queer utopian past and queer representation in museums. She concludes with a starting point for this book's theoretical positioning by arguing,

> Queer utopic longing is a relational process of representation and recognition. Queer utopias are not necessarily only desires for individual recognition, but exercises in group loss, collective memory and, thus, opportunities for community. These utopian spaces can feed possibilities for future representation as well.
>
> (2010, p. 260)

This conception of queer utopia and memory is important to consider in the face of long-standing repression and oppression and will be developed in Chapters 3–7.

Moving to more recent practice as found in Adair and Levin (2020), we find not only is queer representation more abundant but that in a mirror of museum practice more generally, it endeavours to be more inclusive and includes both

non-binary (Johannesson and Le Couteur, 2020) and trans- (Sneeuwloper et al., 2020) perspectives. This recent edited collection updates Levin's (2010) book. It similarly includes reflections from scholars and practitioners on the state of representing diverse gender identities and sexualities in museums in the late 2010s. Beyond the more limited geographic scope of *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums* (Levin, 2010), *Museums, Sexuality, and Gender Activism* contains global examples from, for example, Australia, India and Turkey. Like Janes and Sandell (2019a) and Sullivan and Middleton (2019), the book is rooted in activism and intersectionality. Adair (2020) highlights the necessity of foregrounding activism because, he argues, it highlights that problems within museum representation remain, and that no solution, however radical, will be the last one. Levin (2020) notes that despite an increase in LGBTQ+ representation, exhibitions sometimes lack the contextualisation of class, colonial history and racial privilege.[9] She also notes the influence of feminism, gay and lesbian studies, trans- studies and queer theory on LGBTQ+ representation in museums in the way each challenges understandings of sex, gender and sexuality in a productive way. Adair concludes with an important reminder by arguing, 'We must remain unruly, resistant…and trust in the productive potential of charting an unpopular, or as yet unpopulated path' (2020, p. 293). Like this work, the book discusses important contemporary examples of LGBTQ+ representation in museums (and indeed also discusses the VAM). However, it does little to meaningfully engage with the more abstract elements of queer theory (with the exception of Bissonauth, 2020) as the following chapters will do. However, it is a critical addition to the growing field of queer museology both in its insistence on an intersectional activism and its wealth of case studies.

Sex Museums and Queer Praxis

In considering the profusion of LGBTQ+ representation of the late 2010s, it is important to discuss the ways in which it might be different to curate queerly or to include those previously excluded and Othered perspectives. As discussed briefly in Chapter 1, Jennifer Tyburczy (2016), a former curator at the Leather Archives and Museum, uses scholarship from queer theory and performance studies to propose a 'queer curatorship'. She focuses her work specifically on sex museums including the Leather Archives and Museum in Chicago, the Museum of Sex in New York, the World Erotic Art Museum in Miami Beach and El Museo del Sexo in Mexico City. She defines queer curatorship as '…an experimental display tactic that stages alternative spatial configurations for two distinct purposes: to expose how traditional museums socialize heteronormative relationships between objects and visitors and to cope with ethically fraught objects of queer cultures…' (ibid., pp. 2–3). She also asserts that queer curatorship can use display elements to materialise queer theory by using '…a spatial and discursive approach to display that utopically imagines new forms of sexual sociality and collectivity between bodies, things, and nations…' (ibid., pp. 3–4). Although her examples are often explicit objects relating to queer sexual histories, I argue her emphasis on the nature of display and how the physicality of space relates to visitors is also helpful when considering less

sexually explicit objects to tell queer histories in institutions with broader remits. Her discussion of the importance of queering visitors' relationships to objects is particularly pertinent in my discussion of *Queer British Art* (in Chapter 3) and the interaction between 'mainstream' and LGBTQ+ audiences at the VAM (in Chapter 5). Her definitions of a queer curatorship recall Oliver Winchester's (2010) description of Matt Smith's *Queering the Museum* intervention at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, that a queer display '…is intended to playfully upset the museum applecart, play with visitor expectations, upend the sober, educational and rigid conceptual boundaries that usually constitute a museum display'.

In her discussion of the production of queer sexual histories, Tyburczy focuses on the relationship between the visitor and the object. She argues that museums 'function on the logic of the visible' and visitor resistance to what they are shown is deterred and/or forbidden (for example, public emotional outbursts within the museum are not encouraged) (ibid., p. 7). She cites Gould's (2009) 'emotional habitus' to explain how museums produce particular feelings within the visitor and how this manufacture of feelings should be considered another aspect of exhibitionary technology by museum scholars. She wants to look not just at how these feelings are produced but how visitors react to them and why they might be resistant to 'problematic' sexual exhibits. It recalls Bozoğlu's (2020) argument, building off affect theory, that the expression of emotion is part of the choreography of a visitor's experience of the museum. For her, the museum is a choreographer who sets the steps through a number of prompts throughout the space. Relatedly, Tyburczy argues,

> Museums perform sexual heritage queerly whenever they reorient the emotional habitus between visitors and queer objects. That is, when museums interrupt, create a performative rift, or transform the habitual ways in which bodies relate to these objects, they forge new relationships, queer relationships, and thus a queer kind of sexual heritage that exists nowhere else.
>
> (2016, p. 123)

From a queer theoretical perspective, I would relate this to Muñoz's (2009) concept of altering the here and now in order to achieve utopia. Although for Muñoz queer utopia is a future project, I argue that what Tyburczy is calling for here is that museums can enable affective responses through what she calls 'queer praxis'. The notion of an affective queer relationality that exists nowhere else but between museum visitors and objects is further discussed in Chapters 3 and 7.

Despite Tyburczy's (2016) tight focus on sex museums, her queer theoretical engagement marks an important precedent for understanding a queer museology. For example, despite my focus here on art galleries and a social history museum/community centre, both books' queer theoretical positioning stems from Muñoz's framework of utopia and hope. Tyburczy engages more directly with queer theory than the other queer museologists discussed in this chapter. However, her expertise in museums which focus explicitly on sex and its history means her queer praxis does not easily extend to other types of museums with wider remits. Her examples

speak convincingly when thinking about explicit sexual objects but are difficult to map onto the parts of LGBTQ+ history unrelated to sex acts or the types of hidden histories being pursued in non-sex museums. Examples in this book, on the other hand, seek to allow for broader comparisons across the sector by looking at less explicit narratives within museums and to instances where queering the museum refers to neither explicit sex nor even obvious LGBTQ+ representation – as with the VAM discussed in Chapter 5. I argue that a wider understanding of what LGBTQ+ history and lives can encompass combats the stereotype that LGBTQ+ people are consumed by sexual desire and best understood only in reference to their gender identity or sexual habits.

Queer Museum Activism

As museums seek to better engage visitors and bring in more diverse communities, it is often couched in terms of 'inclusion' and 'social activism'. Indeed, arguments as to whether or how much a museum can participate in or host social activism and/or activists is ongoing by both museologists and museum staff (Sandell and Nightingale, 2012; Sandell, 2017; Fleming, 2018; Hunt, 2018). Throughout this book, I take the position that social activism is possible and desirable in museums irrespective of type or collection. I understand museum activism as taking three forms: 'drawing on Ann Rigney's work in the field of memory activism…we think about…museum activism, museums *in* activism and museums *of* activism', where 'museum activism' relates to practice which attempts to engage with social needs, 'museums in activism' refers to how they might be used as sites of protest and 'museums of activism' denotes those museums which display objects and/or ephemera from protest movements (Robenalt, Farrell-Banks and Markham, 2022, p. 402, italics original). Within this book, I demonstrate one form of museum activism which focuses on how queer frameworks and methodologies might be used to break up disciplines, structures or powers still in place which hinder social progress. As shown in my case study institutions in Chapters 3–6, museums can be and are sites of inclusion and activism for the queer community. As well, the way one presents and interacts with that newly found representation can be queered.

Other queer museologists, like Reilly (2018), Sullivan and Middleton (2019) and the authors presented in the edited books *Museum Activism* (Janes and Sandell, 2019a) and *Museums, Sexuality and Gender Activism* (Adair and Levin, 2020), also argue convincingly that a museum is a site where social change can happen and that intersectional activism on the part of museum staff is crucial in realising it. Each work stresses the importance of being ethically informed and critically resisting the way things have always been done in favour of challenging patriarchal, heteronormative, ableist and Euro-centric positionings. Though Sullivan and Middleton (2019) do not as explicitly frame their work around activist practice as Reilly (2018), Janes and Sandell (2019a) or Adair and Levin (2020), they still position the book as a call to action for museum professionals to challenge their thinking and the narratives and power structures they reinforce through non-critical practice. All four recent works align with the underlying assumptions of this

book – that museums can be sites of social justice and queering practice that asks for critical input from both staff and visitors in order to work towards a reality where museums are the democratic, community-centred institutions they increasingly claim to want to be.

One essential form of public-facing museum activism is curatorial activism. Reilly (2018) writes from the position of art curator and activist and insists that the art history propagated by the art world must 'resist masculinism and sexism, confront white privilege and Western-centrism and challenge heterocentrism and lesbo-homophobia' (2018, back cover). Similarly to other scholars mentioned here and as reiterated by this book, she argues that curatorial activism is characterised by '…leveling hierarchies, challenging assumptions, countering erasure, promoting the margins over the center, the minority over the majority, inspiring intelligent debate, disseminating *new* knowledge, and encouraging strategies of resistance – all of which offers hope and affirmation' (2018, p. 22). Reilly's book is valuable in the exhibition history it tells and its call to challenge the hegemonic narratives told in the art world. She particularly highlights three curatorial tactics including revisionism (in which previously neglected narratives and artists are added back in), area studies (for example women's art or Latin American art) which works to create new canons that, she argues, are worthwhile even though they are sometimes criticised as ghettoising, and relational studies which promote exhibitions as polylogue.[10] She argues,

> A relational approach to curating presents art as if it were a polysemic site of contradictory positions and contested practices. This focus goes beyond a mere description of discrete regions and cultures; it transcends the "additive" approach, collapses the destructive center–periphery binary, and is essentially postmodern in nature: it is textual, dialogic, and 'writerly'.
>
> (ibid., pp. 30–31)

This understanding of exhibition making relates to Mason's (2006) assertion that objects themselves are polysemic and can highlight which narratives are privileged and which are ignored. This understanding of curation is discussed further in Chapter 4 in relation to *Coming Out*'s atemporal display and community-centred gallery.

Beyond queering curatorial work, it is critical to think about how museum work as a whole might be queered. *Queering the Museum* (Sullivan and Middleton, 2019), as with the rest of these scholars and this research, is situated in an Anglo museological context and primarily uses museal examples from England and Australia. Sullivan and Middleton themselves are both museum practitioners working in Australia. As is later echoed in this book, they argue that museum workers must be critical of their practice and think deeply about why and how they know what they do and do what they do. They argue,

> Rather than attempting to replace erroneous views of the past with true and correct ones, a queer approach is instead concerned with problematising

> heteronormative ways of knowing and the inequitable effects of such, and opening up possibilities for being, knowing, doing otherwise.
>
> (2019, p. 31)

Though it is important to think deeply about museum practice and whose views are being privileged, it is equally necessary to acknowledge the difficulty in presenting opposing views in a respectful way. As Grinell asks,

> Can the museum really be an arena for open debate? Or is it, due to historic, bureaucratic, and cultural legacies tied to certain positions and affiliations in the public space? Is it thus possible to deal with different legitimate claims equally, or are we biased, institutionally supporting one side?
>
> (2011, p. 231)

The attempt to recognise multiple knowledges so as to better inform practice is seen most prevalently in this book at the VAM (Chapter 5) and the SMU (Chapter 6). In an attempt to work through this, Sullivan and Middleton (2019) argue that the conception of the museum needs to change from an institution which houses objects to a verb which encompasses heterogenous and situated activities. To do this, they cite Butler's (1993) notion that queering is a process of 'perpetual interrogation from within' (Sullivan and Middleton, 2019, p. 107). These claims fall in line with the position of this book, particularly as regards discussions in chapters 5–7 on institutional critique as a never-ending process both within and without. Though *Queering the Museum* provides valuable examples of queer work being done in English and Australian institutions and promotes queering museum processes over symbolic gestures of inclusivity and diversity, there is limited engagement with the queer theoretical ideas which underpin this book.

Still thinking broadly about museum work as a whole, the edited book *Museum Activism* (Janes and Sandell, 2019a) highlights the turn in Anglo-American museology towards the idea that museums should be sites of ethical and social justice work.[11] Janes and Sandell list three expectations for activist institutions: '1) to be open to influence and impact from outside interests 2) to be responsive to citizens' interests and concerns; and 3) to be fully transparent in fulfilling these two expectations' (2019b, p. 15). These expectations are echoed throughout the discussions of the four institutions presented here, and particularly in Chapters 5 and 6 which address the institutions holistically. Due to the breadth of activism covered in this book (ranging from social, to political, to environmental) only one chapter (Curran, 2019a) covers LGBTQ+ communities explicitly. Curran's (ibid.) work discusses historic houses and promotes crowdsourced, participatory curation as a way to engage marginalised communities and counteract the silence often found in heritage narratives. Another crucial argument which underlies both queer museology more widely and this book is Lynch's (2019) distinction between performative and operational activism which questions whether an institution pursues an exhibition or programming merely for 'show' or if they work collaboratively with communities to actually enact change. This notion is further

discussed in relation to the VAM and their commitment to reciprocal community work (Chapter 5). Overall, Janes and Sandell's (2019a) argument that museums should seek to establish new narratives in conjunction with communities in order to promote collective well-being and move past neoliberal ideas of economic growth and expansion is mirrored in this work.

Museum Professionals' Viewpoint

Finally, in considering the burgeoning field of queer museology, it is important to look at texts which create a foundation for understanding how museums and related institutions have engaged with LGBT stories historically up to the time of publication. The practical work of institutions pursuing LGBT interpretation in the UK and USA contexts is documented by Vincent (2014) and Ferentinos (2015), respectively. *LGBT People and the Cultural Sector: The Response of Libraries, Museums, Archives and Heritage since 1950* (Vincent, 2014) is written with a cultural sector professional audience in mind. Vincent takes each decade from 1950 onward to describe the cultural sector's engagement with LGBT history. He expands his focus to include the work and activism in libraries and archives as well not least because it existed earlier than museum work (ibid.). He concludes by arguing that the cultural sector should work in full awareness of their national and regional context. Further, as Ferentinos will echo, that they should be transparent in what they do and why and should consult the local LGBT community to foster agency and ownership in a shared history (ibid.). This book serves as a thorough reference guide, and while it does not engage with the theoretical aspects of either queer theory or representation in general, it provides evidence of past LGBT cultural work as we move towards the future.

Shifting to an American focus, Ferentinos' (2015) work serves a similar purpose to Vincent's (2014) book. It is positioned as being for museum professionals and is not academically oriented. Indeed, she stresses that an understanding of queer theory is not necessary for on-the-ground LGBT history museum and heritage interpretation work. Despite the theoretical discussions which characterise this book, this is an important point. While I find queer theory a useful framework by which to understand and critique museum work and LGBTQ+ representation, I also argue that the process of queering the museum is not prescriptive and should indeed rely on the lived experience of staff and engaged communities (as further detailed in later chapters). In addition to her discussion of museum practice, Ferentinos gives an historical overview of same-sex love and desire in the USA from the colonial period up to the time of her writing. She notes that there is little scholarship as LGBT content is a relatively new subject for US-based history museums. The book then launches into a few case studies by various museum professionals and an academic to illustrate contemporary examples of LGBT history interpretation at both museums and historic sites. She concludes by suggesting that there are many ways to approach LGBT history interpretation. Namely that it is helpful to turn to the local community, to be explicit and transparent about your terminology and, among other recommendations, that institutions work to

create sustainable plans that incorporate the LGBT community and its histories into normal operations (ibid.). Ferentinos draws some important conclusions, and I would reiterate her call to engage with local queer communities and to think carefully about terminology. Examples of how both these suggestions can play out in the museum are discussed in Chapter 5 with the VAM.

Conclusion and Further Gaps

The collection of my particular case studies combined with a queer theoretical lens concerning utopia, futurity, amateurism and failure makes my research uniquely positioned to analyse the level of engagement with LGBTQ+ communities and queer theory in some Western European museums. The aforementioned texts lay a foundation for the emerging field of queer museology. They deal broadly with LGBTQ+ representation in largely Anglophone museums and the importance of increasing the frequency of this representation such that it becomes an integral part of global museal narratives. They assert that museums have a moral imperative to create ethical and inclusive narratives through their displays. This book is grounded in such assumptions and seeks to add to the literature further by engaging not only with LGBTQ+ museal representation but also how it can be more deeply understood and analysed through a queer theoretical lens. That is, this book attempts to broaden understandings of queering the museum by looking at all facets of queerness (as discussed in Chapter 1) and considering the difficulty in defining queer communities and queer theory itself. Queer theory is used in order to push against 'inclusion' and 'diversity' frameworks and find ways of working which targeted communities actually find beneficial. There is a need to rely on community insight over and above totalising narratives of LGBTQ+ history or narrow themes like oppression and/or 'outing' narratives. The aforementioned authors and I assert that queering museums need intersectional activism to be pursued by both museum staff and external forces in order to realise productive change. To achieve this, institutional critique needs to be on-going and embedded within institutional structures such that it goes beyond verbal and/or textual acknowledgment of issues and leads to tangible change.

Further, this book seeks to shed light on recent LGBTQ+ museum practice. Though the institutions in Chapters 3 and 4 have been more widely written about, there has been less scholarly attention paid to either the VAM (Chapter 5) or the SMU (Chapter 6). Scholarship focused on British LGBTQ+ museum programming remains scarce, though is increasing.[12] There is a notable exception for the VAM as Bishop's *Radical Museology* (2013) takes the institution and the effect of hiring a new director in 2004 as a case study. However, my own research focuses on more recent developments at the museum (though under the same director) and specifically its queering project. Queering at the VAM is also discussed in Adair and Levin's book (Rensma, Neugebauer and Lundin, 2020). It was written by three practitioners deeply involved in the work and is very descriptive of the different elements of the project. Additionally, there is one book documenting the SMU's first collection display, *Self-confidence and Persistence: Two Hundred Years of*

History (2004) by Andreas Sternweiler, a founder and curator of the museum. However, this serves more as a historical and descriptive text than a critical or museological one.

The above sections delineate the subsection of Anglophone museological scholarship dedicated to understanding LGBTQ+ representation in museums and form the basis of queer museology. I have described the way in which, with a few exceptions, this scholarship focuses largely on discourses of diversity and inclusion rather than taking more abstract queer theoretical positions. While each work helps to situate the following chapters, this book serves as one of the first instances of museological research which is grounded deeply in queer theory and museum theory simultaneously. As discussed earlier, Tyburczy (2016) and Conlan (2010) go the furthest in utilising queer theory in the museum – and particularly Muñoz (1996, 2009) as in this book. However, where they find value in his placement of queerness as a future to hope and strive for, I engage more deeply with his conception of anticipatory illuminations, ecstatic time and utopia. Therefore, while all of the aforementioned authors influence the following discussions, there is a lack of queer theoretical engagement that I find critical to understanding queer/ed museums and underpins my description of the 'queer, utopic museum'. Additionally, though LGBTQ+ museum scholarship is largely situated in Anglo-American contexts, I widen the scope slightly to include a Western European perspective. The following chapters build upon the foundations of the work discussed earlier by merging them with queer theoretical ideas in British, Dutch and German contexts.

Notes

1 *Preservation and Place: Historic Preservation by and of LGBTQ Communities in the United States* (Crawford-Lackey and Springate, 2019) provides an additional overview of LGBTQ American historic sites from the perspective of practitioners and preservationists. It does not focus on museums but rather archives, historic sites, archaeology and ways of doing LGBTQ history.
2 For discussions on co-curation, see for example, Gosselin (2014), Robert (2014) and Jensen and Grøn (2015).
3 For further exhibitionary examples of museums covering previously underrepresented or ignored groups, see, for instance, the Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) *Making Space: Women Artists and Postwar Abstraction* held in the summer of 2017 in New York (MoMA, 2017); the British Museum's *Desire, Love, Identity: Exploring LGBTQ Histories* in London in 2017 (The British Museum, 2017); *Study in Black Modernity* exhibited at the VAM in 2017 in Eindhoven (Van Abbemuseum, 2017e); or *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985* exhibited in 2018 at the Brooklyn Museum (Brooklyn Museum, 2018) among other examples.
4 This is not to exclude older, already existing LGBTQ+ museums, including the Schwules Museum in Berlin, Germany (discussed in Chapter 6), the GLBT Historical Society and Museum in San Francisco, CA, or the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art in New York, NY.
5 Some of the chapters in this book come from an LGBTQ+ themed volume of *Museums & Social Issues: A Journal of Reflective Discourse* (Lakoff and Morrissey, 2008). See

this volume for further reading as it also contains other early articles on LGBTQ+ issues in museums.

6 The V&A's LGBTQ Working Group is discussed in Clayton and Hoskin (2020).

7 Section 28 was an amendment to *Local Government Act 1988* put forth by Thatcher's government. It stated that a local authority 'shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality' or 'promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship' (Wilson, Dawson and Murphy, 2018). It was repealed in 2003.

8 *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (Muñoz, 2009), a foundational text for this book, was published two years after Conlan originally wrote the chapter included in *Gender, Sexuality and Museums* (Levin, 2010) and so is not referenced there.

9 Levin's (2020) example discusses the photographic exhibition *Ceylon* at Huis Marseille in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, which showed the work of Lionel Wendt, a gay, Dutch, Modernist photographer whose subjects included young men in Sri Lanka.

10 Reilly cites Aiken (1986, p. 298) to argue, '…that by employing a relational approach we can present multiplicity in terms of an ongoing dialogue – or, more accurately, a polylogue (a term she borrows from philosopher, psychoanalyst, and literary critic Julia Kristeva): "an interplay of many voices, a kind of creative "barbarism" that would disrupt the monological, colonizing, centristic drives of 'civilization'"' (2018, p. 30).

11 It should be noted that *Museum Activism* (Janes and Sandell, 2019) contains global examples from museum practice in, for example, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Ethiopia, Hong Kong, the UK, the USA and Zimbabwe.

12 Exceptions include, for example, 'Museums and Sexuality' (Frost, 2015), 'Heritage and Queer Activism' (Curran 2019a), *Queer Activism Begins at Home: Situating LGBTQ Voices in National Trust Historic Houses* (Curran, 2019b) and some chapters in *Museums, Sexuality and Gender Activism* (Adair and Levin, 2020).

3 What's in a Name?

Queer British Art 1861–1967 at Tate Britain

On a bright, warm day at the end of spring in 2017, my friend and I walked briskly down the Thames to see what was so queer about Tate Britain. It started well enough with two huge banners blowing in the breeze and dangling from the façade advertising that the *Queer and Now* festival would be initiating London Pride's festivities that year (Tate Britain, 2017). Once inside, the main atrium blazed with the glow from Cerith Wyn Evans' enormous light installation, *Forms in Space…by Light (in Time)* (Tate, 2017d). To find the more explicitly labelled *queer British art*, we had to travel down the gleaming spiral staircase in the rotunda, and further into the bowels of the lower level of the museum to the very back left corner, only to finally be waylaid by an imposing navy-coloured wall, a quote from Derek Jarman and a friendly member of staff ready to take our ticket money. All this sets the scene of my visit and my wondering if the all-encompassing and intriguing name, *Queer British Art 1861–1967* would live up to its possible queer potentialities to reach the same heights as the rainbow flag which flies over Tate Britain during pride month.

This chapter discusses one of the many LGBTQ+-focused exhibitions curated in English museums in 2017. The year 2017 marked the 50th anniversary of the passing of the *Sexual Offences Act 1967*, or the piece of legislation which partially decriminalised male homosexuality in England and Wales. There were more than 40 exhibitions and/or events held in English museums and heritage sites to commemorate the anniversary (see Appendix A for a full list). The majority of exhibitions were put on in London and Liverpool at major national institutions. Additionally, 11 National Trust sites (or ≈2.2% of their total properties) participated in some way (National Trust, 2019). Due to the high number of participating institutions, it is outside the scope of this book to discuss every exhibition in turn. Therefore, this chapter and the following focus on two of the largest exhibitions (in terms of both objects and gallery space) held in 2017 at two national museums: *Queer British Art 1861–1967* at Tate Britain in London and *Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender & Identity* at the Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool (NML) in Liverpool. It is important to note that despite the metropolitan focus of these chapters, several exhibitions were staged around England in more localised settings. As well, despite the fact that the anniversary commemorates partial decriminalisation in both England and Wales, I was unable to find any exhibitions put on in Welsh institutions.

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I begin by describing the historical context – both legislative and exhibitionary – of LGBTQ+ representation in English museums. I then discuss the extent to which the 2017 anniversary exhibitions can be considered 'queer' and why this an important consideration to more fully understand what it means to queer the museum. Using the qualitative methodologies listed in Chapter 1, my research illustrates how queerness is being understood institutionally in the UK and how it comes across in an exhibitionary medium. I argue that Tate Britain used 'queer' primarily as an identity-based term, in contrast to the Walker's more political focus as seen in Chapter 4. Further, I discuss how Tate Britain's art historical approach to the exhibition encouraged the uncovering of hidden histories and highlighted the different ways identity politics can be understood in the past over a more queerly experimental approach. This is not to say that there was nothing queer to be found at Tate Britain. Indeed, it provides an intriguing example as to how particular non-art objects and their display in an art exhibition might be understood as encoding queer utopic knowledge. Despite the previously unheard-of level of visibility Tate Britain granted queer art and artists, this chapter argues that the strictly chronological, thematic display, lack of queer community engagement and identity-focused use of language prevented Tate Britain from living up to the potential of a name like, *Queer British Art*.

The Historical Context of the 50th Anniversary

In order to fully understand the context of the 2017 anniversary, it is important to clarify the history of anti-gay laws in the UK, specifically regarding men. Though lesbians have been persecuted throughout history for their sexuality, sex between women has never been illegal in the UK. The *Sexual Offences Act 1967* marked the partial decriminalisation of male homosexuality in England and Wales. Male homosexual sexual behaviour was first made a crime in the UK by King Henry VIII with the *Buggery Act of 1533* (British Library, 2019). The year 1967 saw only 'partial' decriminalisation because the law referred to men over the age of 21 committing 'private acts',[1] where the age of consent for straight couples was 16 (as it is today and since 2001 for anyone regardless of gender or sexuality); it excluded men in Scotland (where it was repealed in 1980) and Northern Ireland (repealed in 1982) and members of the armed forces and merchant navy (where it was repealed in 1994);[2] and it merely changed the maximum sentence from life in prison to no more than 10 years (Tatchell, 2017; British Parliament, 2019). The year 2017 was also the 60th anniversary of the publishing of the Wolfenden Report.[3] However, as Peter Tatchell (2017) argues, male homosexuality was not fully decriminalised until 2013 and in fact policing of gay and bisexual men increased after 1967. Legal protection against discrimination for LGBTQ+ people did not occur until 2003–2007 (ibid.). Additionally, gross indecency laws and the criminalisation of anal sex was repealed in England and Wales in 2003, in Northern Ireland in 2008 and in Scotland in 2009 (though not taking effect there until 2013) (ibid.).

Another important piece of legislative context is Section 28 of the *Local Government Act 1988* which prohibited the promotion of homosexuality through

teaching or publishing (The National Archives, 2019a). It was enacted by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government and not repealed until 2000 in Scotland and 2003 in the rest of the UK (LGBT History Month, 2018). Although no one was prosecuted under this law, both Vanegas (2010) and Vincent (2014) note that it had a deep effect on the cultural sector at large and induced extreme self-censorship. Vanegas (2010) cites Bourn (1994) to point out that between 1984 and 1994 there were only 8 temporary exhibitions of 'lesbian and gay interest' in UK social history museums, with Vanegas counting 13 more from that period to 2002. These low numbers prove how much the British cultural sector has changed since this research records more than 40 exhibitions and/or events that took place in 2017 alone (albeit, in an anniversary year) (see Appendix A). Therefore, though it is important to remain critical of the way queer representation in museums evolves, it is equally important to note the sweeping, positive change in landscape in the last two decades.

A final piece of context is the publication by the British Museum (BM) of *A Little Gay History: Desire and Diversity Across the World* (Parkinson, 2013). Throughout my many conversations with practitioners, this work was often cited for its importance and inspiration (Scott, 2018a; Ashbury, 2017; Clayton, 2017). The project initially began as a museum trail (created through a collaboration between Parkinson and Kate Smith and later expanded by the BM). The success of the trail paved the way for Parkinson to produce the book. As will be seen in Chapter 5 as well, directorial and curatorial support was crucial to the project. Parkinson (2017) acknowledges its later effect as a catalyst for further and more expansive LGBTQ+ programming: 'If the BM did it, it would mark it as safe. If the BM didn't fall down or be burnt down by outrage, sort of anti-activists…it would mean other people would follow'. However, he is reticent to claim all the credit attributed to the book and argues that change could have happened regardless (ibid.). It is important to recognise this book and trail both for its primacy and the sensitive and robust way it addressed queer history in the museum. It serves as the first permanent LGBTQ+ intervention into a major English museum and the book and trail are still available today.

It must be noted that there were several LGBTQ+ themed temporary exhibitions in the UK prior to Parkinson's book that further cement the foundation for the 50th anniversary. These include, but are not limited to, *Hidden Histories* at the New Art Gallery Walsall from 13 May to 10 June 2004 (The New Art Gallery Walsall, 2004); *Hello Sailor!: Gay Life on the Ocean Wave* first exhibited in 2006 at the Merseyside Maritime Museum (MMM) in Liverpool (and at various other institutions until 2019)[4] (National Museums Liverpool, 2019a); *Queer Is Here* exhibited from 04 February to 05 March 2006 at the Museum of London (MOL) (Smith, 2006); *Changing Places: Phil Sayers and Rikke Lundgren* running from 20 October 2007 to 20 April 2008 at the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Liverpool which inspired much criticism and even vandalism (McDonald, 2019); *sh[OUT]: Contemporary Art and Human Rights* at the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) in Glasgow running from 09 April to 01 November 2009 (Gallery of Modern Art, 2009; Sandell, 2017); *Gay Icons* running from 02 July 2009 to 18 October 2009 at the National Portrait

Gallery in London (National Portrait Gallery, 2009) and *Queering the Museum* in the winter of 2010–2011 at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (Archives and Creative Practice, 2018). These all represent important temporary interventions in British museums in the years following the repeal of Section 28 and before the 2017 anniversary. In addition to specific LGBTQ+ temporary exhibitions, it is worth mentioning that there are many other examples of exhibitions and permanent displays where this theme featured as one amongst many.[5]

Understanding Tate Britain

Queer British Art 1861–1967 represents an important example for this book due to its premise and size and the prominence of its host institution. Tate Britain is a public art gallery founded in 1897 located along the River Thames on Millbank in London, UK (Figure 3.1). London, the UK's capital city, is the largest city in Europe

Figure 3.1 A map of London which highlights the location of Tate Britain in relation to other popular London tourist attractions. Map by the author.

with a population of 8.79 million people as of 2021 (London Councils, 2022). Amongst many attractions, it hosts four UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) world heritage sites, 43 universities and 170 museums (London Councils, 2019). Tate numbers two among those museums with Tate Britain and Tate Modern – though it also includes Tate Liverpool and Tate St. Ives (Tate, 2019e). Tate was founded in 1887 by the industrialist Henry Tate (Tate, 2019c). Tate Britain, the first of the Tate locations and originally called the National Gallery of British Art,[6] was purpose-built and designed by Sidney R.J. Smith. The façade resembles a Greek Temple and is topped with statues of Britannia, a lion and a unicorn (Tate, 2019c). It is a national museum with free entrance. Across Tate's four institutions, it collectively houses 70,000 objects (Tate, 2019f). These are chosen based not just on the nationality of their creator but for their contributions to the history and development of art history in Britain (Tate, 2019a). Tate Britain specifically houses British art from 1500 to the present (Tate, 2019e). It is famous for its permanent displays which include major holdings by J.M.W. Turner and important examples from the Pre-Raphaelites (Art Fund, 2019).

Queer British Art 1861–1967

Queer British Art 1861–1967 was exhibited at Tate Britain from 05 April to 01 October 2017. It was curated by Clare Barlow, then Assistant Curator of British Art 1750–1830 at Tate. That same year, Tate Britain also hosted the *Queer and Now* festival organised by E-J Scott which launched Pride in London (Tate, 2017e). Two of Tate Britain's other 2017 exhibitions also connected to this theme, though less explicitly: *Cerith Wyn Evans: The Tate Britain Commission 2017* from 28 March to 20 August (Tate, 2017d) and *David Hockney* from 09 February to 29 May (Tate, 2019b). Appendix A lists other exhibitions honouring the anniversary held in London, for example, at the National Portrait Gallery and the BM, and England more broadly. *Queer British Art*, however, was the biggest in terms of objects and received the most publicity. The exhibition contained almost 200 objects created between 1861 and 1967 in a range of media. The significance of the historical period covered in the exhibition refers to legal advancements for gay males, where 1861 signalled the end of the death penalty for sodomy, and 1967 the passing of the *Sexual Offences Act 1967* (Barlow, 2017b). In addition to art objects, it also contained social historical ones, for example, Oscar Wilde's cell door loaned by the National Justice Museum in Nottingham, UK. Though Tate Britain's permanent collection is free to enter, *Queer British Art* was a ticketed exhibition. It should be noted that admissions from paid exhibitions (like *Queer British Art 1861–1967*) represent the smallest percentage of Tate's self-generated income, where 30% of their funding comes from the government and the rest is privately raised (The Board of Trustees of Tate Gallery (BTTG), 2018; Tate, 2020). Audience research from Tate shows that visitors to *Queer British Art* were 60% LGBTQ+ and the exhibit forms part of a concerted effort on Tate's part to welcome more diverse audiences (BTTG, 2018).[7] Tate notes that the exhibition was generally very well attended[8] and contributed to Tate Britain's 'new relevance' where visitors found it

to be 'open-minded' and 'current' (ibid.). Together, these data suggest that putting on *Queer British Art 1861–1967* did not represent a major financial risk and indeed helped enhance Tate Britain's image.

The following sections argue that because of *Queer British Art*'s limited use of queer as an identity-based term (as defined in Chapter 1); its focus on the historical and subsequent chronological display; and its limited interaction with the queer community it functions less queerly than it had the potential to do and less than the other institutions discussed here. However, through its innovative combination of art with socio-historical objects of queer significance it is able to queerly cut through traditional museal disciplines in order to create moments in which visitors might experience Muñoz's (2009) 'anticipatory illuminations', or, affective responses to queer aesthetics which suggest a queer future as described in Chapter 1. Therefore, although *Queer British Art* marks a landmark exhibition for the treatment of LGBTQ+ art in national English institutions, I argue that its strictly traditional display tactics undercut the queer reading that some of its objects might suggest.

The 'Queer' in *Queer British Art*: Terminology

As previously defined, queer is an inscrutable word which can mean as many different things to as many different people. In the context of this book, it is used in terms of identity, theory and politics with the understanding that all three are critical to understanding how to queer the museum. Because all these aspects are crucial, it is important to identify the ways in which Tate uses (or doesn't) 'queer'. *Queer British Art* primarily utilises queer as an identity-based word and thereby excludes other ways of thinking about how queerness might activate in the museum space. As described earlier, visitors were greeted with a large blue wall which announces the exhibition and immediately defines queer through filmmaker and artist Derek Jarman's words: 'For me, to use the word "queer" is a liberation, it was a word that frightened me, but no longer'.

After this introductory panel, *Queer British Art* was situated in nine galleries on the lower floor of Tate Britain in the back corner away from its wider permanent collection on the main floor. The galleries proceed chronologically on a set path followed by all visitors. As described in Table 3.1, each gallery was given a historical theme, beginning with Victorian Neoclassical paintings and sculptures right through to newly created films co-created with Channel 4. Each gallery, with walls painted in varying, rich colours, holds a number of works in different media – though predominantly paintings and works on paper. The largest galleries feature the most well-known artists, for example, pieces by the Bloomsbury Group mark the halfway point and early works by David Hockney and Francis Bacon are featured at the end. As well, some galleries, for example *Public Indecency* and *Theatrical Types* near the beginning of the show, exhibit historical objects in conjunction with art to aid in the contextualisation of the legal narrative which frames the show and the social conventions which evolve throughout it. The neat chronology and use of touchstone figures like Oscar Wilde, Noel Coward, Joe Orton,

Table 3.1 Key to *Queer British Art 1861–1967* Galleries

Queer British Art 1861–1967	
Gallery Number	*Theme*
Gallery 1	*Coded Desires*: Victorian era work highlighting queer subcultures despite the illegality of male same-sex acts.
Gallery 2	*Public Indecency*: Work from the 1880s–1920s highlighting the period's public debate about gender identity and sexuality.
Gallery 3	*Theatrical Types*: Theatre culture and its LGBTQ+ connections from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
Gallery 4	*Bloomsbury and Beyond*: Art from the famed Bloomsbury group, which included artists and writers.
Gallery 5	*Defying Convention*: Work dealing with gender expression and norms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
Gallery 6	*Arcadia and Soho*: London's queer culture of the 1950s and 1960s.
Gallery 7	*Public/Private Lives*: Further exploration of the 1950s and 1960s queer culture and its contradictions (as homosexual male sex acts were not decriminalised until 1967).
Gallery 8	*Francis Bacon and David Hockney*: Bacon and Hockney's explicit early work (pre-1967).
Interactive space	A dedicated gallery for visitors to leave feedback and watch Tate Britain's collaboration with Channel 4, *Queer Lives: Channel 4 Random Acts* (2017). Each film creates a portrait of an LGBTQ+ person.

David Hockney and Francis Bacon facilitates an easily digested narrative while often ignoring more intersectional perspectives that might have been told through the inclusion of more BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) and/or trans-people. This is not to argue that Tate should have excluded more famous characters, just that their emphasis often overshadows lesser known perspectives that were included.

One example of this is the story behind the small locket, *Pegasus Drinking from the Fountain of Hippocrene*, which was made for Michael Field by Charles de Sousy Ricketts. It is a petite gold locket with an enamelled depiction of Pegasus, a winged horse, encircled by a green enamel laurel crown and dotted with pearls and garnets. Inside is a delicate portrait of Katherine Bradley against a blue backdrop (The Fitzwilliam Museum, 2023). Charles, a gay artist and designer, designed the locket for the lovers (and aunt and niece) Edith Cooper and Katherine Bradley. The two wrote poetry together under the name Michael Field, and took it as a joint identity alongside male pronouns – as they explained, 'we are closer married' (Barlow, 2017b, p. 63). However, this narrative could have been easily missed by visitors both because of the small size of the object and its proximity in situ to a large, imposing portrait of Oscar Wilde and his prison cell door. The inclusion of such non-normative stories is important and if they had been both more numerous and better spotlighted it would have helped change the traditional, art

historical, academic tone of the exhibition towards the promise of radicality that its title represents.

Barlow (2017c) contends that *Queer British Art* was the first exhibition to give this perspective to British art, and one of the first worldwide to use queer in its title.[9] In fact, only 6 of over 40 exhibitions and/or events put on in honour of the 2017 anniversary used 'queer' in their title (Appendix A). She further argues that it was the first exhibition in Britain to embrace 'queer' and all of the different fluid, complex, interesting experiences that it can encapsulate (ibid.). On Tate's website for the exhibition, Barlow is quoted saying,

> Queer has a mixed history – from the 19th century onwards it has been used both as a term of abuse and as a term by LGBT people to refer to themselves… More recently, of course, it has become reclaimed as a fluid term for people of different sexualities and gender identities. Historians of sexuality have also argued that it is preferable to other terms for sexualities in the past as these often don't map onto modern sexual identities. In addition to carrying out audience research, we took advice from Stonewall and other LGBT charities and held focus groups with LGBT people. The advice from all of these sources was overwhelmingly that we should use it. While we tried other titles, no other option captured the full diversity of sexualities and gender identities that are represented in the show.
>
> (Tate, 2017b)

These examples all evidence how queer was used at Tate specifically as an identity-based term. It is important that Barlow (2017a; Tate, 2017b) undertook many consultations during the development of the show to better understand the word, however its focus on understanding the behaviour of historical 'queers' undermines how queer might be used and understood in different ways (as seen in later chapters).

By limiting queer solely to an identity-based term, its radicality is undermined and represents a missed opportunity to create a more experimental show (like, for example, *Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender & Identity* as discussed in Chapter 4) at Tate. Although the recognition of queer identities is important, the anti-assimilationist, non-normative radicality of queer desire is lost in the primarily upper-class, white, able-bodied stories being promoted in a national institutional setting. Barlow is clear in her description of how queer was used explicitly as a way of describing non-normative historical identities that did not have access to the language we have today. Despite her clarity, it ignores the wider political and theoretical definitions of queer discussed in Chapter 1. It recalls Parkinson's hesitation to use it in *A Little Gay History* (2013) at the BM. Parkinson argued,

> Within the context of the museum's vision and in terms of the strategy of getting the book published – I thought queer was not the right word to use. And I think taking an integrative assimilationist approach suited where the museum was at that point.
>
> (2017)

We then see a total shift in opinion only four years later, where Tate built upon the foundations of the BM to feel confident in naming and marketing *Queer British Art*.[10] However, as seen in several contemporary reviews of the show, there is a sense that Tate took a middle road where, while they used 'queer', it ended up describing a traditional, non-experimental, normative show. In a review in *The Telegraph*, Hudson argues, 'For all the radicalism promised by its bold title, the exhibition proceeds in a perfectly coherent, but fairly tame fashion through all the predictable marker moments…' (2017). Similarly, Souter argues, 'The exhibition navigates these hazardous waters effectively, but the result is that it is at risk of becoming slightly academic and dry. Despite the daring title, the approach here is generally cautious…' (2017). Levin further argues Barlow's words were often purposely ambiguous and that

> These locutions also highlighted the contortions often necessary for those presenting queer-themed exhibitions, because they fear legal consequences, loss of funding, or criticism from mainstream audiences. In particular, the use of passive voice or unidentified authorities may hide misogyny and/or homophobia.
>
> (2020, p. 11)

This is not to argue that it was wrong to take an art historical approach to an historical exhibition, or even that there was nothing interesting or 'queer' to be found in *Queer British Art*, but rather that terminology is important. Indeed, in my own experience of the exhibition, I found myself thinking that it was overly academic and almost too safe. The descriptions discussing the hidden meanings of the now rather tame Victorian works in the first gallery set a more reserved tone than was perhaps intended. The use of queer in the title promised more of the in-gallery experience than *Queer British Art* was able to deliver in terms of a radical, anti-assimilationist subject position as seen in the description of its objects and the traditional role assigned to visitors as mostly passive receivers of a new framework for British art. More radical interventions might include, for example, extensive work with the queer community (as seen in Chapters 4 and 5) or queer artist interventions.[11]

Barlow (2017c) argues that a queer framework allows one to unpack rather than impose meaning. Despite the fact that Barlow uses a queer identity to look at works in different ways (not just in assigning queerness to particular artists but looking at other frameworks by which to think about a work), Tate still eschews new ways of displaying the work outside of a strict, chronological, historical framework. Barlow summarises her criterion for inclusion as,

> Each artwork had to connect to queer perspectives and experiences or to public debates over same-sex attraction and gender diversity. These connections are very varied – in some cases, it's an artist exploring their desires, while for others, it's an audience seeing something in the work and either throwing up

> their hands in horror or finding something in the work that speaks to their own sense of identity.
>
> (Albarin, 2017)

Tate did more to approach other definitions of queer through hosting *Queer and Now* and other events at the time of the exhibition. *Queer and Now* (a free one-day event which now recurs yearly), hosted a number of queer music and dance performances, films, talks and tours which '[brought] the conversation around gender, sexuality and identity up to the present and into the future' (Tate Britain, 2017) by bringing in diverse members of London's local queer community to participate. However, the exhibition itself came across as a traditional, art historical show (perhaps unsurprising given the remit of Tate Britain) focused on non-normative identities and the ability of particular people to live successfully or not in a world which marginalised them legally and socially. As mentioned before, the show progressed chronologically from 1861 to 1967 where each of the galleries had a clear theme with group labels which identified it. Despite Barlow's (2017a) stated efforts not to create a queer canon, this type of organisation seemed to suggest one because it was situated in Tate Britain, which hosts the larger British canon of art. Overall, the focus on queer identity and the historical progression of these identities forces the show into a prescriptive narrative. It is presented neatly over the top of a traditionally told narrative instead of a queerer project which might seek to undo the historical narrative entirely given queerness' characterisation as being out of time or in ecstatic time as described in Chapters 1 and 4. An example of a more radical, queer historical exhibition is discussed in Chapter 4 with *Coming Out*.

The Queerness of Objects: Anticipatory Illuminations in *Queer British Art*

Throughout this book Muñoz's ideas surrounding queer futurity and utopia are used as a framework for understanding how to queer the museum. Though the previous discussion works to analyse a lack of queerness in *Queer British Art*, the following will describe different themes in museology and queer theory to theorise how particular objects in an exhibition might evidence what Muñoz (2009) calls 'anticipatory illuminations', and finally, how this played out in *Queer British Art*. It is critical to focus on specific objects with a queer lens both because museum objects are polysemic (Mason, 2006) - that is they are capable of embodying and representing many possible meanings - and because the experience of queerness is highly individualised. As well, the polysemic nature of objects is helpful when using a queer lens because it allows for new queer knowledges to be brought to the fore whatever the history or basic materiality of the object. Additionally, Mason (2005) cites Lidchi (1997) to argue that value and meaning created in museums cannot be separated from the context of the display and *only* becomes intelligible through this shared recognition. As Mason later articulates, sharp focus on specific objects in displays can 'exceed' and 'complicate' the overarching narrative of a

gallery or exhibition because their histories or interpretations have the '…potential to signify in many directions' (2013, p. 50).

Queer theory too stresses the importance of varied and simultaneous meanings and is often centred on the personal (Sedgwick, 1994), the body (particularly early theory in relation to the AIDS crisis; Bersani, 1987; Crimp, 1988), desire (Foucault, 1998, originally published 1976; Butler, 1999) and affect (Love, 2007; Berlant, 2011; McGlotten, 2013). Therefore, it is important especially in the queer museum context to focus on the individual – their relationship to the objects, to the exhibition generally, to each other and to the institution. Building on these themes and inspired by the Marxist theorist Ernst Bloch (1988, originally written between 1930 and 1973), Muñoz argues that through encounters with queer aesthetics one is able to glimpse a queer future or queer utopia. As he states, 'Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality' (2009, p. 1). Throughout his book he describes his own relationship to various queer artworks and how they inspire visions of a queer utopia by using hope as a critical methodology. I argue that such encounters can and do occur in the museum especially if one attaches a queer framework to discussions of display and visitor experience.

Additionally, this concept relies on museologists who theorise about the museum experience and visitors' interactions with objects. For example, it connects to Duncan's (1995) arguments that art museums are sites in which visitors can perform ritual scenarios through direct experience with art as shaped by the social, sexual and political values of the museum. She states, '…a ritual experience is thought to have a purpose, an end. It is seen as transformative: it confers or renews identity or purifies or restores order in the self or to the world through sacrifice, ordeal, or enlightenment' (ibid., p. 13). Muñoz (2009), however, postpones this transformation for the future. For him, a queer futurity is framed by the utopian. It is about the way in which we might reject what he calls the 'hollow present' and instead insist upon the potentiality of another world.[12] Anticipatory illuminations might enlighten one to Duncan's 'purified' world, or, for Muñoz, a future queer utopia. In Rounds' (2006) discussion of identity exploration in the museum, he too leaves the effects of such experiences to be compounded at an unspecified time. He argues,

> …I don't think that sudden, dramatic transformations are what we should be looking for. From the process perspective of the identity work model, the visitor may be seen instead to be using the museum experience as a way of building capacity for transformations that may or may not happen at some time in the future.
>
> (ibid., p. 144)

One can make further associations to discussions of affect and the museum (as discussed in Chapter 1) and the ability of visitors to experience different intensities of emotions when provoked by different exhibitions or objects (Soren,

2009; Witcomb, 2013; Golding, 2013; Smith and Campbell, 2015). Soren (2009) (analysing data from visitor studies done in Canadian institutions) speaks of how museums can facilitate 'transformational experiences' when the relationship between visitor and object is reframed and how this can create a lasting 'vivid impression' for visitors. Similarly, Smith and Campbell articulate that while '… heritage and museums have a performative element' these are also '…embodied acts involving complex relationships between emotion, memory (both personal and social), and cognition' (2015, p. 453). By understanding a museum as a place in which visitors might have vivid and visceral encounters with objects, we can understand how *Queer British Art* might offer examples of Muñoz's anticipatory illuminations.

The aforementioned theoretical understandings of what a museum and queer objects can facilitate played out in a number of examples throughout *Queer British Art* (two are discussed later). Although Barlow does not specifically engage with the aforementioned theorists, she mentions several times how important audience reaction is to understand a queer museum. For example, she argues,

> Each object has been chosen on its own merits. Not all artists in same-sex relationships or with gender-variant identities made art that explored those experiences. Conversely, the potential 'queerness' of an object may lie in an audience's reaction, then or now.
>
> (Barlow et al., 2017)

At a different event she states,

> Queer is a slippery property and situating it in relation to things…one thing that I really found of the show was that at certain moments for certain people the queerness or otherwise of an object may snap into focus, at other moments it may fade from view.
>
> (Barlow, 2017a)

Though Barlow describes this visitor reaction in observational terms, it is an important insight into the experience of *Queer British Art*. As Smith and Campbell (2015) argue, visitors have individual agency in the extent to which they will engage with an exhibition and further that an affective (or emotional) response is not spontaneous, but contingent on the visitor's desire and ability to seek it out and mediate the experience. This aligns with Soren's table of 'Triggers for transformational experiences' in the museum which includes, among others, 'Emotional', or 'Powerfully emotive to the point of tears', 'Sublime, the idea of infinity' or 'An esthetic experience involving imagination, reason, vast magnitude' and 'Unexpected' or 'A shocking and expected (*sic*) surprise' (2009, p. 237). Although, as argued previously, Barlow is describing queerness in terms of identity, these ideas highlight how reliant queering is on personal experience and understanding – especially in light of the fact that 60% of *Queer British Art*'s audience identified as LGBTQ+ (BTTG, 2018). This is not to argue that every visitor was thinking in

Muñoz's terms of utopia and futurity but rather that queer objects situated within exhibitions can provide opportunities for visitors to think more critically about difficult histories and social conventions that they might otherwise ignore. Further, as Rounds (citing Paris and Mercer, 2002, p. 403) argues, 'Individual objects…can contribute to stabilizing identity. In some cases, "something in the object…sparks memories, self-discoveries, and prior experiences that are personally meaningful" ' (2006, p. 140). Of course, it is important to acknowledge that this will not be a universal visitor experience due to a variety of subjective factors which characterise each visit. In theorising the queer, affective museum experience it is critical that future research engages in visitor studies.

As described earlier, the show contains a number of historically important non-art objects (particularly in the *Theatrical Types* gallery as seen in Table 3.1) that might seem out of place in an art gallery. Not only do they add context to help substantiate historical understandings of the period (as Bishop, 2013, discusses), they also become art objects on par with the paintings and sculptures because of their placement within an art show at a national art gallery. This anti-taxonomical act is queer in its rejection of the traditional hierarchies and distinctions which organise museum collections. As Nettleton (2013) describes in her discussion of art versus ethnographic objects in African collections, museums should strive to be a utopia (for her, built upon Marin's (1993) no-place) which questions the boundaries of its categorisations and to see them as horizons instead of borders. She makes the distinction between Jameson's (2005) conception of utopia as bounded or sealed and Marin (1993), who argues rather that its borders are fraying and unclear. She argues that the destabilising of traditional museum categories – prompted in her example by the nature of collecting performance pieces or their remains instead of more traditional *objets d'art* – allows the museum to move away from Euro-American value systems which place less value on the work and practices of marginalised people. In the case of *Queer British Art*, it becomes a queer act leaning on Muñoz's understanding of queerness as a horizonal potential. The objects discussed later become art objects in *Queer British Art* which tell stories of real personal significance that shed light on pre-Stonewall, pre-Wolfenden Britain and might incite the visitor to access future potentialities through anticipatory illuminations.

One much discussed object in the show was Oscar Wilde's cell door from his imprisonment in Reading Gaol from 1895 to 1897 (Barlow, 2017b; Queer Britain, 2023). The battered, cream-coloured metal hung in the *Public Indecency* themed gallery, the second gallery of the show, directly across from the entrance. Surrounded by dark, plum-coloured walls which mimic the darkness one might imagine of a cell and hanging parallel to an almost life size (and indeed, larger than the cell door) portrait of a young Oscar Wilde (painted c. 1884 by Robert Goodloe Harper Pennington), it marks an important moment in the history of gay male sexuality (Barlow, 2017b, p. 61). Though one might question its inclusion in a show about queer British art, the object and Wilde himself are of socio-historic importance. Barlow (2017c) contends that it was included specifically because the story is too well known. It was intended to provoke the visitor, to make them think again about what they know and how the story was told to them. It is reminiscent of

Witcomb's argument that an experience at the Greenough site in Western Australia '…resulted in the slow realization that I was becoming part of its meaning rather than simply gaining access to information that had nothing to do with my own subject position' (2013, p. 259). Though Witcomb is speaking in the context of colonial versus indigenous histories presented at the site, the ability to unsettle what the visitor expects about the narrative they will be told is a powerful one. It is one thing to know Wilde went to prison, and another to be confronted with the door which held him inside. Witcomb also argues that 'simple props' (in her case, barbed wire as a tool of colonisation) can alter the visitor's conception of a story they may already know by creating affective reactions instead of merely cognitive ones.

The experience of seeing the cell door becomes embodied knowledge instead of simply intellectual or abstract. Barlow (2017c) recounts as well that visitor comments left in the final gallery revealed that it brought people to tears. This type of intense emotional interaction is a critical example in the conception of anticipatory illuminations in the museum. Witcomb (2013) suggests that material encounters in the museum give access to what Benjamin (1979) terms *Erfahrung*[13] or Proust's involuntary memory, by shocking the visitor into understanding something as different than they thought. That is, it forces the visitor into a '"radical tension" with the present' by challenging their previous understanding of the topic while also being deeply reliant on it (Witcomb, 2013, p. 269). The unexpected collision of old and new knowledges has the ability to catalyse these affective reactions.

Smaller in scale and fame, one encounters *Box of Buttons* from Dennis Wirth-Miller (a painter) and his partner, Richard Chopping (a designer) in the *Public/Private Lives* gallery (described in Table 3.1). At first glance it is an unremarkable, battered tin box chock full of shiny, regimental buttons (Barlow, 2017b, p. 12). Wirth-Miller and Chopping met in 1937 and celebrated their civil partnership in 2005. Together they had collected the buttons off uniforms of guardsmen with whom they had liaisons. Its presence in the show acts in an archival way as the surviving ephemera of past sexual acts. This idea is further explored in Chapter 6 in relation to the SMU's archives and the idea that some objects leave a 'queer residue' which extends the life of these queer acts past their actual performance. Its significance in *Queer British Art* would be impossible to surmise without the context of its wall text. However, the box provides evidence of queer lives and leaves tangible residue of past transgressions that are usually absent from official historical records (unless as punishment). As Tyburczy argues,

> …by focusing on sexual display as a choreographic engagement that manages movement and affect and to suggest that the composition of this regulated experience with an object is just as important as, if not more important than, the composition of the sex object itself.
>
> (2016, p. 41)

As seen in Chapter 2, in her discussion of sex museums she highlights a queer curatorship which allows visitors to re-think the traditional narratives of sexuality

and gender identity seen in museums through experimental display tactics. In this case, the visitor encounters a queer personal object in the middle of an art historical show and is asked to think about its significance. It is an intriguing object not only because of what its story reveals but in terms of queer visibility and the coded memories it gives access to. As with the cell door discussed previously, the object may provoke an affective response in the visitor through its innocuous appearance and explicit history and its juxtaposition with Keith Vaughan's nude drawings in the gallery before and the violent intensity of Francis Bacon's work in the following gallery. As Smith and Campbell (2015) argue, emotional responses to objects can destabilise received narratives and allow the visitor to engage with hidden and/or marginalised voices. *Box of Buttons* represents a queer moment in *Queer British Art* because it leaves tangible evidence of queer lives in what some may perceive as a more visceral way than some of the visually explicit artwork which surrounds it.

Given these examples, I argue that visitors' experiences of individual objects are important in understanding how *Queer British Art* might be considered queer. Despite the anticipatory illuminations to be found in the show, there was little done by Tate in terms of collections and acquisitions to make sure these future queer utopias extend beyond the end of *Queer British Art*'s run. It is vital to consider how temporary events affect permanent collections. Barlow (2017a) argues that the show was not meant to cement a queer British canon but was rather an opportunity to bring together disparate objects that open up new conversations. Indeed, she (2017c) expressed the hope that others will take this as a provocation to widen the conversation and find new material. However, there were no new acquisitions made by Tate for the *Queer British Art* show, with perhaps the exception of Kenneth Halliwell's *Untitled* (1967) purchased in 2016 (Tate, 2017f). In fact, only 17.4% (34 out of 196) of objects shown belonged to Tate or the Tate Gallery Archive. This is important if the show is to be considered the opening up of a 'canon' of queer British art because it drew from the collections of many important English institutions (notably the V&A and the National Portrait Gallery). It is significant that, unlike the Walker Art Gallery which did acquire new objects for *Coming Out* (discussed in Chapter 4), *Queer British Art* did not have any lasting impact in terms of Tate's holdings. That is, because *Queer British Art* was only a temporary exhibition, there was no discernible addition to the permanent collection that could be traced back to the importance of this show. Despite the fact that specific objects offer opportunities to queer the museum, it is also necessary to consider the lasting influence they might have after the exhibition closes.

Queer British Art and the Queer Community

One aspect of a 'queer museum' shared by all institutions included in this book is an emphasis on community. Bringing the queer community, though an elusive entity, into the museum means creating connections between the past and present in a way that is valuable to traditionally marginalised people. *Queer British Art* itself germinated from discussions through Tate's LGBTQ+ staff network, a highly localised section of the queer community (Albarin, 2017). The network

had 45 active members across Tate in 2018 (BTTG, 2018). Tate's annual report from that year describes how *Queer British Art* allowed the institution to engage the staff network and different communities in order to think about 'established assumptions' of gender and sexuality and how they were historically understood and represented. However, La Kingsbeer (Tate Britain's Marketing Officer and a co-chair of the LGBTQ+ staff network) warns that diverse programming cannot become tokenistic, especially after something like *Queer British Art* (ibid.). Part of this worry is ameliorated as Tate Britain has continued with the *Queer and Now* festival (mentioned earlier) after 2017 and even expanded its partner base in this to include UK Black Pride, Trans Pride Brighton and Regard[14] (ibid.). The inclusion of more and more diverse members of the community is exemplary but shows a greater willingness to experiment with one-day events over longer temporary exhibitions or permanent interventions which might take more time to organise and be more entrenched in institutional politics.

The most direct way *Queer British Art* engaged the LGBTQ+ community (and its broader community of visitors) was the use of comment cards in the final gallery. This room also contained films made in conjunction with Channel 4: *Queer Lives: Channel 4 Random Acts*, which told personal stories of six British LGBTQ+ people including Ian McKellen, Shon Faye and David Hoyle among others (Tate, 2017c). Barlow (2017a) comments that although she had no idea how the audience would use these cards, they were a very important inclusion for her. She recounts how they provoked conversations across cards, how some left numbers for helplines; others left positive comments; and some even told visitor life histories. She further found that the exhibition was significant in the lives of many visitors. It is important to recognise that visitors felt safe and empowered enough to use these cards and leave tangible evidence of the community which engaged with the exhibition. The fate of the cards post-exhibition is unclear, but it would be interesting to discover if visitors' comments were accessioned into Tate's archives or collections and have any influence over future instances of LGBTQ+ representation at Tate.

In addition to these more positive connections, there were also criticisms, citing mostly a lack of BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic), lesbian, bisexual, trans-, dis/abled and working-class representation within the exhibition (as seen during my visit). For example, some visitors left messages like, 'Butch dykes rock!! But not in this exhibition. Looking for lesbian visibility' (Santoro, 2017). Santoro (ibid.) also saw some visitors express discomfort with the broad use of 'queer'. These kinds of criticism were the same levelled at the exhibition in many contemporary publications. As Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz remark, '…sexuality is intersectional, not extraneous to other modes of difference, and calibrated to a firm understanding of queer as a political metaphor without a fixed referent' (2005, p. 1). Therefore, queerness in the museum should be approached intersectionally as Sullivan and Middleton (2019) insist, despite a lack of material objects. As will be seen in Chapter 4, *Coming Out* addresses these issues more directly in the gallery with the creation of FORUM. Barlow (2017b) discusses these challenges in the catalogue and introductory wall text[15] by lamenting the lack of historical evidence

left of a community long criminalised, especially those further marginalised by gender, race and class. This historical context plagues both Tate's own collections and those institutions who loaned work as well.

Again, the historicisation of this dearth of material focuses on identity rather than how the display or visitor experience might be thought through differently when there are important perspectives missing. Take, for example, the way objects already present in the collection were queerly re-framed in the two exhibitions (both called *Queering the Museum*) at the History Trust of South Australia in Adelaide and Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in Birmingham, UK. In 2016, the History Trust of South Australia hosted a community co-curated pop-up exhibition which used disparate objects already present in the collection and paired them with a new, imaginative interpretation (Middleton, 2016; Sullivan and Middleton, 2019). One example, called 'Lavender Marriage', paired a lavender wedding dress and hat from the 1940s with a 1930s fancy dress beard to bring to light the historical convention of a non-heterosexual person marrying conventionally (often colloquially called having or being a 'beard'). In this way, they were able to tell a story present in history, though not explicitly through the traditional lens of their collection and thus merge the idea of an 'included' object with an 'excluded' narrative. This example can be understood by building upon art historian Claire Bishop's understanding of radical museology, or a museological framework which prioritises a sharply politicised and contextual representation, I would further her position to argue for a queer radical museology. One can extend her arguments out from the pure art object to look at how object juxtaposition might pull out a queer narrative. That is, beyond enriching the narrative with broader social context, how one might salvage missing queer histories that have no tangible evidence by making surprising juxtapositions between two collection objects. This is also related to the juxtaposition of non-art objects in an art historical show as discussed before with the examples of Oscar Wilde's cell door and the *Box of Buttons*. Bishop argues that these curatorial tactics mobilise history and make objects 'historical agents' (ibid., p. 56). The idea of an active object can be utilised to talk as well about queer histories. Where past knowledge structures would have never paired the objects of *Lavender Marriage* with the interpretation of *Queering the Museum*, by highlighting authorial voice (the LGBTQ+ community) and reframing the relationship of what it means to be in- or ex-cluded, the museum can pursue new interpretations.

An earlier example is found in the artist and curator Matt Smith's 2010–2011 intervention at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery: *Queering the Museum* (Horn, Winchester and Smith, 2010). He intervened in their permanent collection displays, though his changes were not similarly permanent (Moss, 2010). He used a queer perspective to look at the objects in different and sometimes humorous ways and paired them with new ceramic works he created. One example includes the installation of his small, salt-glazed bear sculptures next to a taxidermy otter in a glass case in reference to popular gay male descriptors.[16] This takes the archive of their collection and gives new meaning to objects by highlighting an undoing of knowledge, and a past failure to understand the potential of the kinds of knowledges

certain objects can inscribe. However, both of these examples do little to address issues of lasting or radical change because artist interventions and/or temporary exhibitions are by nature *temporary* installations where the heavy theoretical lifting is placed in the hands of the artist and not the museum's caretakers or those who influence its institutional ideology. This book instead argues that auto-institutional critique must work in conjunction with outside critique (be it artist or community) in order to combat these issues (as discussed in Chapter 7).

In conjunction with *Queer British Art*, Tate also hosted *The Black Flamingo Open Studio* with artist Ben Connors and poet Dean Atta in which they made new works exploring queer identity and the *From Then to Now: Contemporary Artistic Perspectives on Making Queer Visible* conference which welcomed artists, activists and creative practitioners (Tate, 2017a, 2017g). Both those events go some way in addressing the criticism that the exhibition itself was too white with the participation of Dean Atta and Campbell X. However, the presence of these two events did not change the perspective given to visitors in the gallery. It signals a need to better deal with issues of race, class and gender and the history of collecting within the gallery space itself. As mentioned earlier, one way to do this is presented in Chapter 4 in a discussion of *Coming Out*'s community-led gallery which lay at the heart of that exhibition.

One in-gallery addition in *Queer British Art* which partially addresses the criticisms mentioned earlier is the use of extra labelling: 'LGBT Voices: Responses from Well-known LGBTQ+ Figures' on some objects. For example, in the *Public Indecency* gallery one was written by Juno Roche, a writer and trans- campaigner, and in *Theatrical Types* there was a contribution from Sabah Choudrey, a queer Pakistani activist, writer and speaker. In *Bloomsbury and Beyond*, the artist Patrick Staff had a placard next to Gluck's self-portrait which reads: 'Queerness renders categories like "woman," "butch," "lesbian" or "transsexual" imperfect, historical, temporary and arbitrary'. The inclusion of contemporary LGBTQ+ voices was a critical intervention for a historical show because it helps draw connections between the contemporary queer community and a history that has been largely lost to them. The choice of writers also helps to address issues of diversity aimed at the show. Where Barlow argues that there is a lack of material evidence to include in the show, these voices make a concrete contribution concerning contemporary queer lives. They function similarly to, though less effectively than Smith's intervention discussed before, as an important re-inscription of knowledge from more diverse voices. Though an important addition to the show, these extra labels were insufficient in changing the overall perception of the diversity of the exhibition which, as described earlier, was still seen as too white and gay male by much of the audience. In Tate Britain's permanent collection display there is more of an attempt to address these issues with, for example, the *A Queer Walk Through British Art* gallery trail, the creation of themed webpages which organise their collections by themes like 'disABILITY and art' and 'Black Identities in Art' through the input of staff networks and the 2019 display of *60 Years* of around 60 works from 1960 to the present by women artists (Tate Britain, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d).

Conclusion

Queer British Art represents just one of a multitude of exhibitions put on for the 2017 anniversary. However, it will remain an important milestone in the history of queer museology because it spot lit a new framework for the British canon of art and forthrightly welcomed the queer community into a national gallery. Through the re-inscription of social historical artefacts to artworks, *Queer British Art* allowed for anticipatory illuminations, or queer affective responses that tackled certain binaries of knowledge that have been upheld in the past. These objects were particularly powerful in creating situations in which intellectual knowledge can also become embodied, as with, for example, Oscar Wilde's cell door. Although I argue that *Queer British Art* did not reach the radical potential of its name due to a narrow understanding of queerness and a chronological, art historical display, the queerly framed socio-historical objects represent a significant and queer curatorial tactic. In contrast with the proceeding chapters, *Queer British Art* represents an exhibition which seemed to have little impact on its institution as a whole. Though positive steps can be seen with the recurring *Queer and Now* festival and Tate's LGBTQ staff network, more can be done to queer the institution more holistically (as seen in Chapters 5 and 6). In the end, however, such increased LGBTQ+ visibility at a national institution cannot be overvalued and will hopefully mark the start of swelling and more radical queer experimentation at national museums in general.

Notes

1 The 1967 law specifies 'private' as meaning that the sex must occur in a locked and curtained home between only two men with no other person present anywhere else in the house (Tatchell, 2017).
2 As Tatchell (2017) notes, legislation which allowed the firing of seafarers for homosexual acts committed on merchant ships was not repealed until 2017.
3 The Wolfenden Report, or the *Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution*, was produced in 1957 by the Wolfenden Committee (chaired by John Wolfenden) (British Parliament, 2019). Due to a comparative rise in cases imprisoning men for homosexual activity under the *1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act*, the committee researched and produced legal recommendations for the treatment of homosexual offences and prostitution - namely that they should be considered moral judgments and that it is not the 'law's business' to prosecute private homosexual sex acts (ibid.). Between 1957 and 1967 there were multiple attempts at changing the laws that all failed.
4 *Hello Sailor!: Gay Life on the Ocean Wave* did not show continuously at the MMM, but also travelled to Sea City Museum in Southampton, UK (13 April–09 September 2007), the Discovery Museum in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK (28 January–19 April 2009), the Tall Ship at Glasgow Harbour, in Glasgow, UK (05 September–29 November 2009), Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada (19 May–27 November 2011) and intermittent times at the MMM until March 2019 (National Museums Liverpool, 2019a).
5 For example, see *Family Album* a collaborative exhibition hosted at the National Portrait Gallery; Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens; Beningbrough Hall and Gardens,

Yorkshire; Montacute House, Somerset; Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery and Museums Sheffield (National Portrait Gallery, 2020; Frost, 2015).

6 Tate Britain was originally connected to The National Gallery (founded in 1826) (The National Gallery, 2019), but became independent in 1955 (Tate, 2019c).

7 At Tate Modern, this effort was mirrored with BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) audiences with the exhibition *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* which ran from 12 July–22 October 2017 (Tate, 2019d).

8 The most well-attended show at Tate Britain in 2017 was *David Hockney* (Tate, 2018, 2019b).

9 I note several exhibitions which used 'queer' in their titles and were held before 2017, including 12 exhibitions held at the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art in New York, USA, with the first being *21st Century Queer Men: Artists on the Edge* in 2005; *Queer Is Here* at the MOL in 2006; *My Queer Eye 3 – International Artists Invited to the Gay Museum* in 2006; *Exhibiting Queer* in 2014 and *SuperQueeroes - Our LGBTI* Comic Book Heroes and Heroines* in 2016 at the SMU; *Queer: Desire, Power and Identity* held at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Stockholm, Sweden, in 2008; *Queering the Museum* at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in 2010–2011; *Queer Book Diorama Show* at a branch of the New York Public Library in 2014; and *Revealing Queer* at the Museum of History and Industry in Seattle, Washington, USA, also in 2014.

10 'Queer' was used in another Tate publication that same year: *A Queer Little History of Art* by Alex Pilcher (2017).

11 Artist interventions are one important tactic used to approach issues of silence or uneasy legacies within the museum (Mason and Sayner, 2018). Many institutions choose to utilise the expertise of contemporary artists by hiring them to make conscientious, political and subversive interventions within museum displays and collections. The oft-cited example is the artist Fred Wilson's intervention at the Maryland Historical Society: *Mining the Museum* (Corrin, 1994). Wilson worked to highlight the history of slavery that had always been embedded within the collection (and certainly within the history) but had never been showcased in the museum's permanent displays. Museums often choose artist intervention as a means to engage in critique or acknowledgement without placing the onus on itself. It allows the institution to transfer its agency onto an entity that can both be more provocative and does not have long-standing ties to the museum (either to its past or its future) (Mason, 2017). It is a valid, if temporary, way for the museum to engage in the critical discourses which surround its history and collections and is sometimes pursued within a queer framework (as discussed later in the chapter).

12 Muñoz's (2009) position on queer futurity stands in contrast to another strand in queer theory best articulated by Lee Edelman in his book, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004). Instead of looking optimistically and utopically towards a possible queer future, Edelman instead posits that queers live in opposition to the 'reproductive futurity' that children symbolise, and are instead anti-relational, narcissistic and future-negating.

13 Witcomb (2013) summarises Benjamin's (1979) description of *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*, where the first refers to the convergence of memory and unconscious data and the second to mere information. Following on Bergson and Proust, *Erlebnis* does not allow for deep critical and intellectual engagement. Benjamin argues it is a symptom of the changing pace at which humanity receives and processes information since mechanical reproduction became commonplace.

14 Regard is a national charity run by self-identified LGBT disabled people whose aims include 'To provide information, advice and support to LGBT disabled people; to raise awareness and campaign on issues affecting disabled LGBT people; and to combat social isolation among LGBT disabled people' (Regard, 2019).

15 The introductory wall text of the exhibition states:

> Queer experience is diverse and there are some perspectives for which we have found little surviving material. This is not a definitive selection of queer British artworks. Rather, we hope this exhibition will be part of a bigger conversation that will encourage more material, more stories and more lives to be discovered.

16 One of his bear sculptures, *Tribute to Simeon Solomon* (2009), was displayed in *Coming Out* at the Walker Art Gallery and is discussed in Chapter 4.

4 Politically and Personally Queer

Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender & Identity at the Walker Art Gallery

Traveling cross-country on a damp and dreary autumn day, I was filled with anticipation as I approached Liverpool Lime Street station. *Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender & Identity* was showing just a stone's throw away at the Walker Art Gallery. Walking through its neo-Classical, Victorian façade, I was immediately alerted to the exhibition by big, blue stickers dotting the floor and leading the way up the grand stone staircase. Once at the top, the rotunda was decorated with a multitude of rainbow pride flags and indeed the first artwork could be heard before it was seen at the entrance of the exhibition (a video work by Hannah Quinlan and Rosie Hastings titled *UK Gay Bar Directory*) (Figure 4.1). It beckoned invitingly to unknowing visitors and set an altogether more cheerful tone than the weather. From the first, it was immediately, explicitly queer and promoted its LGBTQ+ themes to all museum patrons regardless if they ended up inside the exhibition itself.

Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender & Identity ran at the Walker Art Gallery from 28 July to 05 November 2017.[1] It was curated by Charlotte Keenan McDonald, the curator of British Art at three venues within National Museums Liverpool (NML) (the Walker Art Gallery, Lady Lever Art Gallery and Sudley House). Also on view in Liverpool to coincide with the 50th anniversary were:

- *Transformation: One Man's Cross-dressing Wardrobe* from 24 October 2015 to 13 February 2017 at the Walker Art Gallery and 31 March 2017–28 January 2018 at Sudley House
- *Fashion Icons: Celebrating Gay Designers* from 02 July 2017 to 01 August 2018 at the Walker Art Gallery
- *Tales from the City: Stories, Objects and Memories from Liverpool's LGBT+ Community* from 13 October 2017 to 31 March 2019 at the Museum of Liverpool
- *Making Himself Claire: Grayson Perry's Dresses* from 04 November 2017 to 04 February 2018 at the Walker Art Gallery

Of these, *Coming Out* was the biggest show in terms of objects and gallery space. It atemporally displayed 100 objects from 44 artists in a variety of media (including painting, sculpture, installation and video work) (McDonald, 2017). The majority of these works belong to the Walker's or Arts Council England's collections with

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Figure 4.1 The first floor of the Walker showing the rotunda at the top of the stairs and the entrance to *Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender & Identity*. Photograph by the author. Used by kind permission of National Museums Liverpool.

very few other loans. In a continuation of (though not curated in conjunction with) *Queer British Art*, it looked at works made after 1967. McDonald argues the works are united by central themes including desire, history, visibility, activism and queer politics. As with *Queer British Art* there was a lack of trans- representation, which McDonald acknowledges in the show's catalogue (ibid.). With the exception of *I Want* (2015) by Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz and *Miss Lesbian I (Amsterdam)* (2009) and *Miss Lesbian VII (Amsterdam)* (2009) by Zanele Muholi which were purchased by the museum with help from the Art Fund in 2017, a trans- perspective was represented through the community-centred FORUM discussed later. The exhibition was free to enter and welcomed 62,000 visitors (National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside (NMGM), 2018).

The following chapter works to understand *Coming Out* as queer museum practice and how, in comparing exhibitions mounted during the 50th anniversary,

it might be considered a queerer show than *Queer British Art* as described in Chapter 3. Using data gained through an interview with the show's curator, and detailed display and document analysis, I argue that *Coming Out* was a politically queer exhibition which focused on wide community involvement in order to explicitly address the art historical gaps identified in the works presented. Through an innovative approach to community collaboration, personal address to the visitor and the rejection of linear temporality, the exhibition encouraged the visitor to question their own political subjectivity and its relation to the art on display. Further, by understanding the exhibition through Muñoz's (2009) definition of 'ecstatic time', as discussed in Chapter 1, and Halberstam's (2011) notions around queer unbeing, I argue *Coming Out* disavows the traditional boundaries of an exhibition and its audience.

Understanding the Walker Art Gallery

The Walker Art Gallery is a Fine Art museum located in Liverpool, UK (Figure 4.2). Liverpool is a large city on the Irish Sea in northwest England with a population closing in on half a million as of 2021 (Liverpool City Council, 2021). It is home to many museums, including NML which consists of the International Slavery Museum, Lady Lever Art Gallery, the Merseyside Maritime Museum, the Museum of Liverpool, Sudley House, World Museum and the Walker Art Gallery (NML, 2019a). The Walker Art Gallery is situated in neoclassical building which opened in 1877 with a donation from local brewer and alderman Andrew Barclay Walker (Walker Art Gallery, 2019b). It became a national museum in 1986 through its affiliation with the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside (NMGM) (called National Museums Liverpool since 2003) (NMGM, 2019; Walker Art Gallery, 2019a). The NML collections together contain more than 4 million objects, with the Walker focusing on decorative objects and Fine Art dating from the Renaissance to the contemporary (NMGM, 2019; Walker Art Gallery, 2020).

In comparison with Tate Britain in Chapter 3, it is important to remember the differences between museums in London and those outside it – namely that there is less funding and fewer visitors. However, NML are the most visited English museums outside of London (NMGM, 2019). During 2018–2019 NML welcomed almost four million people to its eight sites, which marks the second year running in which they topped previous visitor numbers (NMGM, 2019). In 2017–2018, the year of *Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender & Identity*, the Walker itself had over 300,000 visitors, making it the fifth most visited of NML's sites (NML, 2019c). Visitor evaluations found that around 60% of visitors to the Walker (where permanent exhibits are free to enter) also viewed *Coming Out* (a temporary and free display) and that *Coming Out* welcomed many repeat visitors (McDonald, 2019). This majority indicates a high level of public interest in what some may consider niche programming.

The NML received 59% of its funding from the UK government in 2018–2019, a 10% decrease from the previous year (NMGM, 2019). However, it should be noted that this is still almost double of what Tate receives from the government.

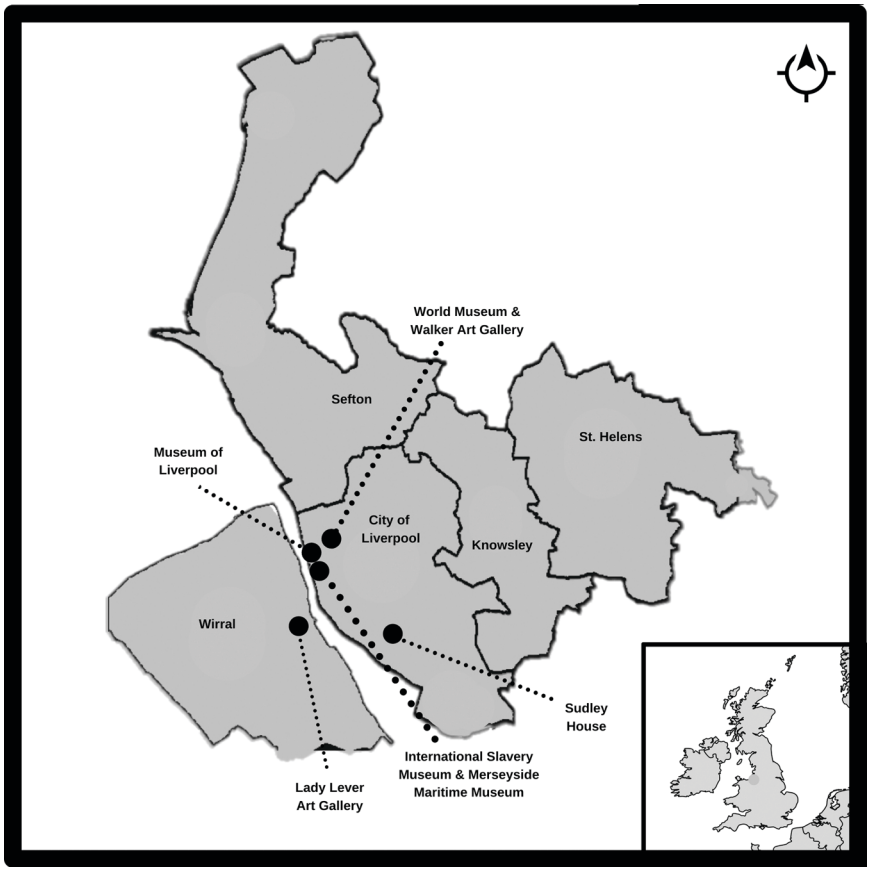

Figure 4.2 A map of Liverpool highlighting the Walker Art Gallery's location in relation to other sites of National Museums Liverpool. Map by the author.

This implies that the NML as a whole is relatively financially stable. In 2018–2019, it received £19.8 million combined revenue and capital funding (ibid.). The rest of NML's funding includes donations, legacies, charities,[2] trading activities and investments. Despite the decrease in government funding, their 2018–2019 budget increased by over £5 million to over £30 million (NMGM, 2019). It is important to note that while the exact budget for *Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender & Identity* was not published, the exhibition included the acquisition of several works through the Art Fund (2018).[3] Additionally, and unlike *Queer British Art*, *Coming Out* was free to enter (as are the permanent galleries of the Walker). McDonald (2019) stresses that it was important for an exhibition on this theme to be open to all. The lack of monetary gain which would stem from this exhibition implies that the Walker is deeply committed to increasing its LGBTQ+ representation regardless of the number of visitors or financial incentives.

Coming Out arose from McDonald's work on the 'Pride and Prejudice' LGBT+ research project (funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation) and the Art Fund's contribution to acquire LGBTQ+ works for the Walker (McDonald, 2019). Additionally, when McDonald began working on the exhibition she was unaware of the 50th anniversary and argues that the sector as a whole did not anticipate the anniversary or the amount of programming that occurred (ibid.). McDonald's original intention with 'Pride and Prejudice' was to uncover and document hidden histories (as discussed later) within the collection and then to fill gaps with the awarded grant from the Art Fund. However, as the project progressed McDonald felt that it was more important to support contemporary and emerging queer artists and acquire their work rather than to try and buy expensive works by already celebrated artists. Although highlighting previously marginalised histories is a valuable practice for museums to partake in, the ability to support part of the current queer community allows the institution to use its resources for the benefit of a marginalised community in a material way. Not only does it help the specific artists whose work is acquired but it allows queer content to be prized, respected and seen. Though the contemporary art world and its economic transactions may be very far from the lived reality of most queer lives, the Walker's commitment to nurturing current artists signals its desire to engage with living queer communities rather than to only reiterate successful white, gay, cisgender, male narratives which are already recognised by the academy (as with for example, David Hockney or Francis Bacon). This is not to say that those artists are unimportant, and indeed *Coming Out* did feature Hockney[4] but that using acquisition funds for contemporary queer artists tangibly prevents the continuation of 'hiding' or ignoring the history of queer art as represented in British museums.

Addressing 'Hidden Histories'

The evolving goal for museums and in museology to represent and collect non-white, non-cisgender, non-heterosexual, non-able-bodied stories, represented earlier by NML's Pride and Prejudice project, is often described as 'recovering hidden histories' – hidden by past social conventions which ideology permeated museum display. The decolonial[5] and queering turn in museums aims to address the lost representation of marginalised groups in a variety of ways. For example, Porter critiques museums and their collections from a feminist perspective by '[looking] for the placing of sexual difference in the narrative of museum exhibitions; and at the moments of unease – the hesitations, contradictions, unconscious slips and awkward silences – in that narrative' (1996, p. 111). The silences and contradictions show how museums replicate and inculcate difference that can lead to dangerous assumptions. That is, if the hesitations and silences are unquestioned by the visitor (or, crucially, the museum staff), then the absence of minority voices are further relegated to a form of non-existence. This erasure in past museum display correlates to ideas in queer theory where minority lives and bodies (specifically those with non-normative genders and sexualities) are made less than human, for Foucault (1998, originally published in 1978), different species or for Butler (1993), abject beings.

The idea that difference is defined by the Other is not new (Sedgwick, 1990; Alcoff, 1991; Butler, 1993; Foucault, 1998). Museums have many options by which they might spotlight past problematics which suppress the Other (present in the collection whether desired or not) and overcome such silences. At the Walker, McDonald specifically used acquisition funding to purchase works by trans- artists (discussed earlier) and further created the FORUM (discussed later) to forefront the lived experience of trans- people. Obviously, different institutions will address these issues in different ways, but it is important for an institution to be self-reflexive in order to redress problematic silences. McDonald's 'Pride and Prejudice' project is an example of one such exercise. As Mason and Sayner (2018) argue, other museums have used artist interventions, gallery trails and temporary exhibitions (though all have their issues) in order to confront past 'hidden histories' and address previous structures of knowledge which may have limited a museum's perspective on its collections. It should be noted that not all silences are controversial, for example, those found in war, military or memorial museums (ibid.).

In considering the ways in which silence affects the museum, it is crucial to examine why those silences exist in the first place. Inherent to the medium of the museum is the partiality with which it treats certain knowledges. As institutions with limited space and collections, they must privilege some objects over others, and thus prioritise certain information over others. Museologist Sharon Macdonald suggests that this makes a museum 'a theory: a suggested way of seeing the world' (1996, p. 14). Further, she argues that,

> The contradictory, ambivalent, position which museums are in makes them key cultural loci of our times. Through their displays and day-to-day operations they inevitably raise questions about knowledge and power, about identity and difference, and about permanence and transience. Precisely because they have become global symbols through which status and community are expressed, they are subject to appropriation and the struggle for ownership.
>
> (ibid., p. 2)

Here, Macdonald summarises the ways in which difference, silence and temporality are intertwined within the museum space, and intriguingly brings up the idea of ownership – an idea which McDonald challenges through the creation of the FORUM and her relinquishing of curatorial authority.[6] Museums are often public institutions, as with NML – 'owned' by the people – why then is the full spectrum of the public not accurately reflected?[7] It is perhaps obvious in view of the history of museums and the elitist perspectives of many of their founders, however, as we will see at the Walker, the struggle against silence and for a broader ownership to combat these gaps remains important. That is, museums have the ability to overcome suppressive regimes of regulatory power even as they are limited by their medium and a necessarily finite display of objects. One way to challenge this regulatory power, as seen in the following section, is to harness the personal and political power of queer rhetoric and directly address the viewer.

Tone and Language in *Coming Out*: Politically and Personally Queer

A critical aspect of *Coming Out* and its queerness is the tone of political urgency it tries to impart to the visitor. Vanasse (the education manager of the Arts Council Collection at the Walker at the time of the exhibition) and McDonald explain:

> Integral to *Coming Out* is the exploration of gender, sexuality and identity. Rather than pinning these ideas onto the artworks alone, the exhibition aims to encourage the visitor to find their own relationship to these concepts. As these ideas are based on an individual's personal experiences, having a space for people to explore, respond and discuss them is key.
>
> (2017, p. 25)

McDonald (2019) explains that she wanted the show and each work to serve as a catalyst for discussion. For her it was not just about showing support or improving LGBTQ+ representation in museums but a 'powerful opportunity' to move things forward and be an 'active ally'. It recalls Tyburczy's argument that,

> Like Foucault, I call for a 'different economy of bodies and pleasures,' one that embraces communities, desires, and practices and asks sex to speak in the service, not of vilifying or exposing the speaker, but rather of invigorating the political with pleasure.
>
> (2016, p. 8)

Though Tyburczy defines a queer curatorship populated with more explicit objects (due to her focus on sex museums and her experiences at the Leather Archives and Museum), her argument that it is less about exposure of LGBTQ+ objects and more about the political potential of these objects, also aligns with McDonald's own approaches to *Coming Out*. That is, the works in *Coming Out* are meant to be provocative and induce reflection and dialogue within the visitor, not just to expose a work as LGBTQ+, but rather to infuse the viewer with a new subjectivity. This is pivotal if we are to consider queer beyond its identity-based implications and instead through a queer theoretical framework (as discussed in Chapter 1).

This queer political work is initiated not just through the exhibited works but through the language used throughout the show. As explored in Chapter 1, queer terminology is often enigmatic. Ideas of queerness denote both non-normative sexual and gender identities and a discipline and political practice which emphasises anti-assimilation, rebellion and knowledges constructed outside of standing binaries. Queer has a complicated relationship with individuals, groups of people and institutions and these are all at play at the Walker. *Coming Out* is able to acknowledge the multiplicity of queer in precise language that addresses both the personal and political for visitors of different demographics. Indeed, the group labels of *Coming Out* ask personal questions about identity and are paired with definitions of important contextual words (for example, intersectionality) rather than explanatory texts about the history of queer British art (Figures 4.3–4.5).

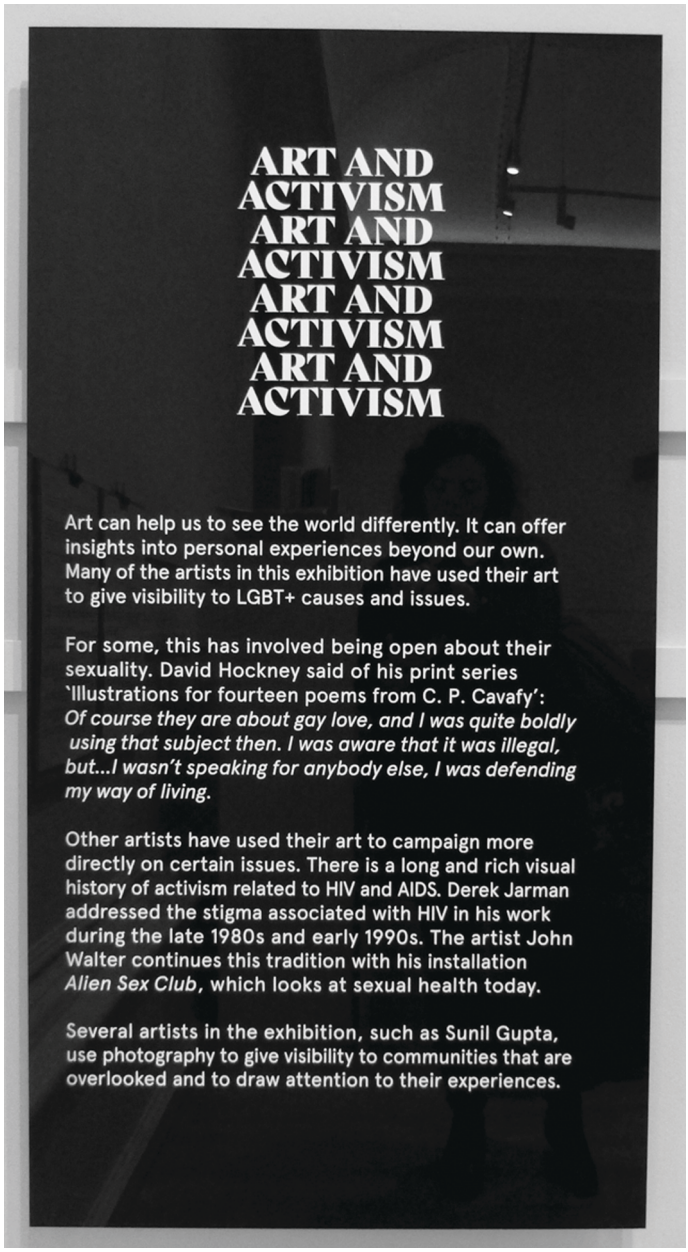

Figure 4.3 Close-up of wall text seen in the FORUM discussing 'Art and Activism'. Photograph by the author. Used by kind permission of National Museums Liverpool.

Figure 4.4 Close-up of wall text asking, 'What makes us who we are and how does it shape our experiences?'. Photograph by the author. Used by kind permission of National Museums Liverpool.

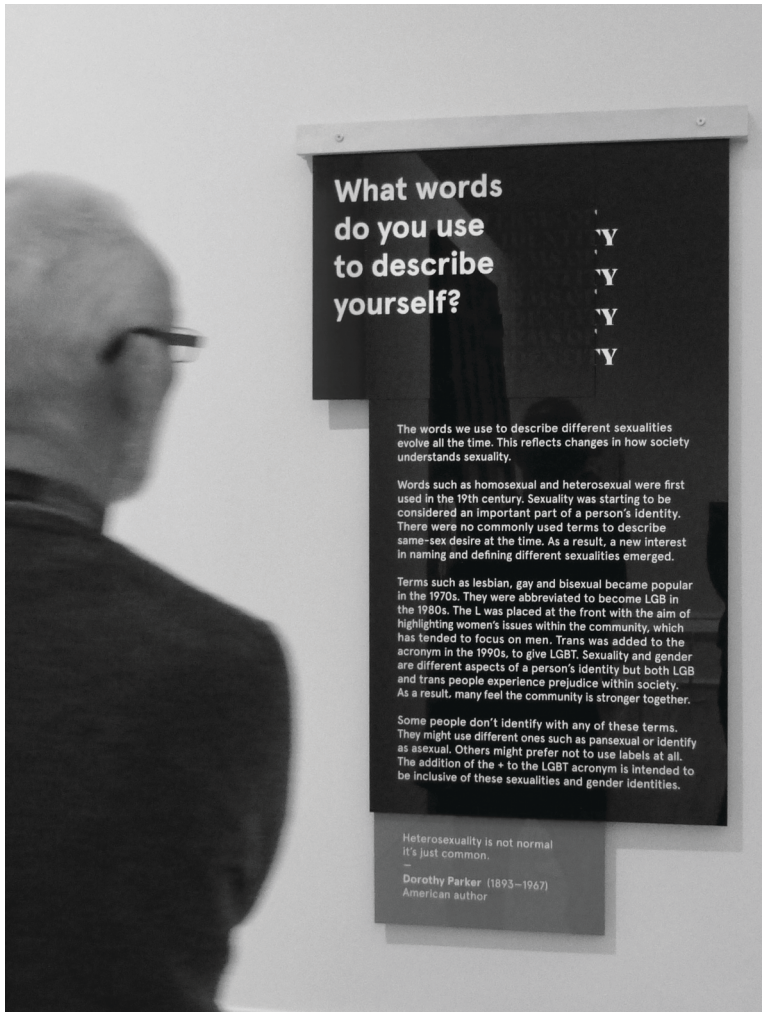

Figure 4.5 Close-up of wall text asking, 'What words do you use to describe yourself?'. Photograph by the author. Used by kind permission of National Museums Liverpool.

However, before you enter the gallery there is an introductory label which gives a clear insight into the themes and purpose of the exhibition (Figure 4.6). The examples of wall text clearly illustrate the reflexive mood the exhibition tries to impart to the visitor. For example, the text in Figure 4.3 reminds 'Art can help us to see the world differently. It can offer insights into personal experiences beyond our own'. The texts in Figures 4.4 and 4.5 personally address the visitor by asking 'What makes us who we are and how does it shape our experiences?'

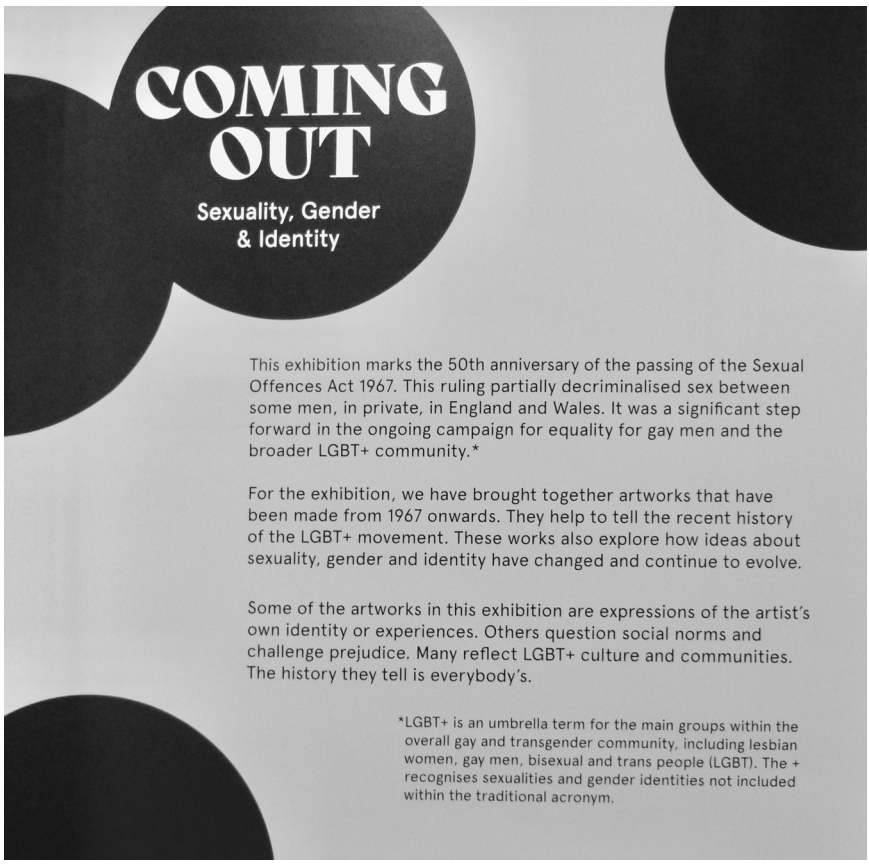

Figure 4.6 View of the introductory label located in the foyer of the first floor. Photograph by the author. Used by kind permission of National Museums Liverpool.

and 'What words do you use to describe yourself?' before going on to describe intersectionality and identity, respectively. The texts are explanatory without being didactic and emphasise how an individual might relate to these issues politically even if they do not identify as LGBTQ+. As the introductory text states in Figure 4.6, 'Some of the artworks in this exhibition are expressions of the artist's own identity or experiences. Others question social norms and challenge prejudice. Many reflect LGBT+ culture and communities. **The history they tell is everybody's**' (bold my own). Through their direct address and appeal to understand the artworks through frames like activism (Figure 4.3) and intersectionality (Figure 4.4), the wall texts throughout the exhibition urge the visitors to make connections between the queer political aspects of each work, the present political climate and how they fit within these issues.

The effect of McDonald's (2019) political and personal intentions can be seen in two anecdotes she recounted about visitor reaction. One event came out of a discussion she had with a front of house staff member who felt that they were able to understand the political importance of the show through observation of a young couple (perceived to be teen girls in a relationship). The staff member described how the couple was initially hesitant to show outward affection or connection but grew more confident as they moved throughout the show. However, they parted again as they exited into the main gallery. McDonald (ibid.) acknowledges how this was an important instance because the staff member who might previously have assumed everyone felt welcome and supported in the gallery had to confront their own perspective and feelings about the space. A second instance occurred during *Coming Out*'s closing event in which McDonald observed a group of young men who went through the exhibition with GoPros so as to document what had become a meaningful exhibition for them through the community building of the FORUM (discussed later).

These two examples highlight how the combination of a personal and political tone worked together to inspire visitors and create a more LGBTQ+ friendly space within the Walker by allowing the exhibition galleries to temporarily become a Muñozian queer utopic space. Queer people were able to exist fully in the space and personally archive it as well – fulfilling Muñoz's (2009) conception that queerness is an ideality not yet achieved but briefly felt during a queer event. If we recall Macdonald's assertion that museums are '…a suggested way of seeing the world' (1996, p. 14), we can understand *Coming Out*'s use of a political and activist framework as creating an environment for the above visitor reactions or a 'suggestion' of what a queer utopian viewpoint might look like. That is, a queer utopian vision can only be realised through action created by activism and politics. Muñoz similarly argues,

> The politics (that is anti-capitalist, anti-religious fundamentalism, anti-'mad governmentality') of Smith's utopianism can be linked to current aesthetic projects that also imagine alternative universes that eschew the dominance of the here and now for the force and potentiality of a conjured world of fantasy and magic that is not simply a mode of fantastical escapism but, instead, a blueprint for alternative modes of being in the world.
>
> (2009, p. 172)

One can connect Muñoz's blueprint with Macdonald's previous description in order to theorise a queer utopic museum – as defined and expanded upon in Chapter 7. Taken together, these definitions suggest that a queer museum is one which highlights a queer way of being or understanding the world. That is, the educational and/or social experience of a museum visit is part of the blueprint that maps out a queer way of being. As argued in each case study chapter, the creation and spread of queer knowledge is an essential characteristic of queering in museums. 'The museum' can be understood as a facilitator for conceiving of the

world in new ways – ways which may have previously been un-encountered by the visitor.

Centring the LGBTQ+ Community: *Coming Out*'s FORUM

In addition to the careful language of *Coming Out*, the exhibition also highlights the political importance of queer community by placing it at its centre. The exhibition is situated on the first floor over four galleries and the Walker's rotunda. The works are not ordered by theme or chronology, but, as touched on earlier, all galleries relate to desire, histories, visibility, activism and queer politics. Though the architecture of the building means that the exhibition is traditionally laid out in a 'free' pattern that leads the visitor from beginning to end whilst allowing them to carve their own path through each gallery (Lehmbruck, 2001, originally published in 1974), the third gallery utilises the space in a different way by hosting what McDonald calls the FORUM. FORUM was a permanent (in the context of the exhibition), community, collaborative space located in the heart of the exhibition that attempted to create a place within the exhibition where voices other than the institutional or curatorial one could come to the fore (Figure 4.7).

FORUM was designed by curator Charlotte McDonald, and education manager Angelica Vanasse to be able to accommodate dances and performances,

Figure 4.7 Installation view of FORUM. Photograph by the author. Used by kind permission of National Museums Liverpool.

workshops and talks and to display community artwork made during the course of the exhibition. It had the capacity to build a stage out of the benches, included a zine-making station and an area for books and/or other publications (McDonald, 2017, p. 16). Over the course of the exhibition it transformed to host many community-planned events. For example, one incarnation – *LGBTQ+ Youth: Take Pride in Your Identity* pop-up exhibition by GYRO (LGBTQ+ Youth Liverpool) and THE Action Youth (Trans Health Education) – was organised as part of the Liverpool Mental Health Festival (Liverpool CAMHS, 2017). During this event, young people were able to learn about museum curation and exhibit their own work in the gallery relating to their personal identities and pride. During my own visit, author and activist Charlie Craggs was running her event, *Nail Transphobia*, a campaign which enables people (in this case, museum visitors) to have their nails done whilst having a chat with a trans- person. As she explains,

> The point is they're getting to meet and speak to a trans person because most people haven't met a trans person and that's where misconceptions, and in turn transphobia, comes from…the nails are just a catalyst for that conversation and my way of bringing people into the conversation around trans issues who wouldn't normally be engaged in it.
>
> (Craggs, 2023)

As mentioned earlier, McDonald was hoping FORUM would allow those perspectives missing from the artworks to be filled in by the community itself (McDonald, 2017).

This privileging of multiple perspectives within the gallery space highlights how 'museums, galleries and heritage sites are now understood to be not so much places of instruction and dissemination, but spaces which facilitate communication, discussion, exchange and interaction' (Mason, 2005, p. 223). This is not to deny the difficulties in doing such. Indeed, the 'queer community' itself is a fraught term which is often described as transient and complex (Sullivan, 2003; Duggan, 1992), despite the fact that one might find kinship in collective memory or collective trauma (Penney, 2014; Edelman, 2004). However, I argue that the queer, curatorially critical focus of FORUM creates a utopic space for the queer community for the duration of the exhibition which celebrates its different iterations and highlights the shortcomings of the museum's collection and perspective. It represents a crucial example in how museums have shifted their focus from the object to the visitor (Vergo, 1989) and highlights the contemporary shift towards co-curation and community work where museums are dialogic institutions for visitors to both learn and express themselves. As Golding argues,

> In today's age of globalisation, museums around the world retain the older powers of treasure house, place of knowledge, sanctuary and shrine, in combination with a newer role as a forum and a vital role in democracy… While this democratic exchange can spark bitter controversy, since the museum in the

> socio-cultural landscape of the twenty-first century can be perceived as an icon of western colonialism in particular contexts, this effect is often in contradistinction to curatorial intentions.
>
> (2009, p. 4)

This controversy is especially true in the context of LGBTQ+ representation in museums. It is helpful then to understand the museum as contact zone (Clifford, 1997). This understanding is more fitting with queer museology because it is more flexible and recognises museums as sites of transcultural encounters populated with active audiences. As Clifford explains, 'When museums are seen as contact zones, their organizing structure as a *collection* becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral *relationship* – a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull' (ibid., p. 192, italics original). This, Mason argues, means that museums can be understood to keep up with evolving social contexts, whether '…colonial, postcolonial, modern, postmodern, public, commercial…' (2006, p. 25), queer, etc. This view allows historical understandings of museums to remain influential even as current frameworks continue to evolve.

Within this evolving social context, for the museum to promote a queer perspective it must account for the tension in representing oppressed peoples, that is, '… the desire to eradicate discrimination whilst enshrining difference' (Winchester, 2012). Early queer theorist Teresa de Lauretis similarly articulates:

> …rather than marking the limits of the social space by designating a place at the edge of culture, gay sexuality in its specific female and male cultural (or subcultural) forms acts as an agency of social process whose mode of functioning is both interactive and yet resistant, both participatory and yet distinct, claiming at once equality and difference, demanding political representation while insisting on its material and historical specificity.
>
> (1991, p. iiv)

This is at the heart of all attempts to reconcile being, living or defining queer and is difficult to theorise within institutional contexts. It is a ubiquitous conflict that wants to eschew Otherness to become legally, socially and culturally 'equal', while maintaining characteristics which mark Otherness. As described in Chapter 1, this complicated theoretical position can be navigated by understanding queerness as Muñoz does as a utopic future not yet achieved. It promotes a self-critical perspective that prevents queer practices from becoming staid or for the institution to become complacent. For example, a queer artist or community-based museum intervention (as at the Walker) might help invigorate such perspectives. As Stearn (2013) argues (though she is not uncritical of the practice), artist intervention, and I would add local community intervention, allows for 'utopian imagination' to enter the galleries via an outsider perspective and the prevalence of such instances brings us 'one step closer to utopia'. She too frames such practices as futures yet unachieved. The previous examples describe both the planning and use of

FORUM. They demonstrate the careful thought needed in planning a multi-use, dialogic space and how effective FORUM was at engaging with local LGBTQ+ community groups.

FORUM's engagement with the local community furthers the notion of co-curation (Jensen and Grøn, 2015; Gosselin, 2014; Robert, 2014) or co-creative museum projects (Simon, 2010). It extended the collaboration from the development stage (i.e. the use of community focus groups when creating an exhibition) into the life of the exhibition itself. As Ferentinos (2015) also advocates for, the Walker invited reflection from all visitors but also worked specifically with members of the local LGBTQ+ community to bring their own values and ideas into the museum space.[8] FORUM was used to host '…talks, pop-up exhibitions, performances and events which respond to or fill gaps in *Coming Out* and its related programme' (McDonald, 2017, p. 26). Additionally, Vanasse and McDonald (ibid.) recognise how the Walker has been complicit in a heteronormative, patriarchal, imperialist culture that has historically underrepresented marginalised communities. This characterisation of Western museums is widely echoed in museology (Mason and Sayner, 2018; Lundin and Esche, 2017; Tyburczy, 2016; Golding, 2013; Levin, 2010; Lynch and Alberti, 2010; Porter, 1996; Sullivan and Middleton, 2019). In *Coming Out*, however, this admission is paired with action and activism by creating FORUM – a Muñozian (2009) queer utopic space which infuses the exhibition with glimpses of a queer future through ephemeral queer events. It is important both that the Walker recognises these historic characteristics of museums but in the same instance gives space for communities to contribute to the make-up of the exhibition. It highlights the value of lived experience by giving over to the outside authority of queer people in order to present a more fully realised picture of the history and present of LGBTQ+ people. It created an active dialogue between individuals and the institution and became an 'in-between' space within which the viewer, the artwork and the themes of the show could coalesce. This brings the act of co-curation into the gallery for the duration of the exhibition as opposed to just during its development. It also marks a difference from the way many museums attempt to engage community by allowing visitors to leave comments at the end of a display (as in *Queer British Art* discussed in Chapter 3). It more closely resembles the community *Werksalon* of the VAM discussed in Chapter 5.

Despite the value found in community collaboration, the risk becomes that the museum will subsequently rely only on those community groups engaged in the first instance such that these groups become representative of a larger LGBTQ+ community that did not collectively decide on such representation.[9] It is difficult to both sustain long-term relationships with community groups and create space for new groups to join as well. There is also the matter of finding people willing to engage with the museum and find fruitful, mutual ways of doing so (as further discussed in Chapter 5 with the way this issue manifests at the VAM). It becomes a balancing act that necessitates long-term collaboration paired with ways to engage new members of the community. FORUM attempts to do both because while it worked with very specific LGBTQ+ Liverpudlian charities that it continues to

engage with, it also built into its structure the ability for other groups to use it as well. Despite the fact that much contemporary museum practice focuses on bringing new communities into the museum, there is no one method that works for every public in every context. It is an active, reciprocal relationship that should be driven by communal desire and not institutionally dictated.

Coming Out's Exhibition Display: Atemporality and Queer Futurity

In addition to working closely with the local LGBTQ+ community and infusing the exhibition with a queer political element, the organisational display of *Coming Out* must also be considered. Alongside FORUM, there were three other galleries which housed the artwork on display. Although the exhibition started in the upper hallway leading off the rotunda (see Figure 4.1), when one entered the first gallery they were confronted immediately with questions of temporality and permanence with Anya Gallaccio's work, *can love remember the question and the answer?* (2003). The work looms above the visitor at 2.75 metres (or 9 feet), with two dark brown, mahogany doors where the middle sections have two glass panes filled with 60 red gerbera daisies. As the exhibition lives on, the daisies fade and wither from their fire engine red to a dull, decayed brown. Other works in the white-walled gallery include, for example, David Hockney's *Peter Getting Out of Nick's Pool* (1966), a square portrait of Hockney's then boyfriend Peter Schlesinger rising naked out of a Los Angeles pool, and Steve McQueen's video work *Bear* (1993), an uneasy, black and white, soundless film in which a nude McQueen wrestles a nude Vernon Douglas (McDonald, 2017). Presented in a totally dark, purpose-built viewing room, where only the breaths of fellow visitors can be heard, the encounter is never resolved (either violently or sexually) and leaves one to consider the audience's role in engaging with the work, the bodies it exhibits and the conclusions it eschews.

The next gallery exhibited a single video work *I Want* (2015) by Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz with performance by Sharon Hayes purchased by the Walker in 2017 (McDonald, 2017, p. 51). Much of the gallery is taken up by a large, glossy, black triangular platform with an inlaid strip of warm white lights, with more strips forming lighted triangles up to the ceiling. The platform provides seating to watch the projected work, but its shape also recalls the pink triangle which was used during the Third Reich in Nazi Germany as a symbol to represent homosexual prisoners (Newsome, 2022). It was later reclaimed as a symbol of activism – take for example, the grassroots political group ACT UP's (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) 'Silence = Death' campaign (where the words were often paired graphically with a pink triangle) and in subsequent memorials to those queer people who perished under the Nazi regime, as with the Homomonument in Amsterdam (which features three pink granite triangles set into the ground to together form a larger triangle on the Keizersgracht canal) (Homomonument, 2023; Finkelstein, 2018). The video itself also entreats us to remember our history, and those silences or ruptures where queer life may be found, through Sharon Hayes' performance wherein, as the artists explain,

> …we wanted to have Sharon Hayes pretending to be Kathy Acker, pretending to be Chelsea Manning, pretending to be an agent of the SLA (Symbionese Liberation Army), pretending to be Jacqueline Onassis, and pretending to be Sharon Hayes, without ever settling on any of these figures.
>
> (Guy, 2015)

This moving break in the darkness between the first and third galleries as visitors contend with the fluctuating identities represented in the work invites the visitor to partake in an important moment of reflection. As with the personal questions asked in the text panels discussed earlier, the work asks the visitor to consider their own relationship to identity, a non-linear and chaotic queer history and what it means for the Walker to purchase and support such contemporary, queer work.

Leaving the darkness of the second gallery, one enters the ever-changing community-centred gallery, or FORUM, as discussed previously. Finally, the last and largest gallery includes works like Tracey Emin's glowing, white neon sign*, When I Think About Sex I think about Men–Women, Dogs, Lions, Group Sex and I love you all* (2005); Derek Jarman's large, dark, layered canvas, *Morphine* (1992); Sarah Lucas' self-portraits, *Divine* (1991), *Self Portrait with Mug of Tea* (1993) and *Self Portrait with Fried Eggs* (1996); a small ceramic bear titled *A Tribute to Simeon Solomon* (2009) by Matt Smith and various Warhol screenprints including, among others, *Self Portrait* (1965–1967) and *Marilyn* (1970). As well, John Walter's *Alien Sex Club* (2015) installation (another work purchased by the Walker with support from the Art Fund) sits tucked around temporary walls and behind a glittering green wall of tinsel (McDonald, 2017). *Alien Sex Club* is characterised as a 'cruise maze' in which one encounters a colourful, maximalist scene of paintings, performances, video and sculptures detailing issues around the continued spread of AIDS in the UK. This mix of eras, mediums, themes, genders and sexualities evokes the disorder of queer history that asks one to step away from the linear progressions of straight time and revel in the unknown and mis-understood instead.

'Ecstatic Time', or Queer Atemporality

Though the presentation of these works might not seem radical in that they are still hung with clear labelling on the gallery walls, there is a sense of atemporality not found in other art historical shows, for example *Queer British Art* as discussed in Chapter 3. There are no group labels to identify how the works in each room should be understood, but rather interrogatory wall texts as seen in Figures 4.3–4.5 and discussed earlier. The works were not arranged chronologically but rather so that specific works were

> … in dialogue with each other in order to explore points of contact between the past and present. It also challenges the idea that there is one true, linear history to be articulated, whether that is the history of art or society.
>
> (McDonald, 2017, pp. 6–7)

This is reflective of Muñoz's contention that:

> Queerness's time is a stepping out of the linearity of straight time. Straight time is a self-naturalizing temporality. Straight time's 'presentness' needs to be phenomenologically questioned, and this is the fundamental value of a queer utopian hermeneutics. Queerness's ecstatic and horizonal temporality is a path and a movement to a greater openness to the world.
>
> (2009, p. 25)

The effect of this, especially in opposition to the strictly chronological display of *Queer British Art* detailed in Chapter 3, is that each work is taken in context to those around it, instead of presenting a neat LGBTQ+ art history organised around explanatory wall text. The display evokes Bishop's curatorial call to resist historicity and instead 'navigate multiple temporalities within a more political horizon' (2013, p. 23) and Mills' (2008) suggestion that a queer museum might be one which rejects linear temporalities. Works bleed into and reference each other but also link to the blatantly personal wall text which nudges the viewer into questioning McDonald's linear art history and Muñoz's straight time (Figures 4.3–4.5). Similarly to some postmodernist and deconstructionist curatorial techniques, McDonald's jumbling of artists from different times and subject positions creates an effective message that both addresses those forgotten by traditional art history and connects them to a queer present with the centralisation of the FORUM.

Not only did McDonald and involved community members use juxtaposition to create meaning, *Coming Out* also provides an example and extension of Bishop's (2013) ideas about what 'contemporaneity' is and how it can be understood within a museum. Bishop insists that contemporaneity is not about a presentism that fails to take global perspectives into account but rather a dialectical methodology that is radical and politicised. For her it is not about the style or period of a piece, but the way in which it is approached by utilising multiple modernities and temporalities. This emphasis on the radical and political over the historical fits with understandings of queerness as being out of time, lost in time, in ecstatic time or, looking towards a queer futurity, ahead of time (McCallum and Tuhkanen, 2011; Muñoz, 2009; Halberstam, 2005). As well, Muñoz's queer utopia builds off More's (2012, originally published in 1516) original description of Utopia, literally an idyllic island out of time.[10] This tactic works for telling queer stories because, due to the nature of past prejudice, one must often fabricate or flesh out LGBTQ+ histories and stories from an incomplete or biased tangible record.

The atemporal arrangement of objects places them not only out of time – a common argument in museology where objects have been taken from their original context and taxonomised in particular and subjective ways – but also in what Muñoz (2009) calls ecstatic time. Following from the quote mentioned earlier, he argues,

> To see queerness as horizon is to perceive it as a modality of ecstatic time in which the temporal stranglehold that I describe as straight time is interrupted

> or stepped out of. Ecstatic time is signaled at the moment one feels ecstasy, announced perhaps in a scream or grunt of pleasure, and more importantly during moments of contemplation when one looks back at a scene from one's past, present, or future.
>
> (ibid., p. 32)

I argue that ecstatic time can be experienced in the museum and that Muñoz's moment of contemplation functions very similarly to how some museologists describe museums. For example, Duncan quotes Göran Schildt (1988) to argue '… museums are settings in which we seek a state of "detached, timeless and exalted" contemplation that "grants us a kind of release from life's struggle and…captivity in our own ego" ' (1995, p. 12). As well, it is largely agreed that museum visitors bring their own knowledges and experiences to the museum (Falk and Dierking, 2000; Mason, 2006), and use it to make judgements on their visit. Therefore, a queer exhibition (like *Coming Out*) combined with the liminal qualities of a museum allow one to interrupt straight time and experience the ecstatic time that Muñoz describes. This ties to my arguments introduced in Chapters 1 and 3 and discussed further in this chapter about how queer futurity plays into the functioning of a queer museum. As Elizabeth Freeman argues,

> Queer temporalities, visible in the forms of interruption…are points of resistance to this temporal order [for her, the capitalist system] that, in turn, propose other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others: that is, of living historically.
>
> (2010, p. xxii)

The rejection of straight time asks the visitor to confront the knowledge and binaries they might live with and reinforce and is part of what makes McDonald's focus on the political so critical.

A Queer Future in Coming Out

Related to notions of atemporality and ecstatic time are ideas of queer futurity. I argue McDonald's curatorial choices can help encourage queer experiences or affective reactions which inspire notions of queer futurity (as argued in Chapter 3 in relation to Tate Britain's inclusion of non-art objects in their exhibition on queer British art). Muñoz proposes that queer futurity 'is attentive to the past for the purposes of critiquing a present' (2009, p. 18). Thinking about queer futurity in relation to the museum, it is important to consider, as Mills does, how the museum can be '…a utopian project, conjoining multiple experiences of time and space under a single roof in order to preserve, order, educate, and collate' (2008, p. 46). Mills is here arguing that this 'utopian project' describes a traditional understanding of a museum's role. However, it is possible to redeploy this understanding of collapsed temporality under one roof as a queer utopian project, and is an effective framework by which to consider the Walker. I argue that a hopeful futurity or utopian

idea can be spawned in the museum space *because* of its ability to 'conjoin multiple experiences' not despite it.

To situate the aforementioned, it is necessary to look closely at ideas of queer futurity. It is difficult to understand queerness as *only* a futurity as Muñoz (2009) espouses; a reality espied but as yet un-lived. Hard to theorise, harder still to recognise. It is helpful to turn to a contemporary of Muñoz, Jack Halberstam. *The Queer Art of Failure* asks

> …How do we see change? How do we recognize it? Can we be aware of change without saying that change has ended everything (the death of…) or that change has meant nothing (plus ça change…)? **Can we recognize the new without discarding the old? Can we hold on to multiple frameworks of time and transformation at once? I think the answer to these latter questions is yes,** and yet there is plenty of evidence in queer culture that we simply allow the rhythms of Oedipal modes of development to regulate the disorderliness of queer culture.
>
> (Halberstam, 2011, p. 71, bold mine)

These questions (and the affirmative answer to them) mirror Muñoz's (2009) past-to-futurity epistemology. The simultaneous possession of 'multiple frameworks of time and transformation' is one method of understanding the queer moment Muñoz talks about. A future position is unknowable and this lateral thinking with multiple viewpoints not only of time, but of transformation (change, rebellion, destruction) is critical to understanding queer and experiencing a queer futurity. *Coming Out*'s atemporal display of past artworks combined with the immediately contemporary concerns represented in the FORUM provide an important, tangible example of this understanding. As Halberstam (2011) points out, contemporary queer culture is one of disorder but we can try to recognise the future as we are presented with it.

Queer futurity then is important within the museum context because many museums (especially large institutions with geographically and temporally diverse collections like the Walker) display multiple frameworks of time and transformation. It can be compared to Bishop's (2013) definition of a 'dialectical contemporary' which emphasises the specificity of why certain temporalities are reflected in art works from particular historic moments. She states,

> …it should be stressed that sightlines are always focused on the future: the ultimate aim is to disrupt the relativist pluralism of the current moment, in which all styles and beliefs are considered equally valid, and to move towards a more sharply politicized understanding of where we can and should be heading.
>
> (ibid., p. 23)

This idea manifests in the curatorial tactics of *Coming Out*. The exhibition utilises an atemporal, disordered display which deemphasises linear readings of queer

history or aesthetics and is instead focused on the here and now of queer politics. This line of thought further demonstrates the suitability of framing the museum as a site of queer futurity which focuses on an inclusivity in which not all things are equal, but are given a political, radical and critical lens which exposes historical positioning as it points to the future.

In addition to understanding futurity through temporality, it is important to look at knowledge structures and how the subjectivity of memory affects this process. As Halberstam argues,

> Generational logic underpins our investments in the dialectic of memory and forgetting; we tend to organize the chaotic process of historical change by anchoring it to an idea of generational shifts (from father to son), and we obscure questions about the arbitrariness of memory and the necessity of forgetting by falling back on some notion of the inevitable force of progression and succession.
>
> (2011, p. 70)

This idea provides a framework for a museum to recalibrate the processes of remembering it utilises (as McDonald, 2017, among others, argues they should). Museums are already engaged in acts of forgetting through the necessarily subjective and exclusionary nature of collecting and displaying. It is by highlighting this 'arbitrariness' and the 'chaotic process of historical change' that a museum could, and I argue *Coming Out* does, function queerly and against this generational, normalising logic. Similarly to postmodernist curatorial tactics, both Tyburczy (2016) and Bishop (2013) argue for new ways of organising displays which utilise juxtaposition as methodology. They understand the power of display to disrupt normalised knowledge production. For Bishop, the juxtaposition of art objects with documentary materials, copies and/or reconstructions allows for the defetishisation of objects and for 'The contemporary [to become] less a question of periodization or discourse than a method or practice, potentially applicable to all historical periods' (ibid., pp. 56–57). She defines the contemporary as a politicised, radical temporality. In *Coming Out*, it is McDonald's atemporal display of works juxtaposed both to each other and the community events organised in the FORUM which produces this disruption of normalised knowledge. It is an example of how a museum might make a vital start towards the destruction of past logics which must underpin a queer museum. That is, instead of framing human history as a linear progression, museums must allow new ways of knowing and experiencing to arise. A Queer futurity is one that is not characterised by linear progression but chaos and forgotten moments. As Halberstam (2011) argues, radically changing this foundational logic away from a heteronormative, patriarchal, homo-, lesbo-, trans-phobic narrative is queer.

Finally, one can consider *Coming Out*'s atemporal, queer display in terms of queer collage. As described earlier, the works are relational, but more like a collage than a schematic which points neatly to marginalised histories which are only now being 'uncovered'. In reference to queer collage, Halberstam argues,

> …I want to use the example of collage, a cut-and-paste genre, to find another realm of aesthetic production dominated by a model of radical passivity and unbeing. Collage precisely references the spaces in between and refuses to respect the boundaries that usually delineate self from other, art object from museum, and the copy from the original. In this respect, as well as in many others, collage (from the French *coller*, to paste or glue) seems feminist and queer.
>
> (2011, p. 136)

Halberstam makes a distinction between the museum as an institution and its parts (objects) and how framing the museum through collage may lead to a queer unbecoming. In the case of *Coming Out*, one might think about the exhibition as collage, a form of cutting and pasting from the Walker's and Arts Council's collections to bring McDonald's queer political themes into the viewer's consciousness. The exhibition encourages an unbeing brought about by changing an exhibition's usual boundaries – it's atemporal organisation and the creation of FORUM. There is no apparent hierarchy of works or artists or subject positions (apart from the fact that they were chosen for the exhibition in the first place) and there is an attempt to equalise the curatorial voice and the community represented with the FORUM. If we take the curator as collage artist, McDonald's insistence that the collection's gaps and lost history can better be addressed through this sort of jumbled organisation and inclusion of the FORUM reflects Halberstam's focus on the space in between and refusal of boundaries. Additionally, as Whitehead (2009) insists, the museum (its architecture, decoration, etc.) cannot be separated from an analysis of the exhibition. Therefore, the museum is not only the canvas or paper on which the collage rests, but rather an active partner which works towards a new museum existence – a collage of space, artwork out of time and a community hub which brings in a marginalised community not traditionally part of a museum's work.

Conclusion

Coming Out marks an important example among the exhibitions which honoured the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of male homosexuality in England and Wales. Its political and interrogative wall text highlighted the importance of language in signalling queerness to the audience. As well, it produced queer curatorial strategies relating both to specific objects and their display, and advanced what it means to work with and centre a local queer community in a museum. I have argued *Coming Out*'s presentation offered and promoted queer action in asking visitors personal questions (either through text panel or performance) that pushed them to think about the inherited social constructions which queer identities try to eschew. This is a queer, deconstructionist goal that stands in contrast to the experience I described in Chapter 3 of *Queer British Art* due to its more historical, academic presentation. For the duration of *Coming Out*, the Walker can be understood as a queer utopic space which both highlighted the importance of community and lived experience while using an atemporal display that disrupted

the traditional boundaries of the museum. Analysed through the frameworks of Muñoz's (2009) ecstatic time and Halberstam's (2011) unbeing, *Coming Out* worked to make its audience question each work on its own political terms, in relation to the works around it and to their own subject position. Overall, the LGBTQ+ -focused exhibitions put on in England in 2017 mark an important step forward in the representation of queer lives and histories in the museum. Although the effect that these exhibitions will have on future English exhibitionary praxis remains to be seen, understanding each through the lens of Muñoz's work on queer futurity points to a horizon in which community-centred, politically focused, experimental shows continue to propagate even without major anniversaries to commemorate.

Notes

1 Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery also hosted a version of *Coming Out* from 02 December 2017 to 15 April 2018 augmented by their own collection as well (Arts Council Collection, 2019).
2 The NML is connected to nine charitable trusts which predate the formation of NML (NMGM, 2019).
3 The Art Fund granted the Walker £14,000 in 2017 to help with the acquisition of various works (Art Fund, 2018). The works directly related to *Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender & Identity* include: *I want* (2015) by Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz, *Sexy Collages* (2015) and *Untitled* (2015) by Marvin Gaye Chetwynd, *Wolfenden* (2015) and *Polari – An Etymology According to a Diagrammatic by Alfred H. Barr (1936)* (2012) by Jez Dolan, *Miss Lesbian I (Amsterdam)* (2009) and *Miss Lesbian VII (Amsterdam)* (2009) by Zanele Muholi and *Happy Union* (2009) and *Tribute to Simeon Solomon* (2009) by Matt Smith (ibid.).
4 One work by Hockney in *Coming Out, Peter Getting Out of Nick's Pool* (1966) in fact won the Walker's John Moores Exhibition 6 (now called the John Moores Painting Prize) in 1967 (NML, 2023). The prize began as a collaboration between John Moores and the Walker in 1957 and is one of the most important art awards in the UK (John Moores Painting Prize Trust, 2023). This marks the early and continued support of an artist whose works only grew more explicit about his sexuality (particularly after the decriminalisation in 1967).
5 The decolonial turn in particularly Western museums and museum theory has emphasised how undisturbed silences emerge in museum displays when past colonial collecting practices are not adequately addressed (Mason and Sayner, 2018). Many Western museum collections were formed by affluent white men for the education of 'polite (white) society'. Given the context of their political and cultural world, they proceeded to perceive 'foreign' or 'Othered' objects as inferior thereby naturalising the Eurocentric, patriarchal, heteronormative perspectives they held. Today, museums, visitors and theorists must critically assess various museums' ability to address this history and to look for the ways in which they still uphold this positioning in order to address it. For further discussions on decolonising the museum, see among many others, Onciul (2015), Muñiz-Reed (2017), Procter (2020) and Tolia-Kelly and Raymond (2020).
6 One can compare McDonald's creation of FORUM to the inclusion of a café-type meeting place included in the *Transmission* exhibition at the Amsterdam Museum during 2015–2016 discussed in Sneeuwloper et al. (2020). In *Transmission*, they created space

within the exhibition in which trans- people could come together to meet and tell their stories and speak with visitors.

7 For further discussions on how to represent a larger cross-section of a museum's publics, see, for example, Gosselin's (2014) discussion of a temporary exhibition at the Museum of Vancouver and Ross's (2015) discussion of the permanent galleries at the Museum of London (previous to their coming relocation to West Smithfield).

8 McDonald (2019) states that they worked and continue to work closely with local LGBTQ+ groups including Homotopia, GYRO (Gay Youth 'r' Out) and TAY (Trans-Action Youth). They also held many consultations with different stakeholders and community groups during the development process.

9 For issues concerning the idea of a queer or LGBTQ+ community, see Duggan (1992); Warner (1999); Sullivan (2003); and Penney (2014).

10 The word 'Utopia' stems from Sir Thomas More's (2012, originally published in 1516) pun on two Greek words, 'ou-topos' (nowhere) and 'eu-topos' (a good place) (British Library, 2023).

5 Never Queer Enough

A Queer Utopia at the Van Abbemuseum

Word of a queering museum project entreated me across the North Sea towards what was for me an unknown institution in an unknown city, the Van Abbemuseum (VAM) in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. As I walked through a city largely destroyed and rebuilt after World War II, I wondered what I would find behind the red brick façade of the city's only art gallery. With an institution that boasted queering, decolonising and demodernising projects, it was hard to anticipate the experience. Eindhoven is home to a few other museums, commercial galleries and more experimental spaces, however with the VAM's prominent place along the River Dommel in the city centre I would soon find out why it is the preeminent cultural space in the city.

The VAM is a modern and contemporary arts museum. It houses over 3,000 art objects valued at over €150 million (Jorritsma, 2017; VAM, 2019j). These include major works by European artists such as Joseph Beuys, Marc Chagall and Pablo Picasso. It was founded in 1936 with funding and a collection donated by a local cigar manufacturer, H.J. van Abbe, and has since expanded from its original building to incorporate a 2003 addition (VAM, 2019a, 2019b) (Figures 5.1 and 5.2). Eindhoven itself is the largest municipality in the southern North Brabant region of the Netherlands, and the fifth largest in the country (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (Central Bureau of Statistics, CBS), 2018) (Figure 5.3). The city is known as a design and technology hub as the historic home to Philips manufacturing and now hosting the Design Academy Eindhoven and the Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e). These details might not suggest that the VAM is also home to a radical decolonising, demodernising, queering project that began in 2014, however as Bishop notes, since Charles Esche's arrival as director in 2004, the museum has been increasingly experimental (Neugebauer, 2018; Bishop, 2013).[1]

The following chapter argues that through the VAM's pursuit of its ongoing *Queering the Collection* initiative, it has become a radical queer utopic space. I will detail the VAM's recent practice under its director, Charles Esche, to describe what the museum terms 'de-practices', which include de-colonising, de-modernising and de-viant practice – where deviance encompasses queering.[2] I will examine the importance of having an invested and supportive director; how queering is a museum-wide project, changing the museum's procedures concerning collections

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Figure 5.1 The façade of the original building with a small snippet of the 2003 addition coming above the right side of the clock tower. Photograph by the author. Used with kind permission of the Van Abbemuseum.

and acquisitions, facilities and front of house staffing; and how community participation is woven physically and practically into the museum. Though specific actors pushed these changes, the VAM presents a unique example of how queering can encompass a museum's entire function beyond hosting LGBTQ+-focused exhibitions or programming during an historical anniversary as seen in the English institutions of the preceding chapters. Given directorial support, the VAM was able to host and fund a queer community group and hire a part-time liaison through whom ideas and practices were filtered and managed.

I argue that while the VAM pursues a wide range of artistic and museological interests beyond queering, its radical political and theoretical understanding of queer allow for a Muñozian queer utopic museum to emerge. This position is evidenced through data gained in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with Daniel Neugebauer (the former head of marketing, mediation and fundraising who initiated the queering project), Olle Lundin (the coordinator of *Queering the Collection* at the time of our interview, a member of the queer constituency and former intern, though hired as the Constituent Curator in 2020) and Anne Rensma (a former intern who produced the theoretical framework for the project) and site and programming analysis. All three interviewees emphasise the necessity of

Figure 5.2 An exterior view of where the old and new buildings merge showing their situation along the River Dommel. Photograph by the author. Used with kind permission of the Van Abbemuseum.

co-creating new knowledge with involved communities and the museum to the benefit of both. Though this chapter presents a snapshot of the VAM's engagement with queering bound by the time of my research, the project is still ongoing. I argue that the VAM is a queer utopic museum due to the directorial support of its queering project. Additionally, its commitment to internal and external institutional critique re-frames the way it thinks about its collections and audiences. This is reflective of the paradox in queer theory whereby the queer subject must balance its desire for recognition whilst maintaining a non-normative position. Sustained reflection paired with non-prescriptive action allows the VAM to take a future-oriented, utopic stance on what the museum could be.

'De-practices': Decolonising, Demodernising and Deviant Practice

The following section provides context and describes the major institutional shift seen at the VAM since Esche 'introduced terms like decolonisation, demodernisation and queering to develop a contemporary reading of the museum collection' (Lundin and Esche, 2017, p. 261). The VAM cites Mignolo who defines decolonisation as a process which 'opens up spheres of conversational and communal healings,

Figure 5.3 A map of the Netherlands showing its regions and the cities of Eindhoven and Amsterdam. Map by the author.

reorienting thinking, sensing and doing in the/our praxis of living' (Mignolo, 2009; VAM, 2017a). Similarly, demodernisation '…aims to undo the modern museums' (*sic*) focus on exclusivity, autonomy and separation, seeking to facilitate substantial re-readings of the modern canon combined with new user-driven programming' (VAM, 2017b). For Esche, the 'demodern' is as well a utopian impulse, though he does not use that word specifically. He describes it as a process meant to release the promise of communism (for him, social justice and equality), but equally acknowledges that we need a new word to describe it because 'communism' cannot be divided from its historical legacies (Vanabbemuseum, 2017). As Lundin (2018a) explains, the museum went from showing works in a white cube,[3] to highlighting that it *is* showing work in a white cube. Demodernising functions in tandem with decolonising for, as Mignolo argues, modernity is the mirror side of colonialism

(Bouwhuis, 2017). The VAM uses decolonisation and demodernisation to define an institutional culture focused on undoing problematic assumptions made by past European art institutions that include racial and heterosexist prejudices which placed white male perspectives above all others (as also noted by McDonald, 2017, at the Walker in Chapter 6). The museum hopes 'to be transdisciplinary, experimental and accountable, and to come to terms with their pasts, ongoing power structures and reconsider what, how and for whom they are collecting' (VAM, 2017a). Both processes, though heavily reliant on theoretical understandings, emphasise how this thinking must impact day-to-day museum work.

Queering pairs well with these strategies – both in their reliance on theory and work towards practical changes. Decolonising and demodernising are essential to queer utopic change at the VAM. This understanding is influenced both by Benjamin's definition of utopia as a tool of critique capable of transforming the future (1977, cited in Creagh, 2007) and Halberstam's assertion that queering (specifically, queer failure, or the inability to cohere and belong) is '…a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique' (2011, p. 88). A queer utopia is one in which harmful power structures are dismantled, and representational narratives are re-imagined and aligned with the realities of marginalised LGBTQ+ people. The VAM's focus on the local LGBTQ+ community (discussed later) coupled with the lenses of decolonisation and demodernisation allow it to be understood as a queer utopic museum (as further explored in Chapter 7). Taken together, these three frameworks are similar to Hooper-Greenhill's (2000) description of a post-museum. Marstine summarises the post-museum as one which 'clearly articulates its agendas, strategies, and decision-making processes and continually reevaluates them in a way that acknowledges the politics of representation; the work of museum staff is never naturalized but seen as contributing to these agendas' (2006, p. 19). However, the post-museum is broadly defined[4] and does not offer the specific boundaries and themes that decolonisation, demodernisation and queering do.

Initially, the VAM was criticised for using broad academic buzz words. Lundin argues, however, that sustained experimentation around those themes proves their utility (Lundin and Esche, 2017). Esche points out that even though the VAM's collection mostly contains Western, white, cisgender, heterosexual male artists, its presentation has persisted in making universal claims about the history of art.[5] Echoing McDonald's (2017) argument that the Walker is characterised by a heteronormative, patriarchal, imperialist past, Esche states, 'We need to smash the whole structure because it is colonial, racist and heterosexist. And then we need to start representing something new, or design something that represents our current situation' (Lundin and Esche, 2017, p. 264). The decolonising, demodernising and queering projects serve to identify and undo these fallacies. I argue that when Esche calls for new representation more fitting to the reality of current political and cultural situations, he is using different language to describe what Muñoz (2009) calls 'anticipatory illuminations'. That is, how encounters with art can encourage affective reactions in visitors in which they might relate their own subject position to an imagined queer future. The reorientation and re-categorisation of objects or

usurpation of past frameworks to interpret objects can contribute to these anticipatory illuminations. The unique combination of museum space, visitor expectations, objects and their queer reinterpretation might affect the visitor affectively in order to inspire new conversations and conclusions as further explored later. These interactions become queer, postmodern and utopian elements of institutional- and self-critique. Like Esche, Halberstam (2011) and Hall (2003) too understand queerness as an endorsement to reconsider and remake institutions. It is further reminiscent of Conlan's assertion that,

> Queer museum interventions…entail a critique of institutional heterosexism and a radical reworking of the museum's conceptual and physical structure, in order to interrogate systemic heteronormativity. Concomitantly, pragmatic gains can be made by continuing to repeat the call for the recognition and inclusion of LGBTQ history, art, and culture, staking a claim for LGBTQ possibility on gallery walls.
>
> (2010, p. 261)

To do this, the VAM utilises institutional critique – performed by its staff, its communities and outside voices – as a vital component for the 'de-practices'. This implies a future-oriented, utopic vision for what a museum is and can be, and how it can serve traditionally marginalised communities with an evolving degree of effectiveness as detailed throughout the rest of this chapter.

'Mainstream' versus Queer Audiences at the Van Abbemuseum

Esche's institution of the 'de-practices' was not without resistance from the local authority which helps fund the museum.[6] There was a question of whether such radical steps would alienate visitors at a time when the museum needed to increase revenue due to a decrease in funding at the national level (Pontzen, 2011; Windhorst, 2015; Museumvereniging, 2018; Mason, Robinson and Coffield, 2018). This was an internal issue as well. For example, Lundin (2018a) questions if queering isolates the general public from the museum because it is a topic or strategy that does not personally affect or interest them. Further, he asks if this potential alienation is more or less meaningful than engaging smaller groups in a new and vital way? This radical shift in focus from the 'mainstream' to the marginalised is a question that every institution must debate. As Fuss asks,

> Why is institutionalization over-written as 'bad' and anti-institutionalization coded as 'good'? Does inhabiting the inside always imply cooptation? (Can incorporation be so easily elided with recuperation?) And does inhabiting the outside always and everywhere guarantee radicality?
>
> (1991, p. 5)

This is perhaps where some museum staff or institutions struggle to reconcile past behaviour with their current reality of visitors. If museum visitors still largely

consist of white, middle-class families and groups of adults,[7] is it worth re-thinking the whole strategy of the museum? This turn towards decolonising, demodernising and queering that the VAM in particular, but Western museums more generally, are starting to engage with would suggest that the potential to attract new, more diverse visitors is more important than whether or not traditional visitors turn away.[8] The VAM itself has seen a 10% increase in visitor numbers since the project started and is one of only 10% of Dutch museums to receive more than 100,000 visitors per year (CBS, 2017; Jorritsma, 2017). The majority of the VAM's visitors are local to the area, and seem to be drawn to major artist retrospectives, for example, *Qiu Zhijie: Journeys Without Arrivals* in 2017 which was earmarked by the museum as particularly popular (Jorritsma, 2017; Neugebauer, 2018).[9] These numbers suggest that the museum's re-orientation has been well received.

Though visitor numbers have generally increased, it does not mean niche, LGBTQ+ programming is always highly attended (as noted by Neugebauer, 2018). The queer constituency is robust, but it is not necessarily Dutch or becoming embedded within Eindhoven. Neugebauer (ibid.) argues that it is sometimes difficult to find participants for specific queer programming. He recommends that if faced with this challenge an institution should try to host fewer high-quality events that are productive for both participants and the museum. However, the VAM is limited by its geographic and political context as a relatively small city in a southern region of the Netherlands. This affects the demographics of the audience and the potential community who might become involved with the constituency, especially when 60% of the VAM's visitors live locally compared with museums in capital cities where tourists are more likely to be the majority (ibid.). Like the Walker Art Gallery discussed in Chapter 4, Neugebauer (himself German) stresses that the museum tries to connect with the local community (queer or otherwise) in Eindhoven.

However, in Neugebauer's experience, the LGBTQ+ community was not as radical as either the museum itself or the international community which became involved (ibid.). In his opinion, LGBTQ+ people in Eindhoven are more interested in the emancipatory identity politics that began in the 1970s and 1980s, rather than the radical queer positioning that frames the queering project at the museum. These political positions are mirrored elsewhere in the Netherlands as well. For example, Parry and Schalkwijk (2020) argue that due to the Dutch government's relatively more successful and competent handling of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s (as compared with, for example, the responses from the USA and UK governments at the time), the same activism and political radicality did not emerge in the Netherlands. They argue further that the

> …Dutch self-image (as progressive and tolerant) plays a significant role in the underrepresentation of LGBTQ+ experience in archives and museums (as well as in history education and public history training), with cultural professionals, educators, and students commonly arguing that there is no need to focus on this group as they are not marginalized, that such a focus would 'politicize' mainstream history – and that by implication, mainstream history is *not* politicized.
>
> (2020, p. 115, italics original)

This difference highlights the difficulty in condensing the LGBTQ+ 'community' into one position that often shows itself in generational gaps (this issue is also seen at the SMU in Chapter 6). Instead, Neugebauer found that this radical subjectivity was shared by a more international local contingent stemming from, for example, students attending the Design Academy Eindhoven (like Olle Lundin) alongside a virtual queer community on the VAM's Facebook page (VAM, 2019h). This community is intimately connected to the queer constituency engaged with the museum (discussed further later) and more broadly with the 'Queering the Collections'[10] network of Dutch institutions and researchers founded by the International Homo/Lesbian Information Centre and Archive (IHLIA) in Amsterdam of which the VAM is a part.

Radical and Political Queerness at the Van Abbemuseum

At the VAM, museum staff find it important to understand queer both as something related to LGBTQ+ lives and histories, and as a theoretical word that signifies radical change. As mentioned earlier, the museum frames queerness differently from other cultural institutions and generations in the Netherlands. Wishing to separate from emancipation and identity politics, Neugebauer – and through him the museum – instead identifies queerness as a type of radical activism. This fluid, political, countercultural attitude is also reflected in my argument for what constitutes a queer utopic museum (as discussed in Chapter 7). Neugebauer terms queering as 'de-mancipation' (in reference to emancipatory identity politics, and 'de-practices'). The VAM often takes such radical, experimental positions.[11] A theoretical understanding of queer affects the type of structural change and knowledge production that might occur as a result. Similarly, Lundin (2018a) states that the initial discussions which decided how queering should be approached at the VAM were fundamental and involved both the LGBTQ+ community and museum staff. Neugebauer and Lundin stress that although visibility is important to LGBTQ+ causes, *Queering the Collection* should not be limited by this sole aspect. It is important both that the staff had these discussions, and that they acknowledged that whichever avenue they chose would lead to different outcomes.

It is crucial to think about queerness beyond identity politics. As Jagose (1996) notes, queer is an elastic term full of possibility and potentiality that is as yet undefined. To limit its potential is therefore a denial of its multi-faceted nature. As discussed in Chapter 1, Lundin (2018a) allows that queer can identify genders and sexualities but also that it is a way of thinking about and seeing the world that can be academic or not. This mirrors Macdonald's (1996) assertion that museums are suggested ways of seeing the world. However, for Lundin, there is a focus on how knowledge is created – what that knowledge is, where it is formed, what value it's given and why. This idea underpins much of what the VAM does and is vital in understanding how to characterise it as a queer utopic museum. Lundin questions

> Is the goal to have more queers in the museum? I don't think so. I think, I think we, for me here the goal would be more to try to understand how – basically, continue to produce knowledge about how queer life can inform museal

> practice. Because I see it being very beneficial for what the museum does and how it acts. What kind of bodies are being welcomed into the museum and how those bodies are being addressed. And I think there's a lot of respect and value tied to that. That I really believe in. So, to continue that knowledge production would be central to a museum if it's supposed to be a queer museum. The changes that come with that. Like, if you're dedicated, you also have to make, maybe the sacrifices of the quote unquote mainstream culture. But I think that that will create a different environment to talk about life in.
>
> (2018a)

Therefore, it is not only about the destruction of past structures, but instead the creation of a new, queer future to be lived out in the museum and created by its constituents. Building upon the notion of museums as forums (Burdon, 2000; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Keene, 2006; Sandell, 2007; Cole, 2014; Mason, Robinson and Coffield, 2018), the queer utopic museum has to host and highlight the new queer knowledge that it generates through staff and participants. Ideas of queer, utopian futurity can be sparked by the impact of investing in a queering project that hosts a queer constituency and enables a conduit between this group and its staff. Neugebauer (2018) also emphasises the organic nature of such a project. Not everything is directed from the top but can be offered up by staff and the constituency and inspired by the other 'de-practices'. For the VAM then, queering is a generative process that allows multiple queer perspectives to merge and new structural processes to emerge. This approach is also seen at the Walker in Chapter 4 and the SMU discussed in Chapter 6.

Neugebauer (2018) further argues that a queer museum needs to be a site of resistance. As Muñoz comments, 'Queer utopian practice is about "building" and "doing" in response to that status of nothing assigned to us by the heteronormative world' (2009, p. 118). Although queer tours or exhibitions in large institutions are good for visibility (as seen, for example, at Tate Britain as described in Chapter 3 or in Adair and Levin, 2020), it does not signal the end of what queering can do for an institution. Neugebauer argues that,

> …it's very important that we have this (*sic*) safe museum spaces, experimental spaces where these things can be tested in a tiny surrounding and then spread to a bigger one. But that's not the end because the end is not to change museums… the big goal is to change society, to change nation states, to change the world. Nothing less!
>
> (2018)

His queer political position shows how important it is for queering to reach across all facets of the institution. Museums can provide space (protected and legitimated through the institution, however radical) for queer, utopian experimentation that builds and inspires more widespread structural change. As suggested throughout this book, the museum can provide the setting for anticipatory illuminations or

affective responses which inspire a queer, horizonal thinking and a deep, critical engagement with the subject position of both the institution and its visitors.

Queerness as Hospitality in Praxis

The VAM further characterises its queering project as one of hospitality. Esche argues,

> *Queering the Collection* was also an obvious step to gain an understanding of how we actually talk to people, and not just to people from the queer community. What can we learn from a queer perspective on the collection and for the way we address mainstream narratives? Like we did when we introduced Decolonising and Demodernising the Collection. They're all meant to steer away from the mainstream. In my opinion that's what a museum should do: offer an alternative to the mainstream.
>
> (Lundin and Esche, 2017, p. 261)

As mentioned earlier, the discussion about mainstream audiences is an important one. If museums are traditionally understood as mainstream public institutions, it is quite radical to make it a museum's mission to be alternative, to be *for* the marginalised, as opposed to being merely additive. It is a queer act to alter the position of a museum in order to incorporate marginalised identities and histories, to re-orient it against tradition and the mainstream. In other words, it is radical to invite in a queer subculture because it is critical of heteronormative institutions and the idea of community itself. As Halberstam (2003) argues drawing on Butler, communities are only possible through the 'unbelonging and disconnection' of the marginalised. Maintaining an oppositional, anti-mainstream position is a major theoretical paradox within queer theory (Bersani, 1995; Jagose, 1996; Warner, 1999; Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz, 2005; Halberstam, 2012). Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz argue that 'The operations of queer critique…can neither be decided on in advance nor be depended on in the future' (2005, p. 3) because the definition of the mainstream adapts over time. It necessitates constant reflection and vigilance – a strategy which is built into the VAM's thinking. This tactic is different to those used at Tate Britain in Chapter 3, where some narratives become more inclusive while the status quo is largely maintained. This is usually seen, for example, when institutions' queer interventions stop at trail making or anniversary exhibitions.

The emphasis on hospitality also signals that despite the VAM's dedication to critical reflection, there is an element of welcome. Queer is a verb that requires deviant ways of working and critiquing to create new knowledge that is not just theoretical, but practical as well (Muñoz, 2009; Conlan, 2010; Halberstam, 2011; Jones, 2013). The museum, then, invites people who might otherwise have felt neglected in order to re-work an institution into something more beneficial to them (i.e., a queer utopic museum). Adair, too, argues visitors who have felt unwelcomed or constrained by the museum's environment should '…[demand] hospitality in the

form of recognition and representation', so as to '…begin to build places that they might inhabit – if only temporarily and perhaps still somewhat uneasily' (2020, p. 290). Esche also argues that alongside this desire to position the VAM on the edges, a museum should be associated not with leisure, but rather sport – something that requires practice and pain to change. Queering is often described as a continuous, strenuous task (Hall, 2003; Sedgwick, 1994). Esche states, 'You come and practice some ideas of who you think you are, who you might be, or who you might become and that's not always easy or pleasurable. Exercising your identity hurts' (Lundin and Esche, 2017, p. 261). Similarly, Rounds (2006) argues that the museum offers visitors a low-risk environment in which to 'play' at different identities. Further that,

> The visitor can maintain the present boundaries that define his or her personal identity, while becoming familiar with the fact that other people see things very differently. The museum visitor can act as an 'objective' observer, without risking being tainted by participation. This is a first step toward imagining the possibility that you might be different.
>
> (ibid., p. 146)

This self-reflection and ability to consider different perspectives is critical both for the visitor and the museum itself. One must ask if *Queering the Collection* is tokenism, or if it is actually becoming ingrained into the museum's DNA?[12] Critical reflection begins with the museum's past practices, but then must continue to consider the project as it proceeds.

One way to measure the institutional impact of queering is to determine whether those not involved with the project (but still affiliated with the museum) are seen to challenge their thinking. Neugebauer (2018) highlighted practical examples of internal changes which show the impact of the queering project and play on Esche's ideas of hospitality. One instance includes changing online forms to erase gendered titles (ibid.). As Neugebauer calls them 'tiny things'. These small changes play directly into Esche's call for queering as a form of hospitality by trying to make as many people feel as welcome as possible. These measures are more about creating visible and productive change that indicates the institution's position rather than something that affects all visitors. Another example describes how front of house volunteers questioned their position name – *gastheren* (male hosts) and *gastvrouwen* (female hosts) – and whether or not they could use an all-gender term instead. Neugebauer argues that this change in attitude is more impactful than any amount of programming or publications produced from such a project. Lundin (2018a) too echoes the idea that the measure of a queering project does not lay in quantitative success. The above examples demonstrate Neugebauer's hope that queerness becomes explicit in institutional thinking – a ubiquitous framework for all staff to work from.

A further example of hospitality is seen in the way informal networks of visitors – both queer and not – are able to intertwine. It recalls Tyburczy's queer curatorship which calls for 'alternative spatial configurations' of objects in order 'to expose how traditional museums socialize heteronormative relationships

between objects and visitors and…to cope with ethically fraught objects of queer cultures…' (2016, p. 175). For her, new juxtapositions of objects undo and open up new sexual histories. In the following example, it is not the position of objects but the position of visitors which upsets traditional knowledge structures at the VAM. Knowledge exchange between visitors can create a queer utopic space by mixing together traditional museum practice with queer events. Lundin (2018a) believes that part of the impact and success of *Queering the Collection* comes when it allows new groups to meet, create new knowledge and have new experiences. For example, he describes 'Queering Session #5: Party Soiree Club' held in June 2017 in which the museum hosted a huge party with performance art, screenings, DJs, cabaret and VJs (Lundin, 2018a; VAM, 2017d). The museum held an academic lecture on the same night. When it ended, visitors from the lecture drifted toward the museum's bar and into 'Queering Session #5'. Lundin claims that while some thought this might lead to disaster, in fact it created an environment where two different demographics came together to have meaningful discussions. It is an example of how bringing a queer element into the museum creates the potential for knowledge production and exchange that might otherwise remain untapped.

A final element of the VAM's queer hospitality merges with its pursuit of critical reflection. The museum has funded two types of artist/researcher residencies (*Deviant Practice*[13] and trans- and intersex[14]) that provide institutional critique through publication and interaction with the public. The structure and output of the residencies overcome the limitation of other such museums whose interventions stop at one exhibition or lecture, because its purpose is for these critiques to affect the institutional culture. As Mason and Sayner (2018) argue, the usual tactics of artist intervention allow an institution to appear to engage in critique without placing the onus on itself to actually change. Instead, the VAM embraces it by

> …[Understanding] deviance as an opportunity to reflect on the manner in which we approach our own practices and protocols: questioning past suppositions, hierarchies and modes of working…deviance should also concern itself with how we find paths through the present and towards the future.
>
> (VAM, 2019g)

This wording draws parallels to Muñoz, for example, when he opines 'Utopia is an idealist mode of critique that reminds us that there is something missing…' (2009, p. 100). The VAM seeks to create new knowledge in order to better understand and represent the future. This knowledge making is fundamental for staff but is also opened up to the public (VAM, 2019g). As Lundin (2018a) argues, Deviant Practice residencies literally inform the museum of its blind spots and help them evaluate their behaviour in order to make structural change.

Directorial Support

Alongside institutional critique and a theoretical understanding of queer, the most important influence on the spread and efficacy of *Queering the Collection* is the museum's director. Esche was explicitly supportive of the idea of queering the

museum and how it fits with 'de-practices'. Neugebauer comments that when he sought approval to pursue the queering programme, Esche replied 'Oh yes, sure, do it. A museum can never be queer enough' (2018). Lundin (2018a) clarifies however, that it is necessary to have a director interested in queering museums. Despite Esche's enthusiasm, the top-down nature of the museums' hierarchy rubs against the goals of queering – it is not queer to ask permission. If queer utopian thinking '…[offers] us one method for imagining, not some fantasy of an elsewhere, but existing alternatives to hegemonic systems' (Halberstam, 2011, p. 89), then first gaining support from the hegemonic authority is antithetical to a queer impulse. It is the biggest hurdle for today's museums to maintain the bureaucratic, administrative standards which currently structure them while also engaging in the radical undoing of queering, decolonising and demodernising. As Fuss argues, we need '…an insistent and intrepid disorganization of the very structures which produce this inescapable logic' of heteronormativity (1991, p. 6). However, maintaining the director's authority does not negate the queerness of projects which they approve and fund. It simply implies that the queering, decolonising and demodernising does not stretch as far as it could. What would a museum without a director look like? This idea is later explored in Chapter 6.

One way the VAM combats this paradox is to allow many levels of staff to propose new strategies. This is a utopian, collaborative venture (however, as we will see in Chapter 6, it differs sharply from the activist culture of the SMU). Neugebauer (2018) states that it is part of the working practice of the VAM to allow staff, constituencies or volunteers the possibility of getting funding for an event. One example includes the *Qwearing the Collection* project initiated by Lundin (discussed later).[15] Before becoming involved with the museum, Lundin approached its staff to enquire what they were doing in terms of queering. This initial contact fomented his long-term relationship with it. Therefore, despite the fact that the director needs to foster this kind of environment, it allows ideas from all levels to be pursued. This level of input plays into Esche's idea of queerness as hospitality (as explored earlier). All backgrounds and education levels can be appreciated. This should lead to more diverse programming which allows various types of knowledge to flourish. A holistic approach which relies on input from all levels and incorporates ongoing projects and frameworks is appropriate because, as Neugebauer articulates, Esche (and his curatorial team) want the museum to be a place both deviant and queer.

Queering the Collection: A Cross-Museum Project

The idea that queering must reach all facets of an institution was mentioned previously but will here be made explicit. Where earlier chapters focused on two anniversary-inspired exhibitions and the identification of LGBTQ+ history within collections, the VAM's *Queering the Collection* aims to go further than its name suggests. Neugebauer (2018) states that part of his inspiration for the queering project was his belief that the museum was implicitly queer, but that it had never been made explicit. This became his key strategy – 'making the implicit

explicit' – by pushing understandings of queering as a shared enterprise that affected all areas and staff of the museum. Neugebauer comments that '…queering as an educational practice is good – but the DNA of a…museum, it goes deeper' (ibid.). He further describes this as a holistic approach, with '…the idea…that everything is connected with everything, which makes it sometimes very blurry, but also sometimes very productive' (ibid.). This understanding stems from ideas in queer theory which emphasise queerness as disruptive, fragmented and contingent (Hall, 2003) or relational and strange (Sedgwick, 1994). Rensma (2018) similarly highlights that *Queering the Collection* has too many dimensions to be considered one project. The following sections highlight the ways *Queering the Collection* has affected the museum by exploring the museum's collecting practices and acquisitions, a performative curatorial intervention and a staffing decision which embeds queerness within the staff hierarchy.

Queering Collecting Practices and Acquisitions

In order to gain insight into the institutional understanding of queerness as both radical and political and to cement the idea of putting theory into practice, it is necessary to look at the museum's procedures. For example, one way to show a museum's explicitly queer position is through sustained queer collecting (though this can be pursued differently by institutions of varying foci and acquisitions budgets as seen, for example, at the Walker in Chapter 4). Queer collecting is about acquiring new works which explicitly address this remit but also making sure a queer framework becomes embedded within the museum's already existing database and metadata. The process of ascribing new metadata addresses the issue some museums face when they are limited by past 'disciplinary lenses' used to initially and subsequently categorise their collections (Mason and Sayner, 2018). It is important to think about these new frameworks intersectionally. That is, queering collections must involve thinking beyond gender and sexual identities but also how narratives of class, dis/ability and race (among other characteristics) can affect collecting and metadata. Zepeda (2018) and Steorn (2012) also argue that updating metadata allows different research lenses to be applied to collections.[16] As Steorn states, 'The alternative archive…is not necessarily about completely different objects, but about different emotional and political attachments to objects' (2012, p. 357). It recalls Halberstam's insistence that we look elsewhere '…to locate all the in-between spaces that save us from being snared by the hooks of hegemony and speared by the seductions of the gift shop' (2011, p. 2). That is, to build a queer utopia within the untold and un-catalogued. New frameworks allow previously hidden histories to arise because the objects can be interpreted with these new perspectives in mind. This follows Tyburczy's (2016) assertion that all museums can be sex museums. The VAM here proves that all museums can be queer museums by reorienting disciplinary frameworks.

Queer collecting is both about re-framing past collections and positioning new acquisitions with an eye to a queer framework. To accomplish this at the VAM, Neugebauer approached then head of collections, Christiane Berndes. They worked

together to queerly revamp the VAM's collecting practice. This action explicitly attracted donors to work with the museum. For example, a private collector donated works by Boudry/Lorenz[17] as a foundation for future queer collecting (VAM, 2019c; Neugebauer, 2018). Additionally, Lundin andAlice Venir (another intern) wrote, 'Queering the Collection: Inventory of Queer Aspects of the Art Collection' (2016). It highlights a radical queer understanding by demonstrating that queer alludes to more than just identity and can lead to new questions and knowledge. As Steorn argues, 'Hidden in the collections of any museum might be hundreds of objects that have immense queer interest or that could be strongly associated with lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans-gendered (LGBT) communities' (2012, p. 357). Lundin and Venir's text lists 21 works in the permanent collection and describes queer features of each work while also ascribing queer terminology to each as though keywords in a collections database. Each description serves as a provocation to the viewer/reader by asking them to critically and queerly reflect on each work. For example, they take *Fragment of a Crucifixion* (1950) by Francis Bacon and ask, 'Does the fact that Bacon himself was gay matter when we are discussing queer art? Does a gay identity create gay art?'. Alternatively, they take a classic female nude – *Liggend naakt* (Lying Naked) (1931) by Jan Sluijters – and tag it with the terms: 'Agency, Binary, Fetishization, Patriarchy, Gaze, Embodiment' (Venir and Lundin, 2016). It should be noted that it is unclear whether this type of tagging is an ongoing project or if the pamphlet marks its only iteration – particularly because it was not produced by the museum's curators. However, these tags have been added to the collections database. For example, if you search the term 'queer' on the collection section of their website, 26 works are found, whereas during my initial research during 2018–2019, no results were found (VAM, 2019f, 2023b).[18] This provides evidence of how their queer collecting causes both internal and outward facing changes.

Queer Curatorial Interventions: Qwearing the Collection

Queering is not only about the way in which the collection is framed, but also how it is displayed. The year 2017 marked an important queer curatorial intervention with Olle Lundin's *Qwearing the Collection*. It was a performative, interactive project which asked visitors to question their subjectivity through the use of props in the gallery space. Lundin, then an intern, worked on this project for his own design degree and as a major queering event for the institution. His initial project, in conjunction with Venir, was to create a queer glossary for the museum.[19] As a fashion designer, he then created a scarf printed with this glossary and five additional garments designed with imagery found in major works in the permanent collection (Lundin, 2018b) (see Figure 5.4). These were worn by visitors in order to provoke, create a dialogue and encourage them to view the collection with these definitions and subject positions in mind. This functions similarly to the rhetorical questions asked in *Coming Out*'s wall text at the Walker as discussed in Chapter 4. It makes the museum, as Esche (Lundin and Esche, 2017) argues, a place to exercise one's identity (as discussed previously).

Figure 5.4 A close-up of the scarves available for sale in the museum shop. Photograph by the author. Used with kind permission of the Van Abbemuseum.

It was an important intervention for the museum because it helped visitors create new, queer knowledge for themselves and potentially those around them by providing provocative props to be utilised in a safe, comparatively neutral environment.[20] It is comparable to Muñoz's discussion of Samuel Delany (1988) and James's (1977) example of how a socialist utopia was created by workers within a capitalist workshop. He argues,

> The stage and the street, like the shop floor, are venues for performances that allow the spectator access to minoritarian lifeworlds that exist, importantly and dialectically, within the future and the present. James's workerist theory allows us to think of the minoritarian performer as a worker and the performance of queer world-making as a mode of labor. These performances are thus outposts of an actually existing queer future existing in the present.
>
> (2009, p. 56)

At the VAM, the visitors were induced to perform so that they and other visitors could access these minoritarian lifeworlds and imagine a queer future. Using Witcomb's (2013) language, the intervention works 'poetically' or affectively in order to provoke or unsettle visitors into thinking about their preconceived notions about the museum and its objects. The performative aspect of *Qwearing the*

Collection is essential in this process. As Muñoz reminds, 'The best performances do not disappear but instead linger in our memory, haunt our present, and illuminate our future' (2009, p. 104). It is also ongoing because the scarves are still sold by the museum. The intervention becomes an object which can leave the museum's walls and spread impact beyond. The wall text within the shop encourages the buyer to 'Challenge yourself and your surrounding (*sic*) with the numerous ways of seeing the world…a bit more intersectionality for all of us…'. This influence, however small, marks the slow and piecemeal spread of queer provocations and future queer utopias by providing a catalyst for visitors to think more deeply about LGBTQ+ issues. Even though this is a difficult reaction to measure, it is still an important outcome for the queering project.

Qwearing the Collection played on ideas of performativity, but also body politics and drag by allowing visitors of all ages and genders to playfully engage in debates they might not normally partake in. It demonstrated how the museum could expand its impact outside its walls to positively affect visitors' relationships and understandings of themselves. As Lundin argues, the wearer is engaging with text and imagery found on one's own body and 'This alters the performativity of the exhibition space and renegotiates the relation between the wearing and the non-wearing visitors' (Lundin, 2018b). This coincides with Tyburczy's (2016) argument that 'queer curatorship' can use display tactics in order to make queer theory tangible. She argues, 'It can…materialize a spatial and discursive approach to display that utopically imagines new forms of sexual sociality and collectivity between bodies, things, and nations in public institutional display spaces, such as museums' (ibid., pp. 3–4). Taken together, these arguments prove how such an intervention helps to create a queer utopia within the museum – at least for the length of visitor engagement. As I argued about specific objects in *Queer British Art* in Chapter 3, it can facilitate Muñoz's (2009) anticipatory illuminations by engaging visitors with alternative, queer, future subject positions. For example, Lundin describes how one family travelled across the Netherlands (from Groningen) to visit because they thought it would be a helpful and productive way to start a dialogue with their children who were dealing with issues of identity (Lundin, 2018a). The museum thus provided a catalyst for at least one family to engage in a way they would not otherwise have been able to.

Sustained Engagement through Paid Staff: Queering Coordinator

This section has identified how queering might affect collecting and curatorial practices within a museum, but the VAM's commitment to queering is further demonstrated through the creation of a Queer Coordinator. At the time of my research, it was not a formal staff position as such, but a part-time, paid position called coordinator of *Queering the Collection.* Then held by Olle Lundin, he describes this work as queer in itself (Lundin, 2018a). He was part of the museum's queer constituency group – which he calls both a formal and informal group. However, he also held a position within the institution itself. His main duty was as go-between for the institution and its queer constituency. Lundin found himself in the contradictory and queer position of working both for and against

the institution simultaneously. That is, he organised, produced and coordinated events and programming through and for the museum, however these programmes might be positioned theoretically against the institution, or with the goal of creating knowledge which fundamentally alters it. It is important that this ambiguity, fluidity and flexibility is built into the position, however it is equally important to remember that even when such a position is established by the institution (what Fraser, 1987, 1992, terms an 'invited space', as cited in Lynch and Alberti, 2010) it is still affected by the power relations of difference.

During my research in 2019, this position was not reflected in the staff structure published on the museum's website (VAM, 2019j). This indicates that although the rhetoric and situation on the ground showed progressive queer change, it is not always cemented in the museum's published image. This leads one to wonder whether queering is as fully embedded within the museum's structure as it seems. Or if it is still dependent on individually driven change, which is a concern often highlighted by queer practitioners working today.[21] However, Lundin (2018a) notes that it was a major internal change for the museum. His work as mediator evokes Ashcroft's utopian understanding where '…the dynamic function of the utopian impulse is a dual one: to engage power and to imagine change' (Ashcroft, 2009, p. 13). The queer constituency group 'imagines change' as 'minoritarian performers' (described by Muñoz, 2009 cited earlier) in order to engage the institutional power of staff members. The goal is to have real effects on the collection presentation and institutional understanding of queering. It demonstrates a clear priority by the museum to make sure this knowledge and engagement is not lost. However, it is precarious because it relies on the coordinator's ability to effectively communicate with both groups in a limited amount of time (one person, one day a week). This becomes a huge responsibility for the coordinator. They must interact will all levels of the museum and use their 'queer' position to slip between cracks and effect change where they can.

Community Involvement: *Werksalon* and Constituencies

Thus far this chapter has described how the VAM understands queering institutionally given directorial support and shown examples of how this has affected collecting, curatorial practices and staff positions. But equally if not more important is the museum's commitment to working with local communities, or constituency groups, in a reciprocal and mutually beneficial way. The museum hosted local community groups within the *Werksalon* (Work Room). The *Werksalon* represents the central hub for community involvement within the VAM. Located in the physical centre of the museum and open to all visitors, it was a community space most utilised by its local constituency groups. It was a three-year plus research project which ran from 23 September 2017 to 03 January 2021 (VAM, 2019i). The involvement of community groups began in 2015 (Lundin, 2018a). Their presence and impact on the museum were formalised with the installation of the *Werksalon*. When I visited the museum in 2018, these groups included 'Queering the Collection', 'Expat Spouses Initiative Eindhoven', 'Sustainable Eindhoven', '*Van Abbemuseumkoor*' (Van Abbemuseum Choir) and 'Agents of Change'.[22] The

Figure 5.5 A view of one corner of the *Werksalon's* research room. Photograph by the author. Used with kind permission of the Van Abbemuseum.

Werksalon comprised three rooms of gallery space. It contained a research room (which included a podcast studio, presentation walls, archives, a large map of Eindhoven and general meeting space), a production room and finally, a presentation room (with space for film screenings, discussions, lecture and presentations) (VAM, 2019i) (see Figures 5.5–5.7).

The *Werksalon* was important not only for the work that happened within its walls, but because it was a visual reminder to any visitor that the institution hosts interested community members and considers communities' critiques. Where many museums attempt to maintain the illusion of their objectivity, the VAM actively engaged with the impossibility of objectivity and the ways in which the public might respond to it. As they state, it is common practice in museums for stories to be told by expert curators who are often

> white, well-educated and over forty years old. Therefore, they are not a good reflection of society. Yet this small group creates programs that are supposed to be for the whole society. Is the museum really for everyone? And are the stories that the museum tells and collects actually about the world around us?
>
> (VAM, 2019i)

Figure 5.6 A view of the opposite corner of the *Werksalon*'s research room. Photograph by the author. Used with kind permission of the Van Abbemuseum.

The VAM forefronts knowledge production and transparency about who is producing what for whom. As part of Esche's call to create a deviant museum which turns away from the mainstream, Lundin (2018a) expressed hope that the *Werksalon* would spark ideas amongst the constituencies and visitors that there is no mainstream nor standard narrative to be told. Instead, the constituency work (and particularly the 'Queering the Collection' group) would help visitors see a broader, fragmented picture of what society is and how it can be represented in the museum. This kind of future-oriented thinking presents a utopian vision for the VAM and what it might inspire.

The *Werksalon* was described *in situ* as being a work in progress. It was a utopian project invested in utopianism, an idea which Ashcroft describes as '…fundamental to human consciousness because humans are always striving forward, anticipating, desiring. While utopias exist in the future, utopianism, anticipatory consciousness, is heavily invested in the present' (2009, p. 9). Indeed, because the museum is focused on facilitation and mutual knowledge creation – or a reciprocal relationship which is '…entered through mutuality, as a form of co-labour and/or collaboration, whereby all parties benefit through acts of trust, friendship, kindness and sharing' (Byrne et al., 2018, p. 9) – it allows one to consider the

Figure 5.7 A view of the *Werksalon*'s production room. Photograph by the author. Used with kind permission of the Van Abbemuseum.

Werksalon and its constituencies through a Muñozian framework of hope which emphasises their future goals. Lundin argues that the *Werksalon* was '…really to inform and generate knowledge about what needs the museum can facilitate for, for instance, a queer constituency. What needs does this particular group have here in Eindhoven?' (2018a). It is a form of external critique embedded within the museum that, as mentioned earlier, 'engages power' and 'imagines change'. When viewed through the lens of the queer utopic museum, it is an example of Muñoz's (2009) queer futurity – a critique of the hollow present in service of a future not yet achieved because the queer project is never finished.

'Queering the Collection': The Van Abbemuseum's Queer Constituency

The museum and the 'Queering the Collection' constituency are mutually informing, but Lundin (2018a) argues that the group itself has evolved since its

creation. The community is critical of the museum but now also examines its own composition and relationship to the institution. Lundin argues that it is necessary to keep asking

> …are we queering things? Or are we not? Like is the queer constituency a queer constituency? Maybe. We have to find this out. Like we have to keep researching and understanding what the relationship is and if it's meaningful or not…is it mutually beneficial? Like, really? Is it?
>
> (ibid.)

This type of continual self-reflection is essential for the queer utopic museum, especially if one maintains that utopia is a tool of critique (Muñoz, 2009; Ashcroft, 2009; Claeys, 2020, originally published in 2011). One must recognise that constituencies '…are always mutable, fluid, protean and self-generating', and the constituent museum is one '…in which meanings and identities are themselves coproduced and continually re-negotiated through our collaborative uses of art' (Byrne et al., 2018, p. 12). This process is difficult to maintain, but as Neugebauer (2018) and Lundin (2018a) highlight, it is a necessary component to queering work. Through the VAM's constituency work the museum becomes a queer heterotopia[23] which Jones defines as

> …material spaces where radical practices go unregulated. They are sites where actors, whether academics or activists, engage in what we might call a radical politics of subversion, where individuals attempt to dislocate the normative configurations of sex, gender, and sexuality through daily exploration and experimentation with crafting a queer identity.
>
> (2009, p. 1)

Though hosted within the museum, the constituency is given freedom to explore as it desires. Lundin (2018a) understands the relationship between constituency groups and the museum as an 'institutional challenge' on the part of the community and a '…challenge to listen to a group that you actually started to work with and… have responsibility towards' on the part of the institution.

The intangibility of knowledge production and sharing between the constituencies (particularly 'Queering the Collection') and the institution are reminiscent of Muñoz's (2009) ideas surrounding ephemera. He argues,

> The key to queering evidence, and by that I mean the ways in which we prove queerness and read queerness, is by suturing it to the concept of ephemera. Think of ephemera as trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumor.
>
> (ibid., p. 65)

He is here explicitly referring to the gestures that make up queer life – he takes, for example, '…the cool look of a street cruise…or the mannish strut of a particularly

confident woman' (ibid., p. 65). When these gestures, for Muñoz an essential part of the performance of queerness, occur within the museum (in the *Werksalon* or with the changes to procedure discussed in earlier sections), they become the ephemera by which to trace the influence of queering. Muñoz further argues (in reference to a dance performance), 'We also must understand that after the gesture expires, its materiality has transformed into ephemera that are utterly necessary' (ibid., p. 81). The necessary materiality of queer gestures frames how the museum might be characterised as a queer utopia. That is, the museum is not only a site of futurity where queer imaginaries are encouraged but one which can house and sustain this ephemera through tangible existence. In this case, through the physical presence of the *Werksalon*. This allows these gestures to be experienced by its visitors in order to promote a re-reading of the museum's narrative and society at large. Esche, too, comments on the museum's potentiality to do this:

> It's not that people have to come into the museum in order to make use of it. It's also that the museum can go outside. Can influence thinking, can influence ways of behaviour. Which probably we can never trace back to the origin of the museum…It is a non-causal series of effects which artistic thinking, artistic imagination, creates possibilities in the world which otherwise wouldn't be there. And those possibilities, some of them are the ones that allow the future to unfold.
>
> (Vanabbemuseum, 2017)[24]

One can understand the VAM as a queer utopic museum when this understanding is combined with Esche's comment (cited previously) that many Western museums founded in the modern period which perpetuate colonial ideologies are racist, heterosexist structures which must be dismantled. To return to the purpose of the *Werksalon*, one can understand it through Muñoz's view that, 'The ephemeral does not equal unmateriality. It is more nearly about another understanding of what matters…to get lost: lost from the evidentiary logic of heterosexuality' (2009, p. 81). Though he is here speaking about a queer dance performance, if one understands the knowledge exchange between community and institution as a type of performance, Muñoz's point of view sheds new light on the value of ensuring knowledge production is central to queering practice.

Community Engagement with a Difference – The Constituent Museum

It is important to note that while many Western museums now promote working with communities (Golding and Modest, 2013; Byrne et al., 2018; American Alliance of Museums, 2019; Museums Association, 2019b), the *Werksalon* is itself a unique example that fosters a different kind of relationship. There is an important distinction between the VAM's relationship to its constituency groups and other community work often pursued by museums in the form of co-curation or other community-based initiatives.[25] The difference between 'Queering the Collection's' use of the *Werksalon* and, for example, Simon's (2010) categories of community

engagement (contributory, collaborative, co-creative or hosted projects) is that the end goal is not an exhibition or community-led event, but instead a continuous and shared critique of the institution. Although there are elements of Simon's co-creative and hosted projects within 'Queering the Collection' events, they are part of a larger initiative meant to cement institutional change. The lack of widespread change is a common critique made of various community-based projects, as Lynch and Alberti (2010) call it 'participation-lite'. While co-curation is important for better informing exhibitions, it does not necessarily create a sustained relationship between the museum and the target community. The groups in the *Werksalon* are not just focus or advisory groups but instead perform mutually informing work with a constant physical presence within the museum.

As Lundin (2018a) describes, the *Werksalon* is, '…a more profound way to link to the groups that the museum has been working with or are interested in learning from…really making sure that…that knowledge exchange has a place in the museum. It has…direct effects on how the exhibitions look…' and is, 'a mutual relationship'. Similarly, it is not just about the institution identifying groups they wish to work with and demanding their participation, but rather working with the community to find out who is willing and what they would like to do with the museum and its resources. Their community work is more reflective of the 'participatory museum' that Simon describes:

> I define a participatory cultural institution as a place where visitors can create, share, and connect with each other around content. *Create* means that visitors contribute their own ideas, objects, and creative expression to the institution and to each other. *Share* means that people discuss, take home, remix, and redistribute both what they see and what they make during their visit. *Connect* means that visitors socialize with other people – staff and visitors – who share their particular interests. *Around content* means that visitors' conversations and creations focus on the evidence, objects, and ideas most important to the institution in question.
>
> (2010, preface)

Complementing the 'participatory museum' is the 'constituent museum', where the museum puts relationships at the centre of its operations; the institution is only one constituency among many; and the visitor is understood as an active member of a constituency who can facilitate, provoke and inspire (Byrne et al., 2018). For the VAM, it is less about the museum paying lip service to inclusivity and more about reformulating an institution's relationship to those who engage with it. It is not that the museum has an exhibition or programme already in place that requires community input, but something that the groups themselves propose. The group might not utilise the museum-specific abilities of the institution, but rather the museum is able to provide space for queer happenings otherwise lacking in Eindhoven. As Lundin comments, '…the museum made something that queer folks would be able to gather around' (2018a). For example, the museum acts as host for the Queer Book Club. However, the dialogue and knowledge coming out of these book

discussions could in turn affect later events or attitudes of the museum. The symbiotic relationship between the museum and its constituencies is important for the VAM and in considering what a queer museum could be.

Curatorial Interventions from the Werksalon

A final aspect of the *Werksalon* to consider is its ability to make curatorial interventions. Beyond the gallery of the *Werksalon*, the interventions are tangible representations of how the constituency groups are engaging in critical thought about the museum. They take the form of constituency-made banners which ask provocative questions meant to reframe how visitors perceive the collection. At the time of my visit, these banners were on the second floor within part of the permanent collection display, *The Way Beyond Art*. The last gallery, which contained work around the theme of labour, displays these long, vertical, white banners with large red and black text as drops suspended from an opaque skylight which towers several metres above visitors. These community-produced banners align with the exhibition's main conceit which asks, 'What kind of country or society do we want to live in? What roles do freedom, identity, and sustainability play in our thinking about the future? Can art and the museum give directions?'. The introductory panel also claims, 'We make periodic changes to the exhibition, together with visitors and groups who add focus to the exhibited themes from their own perspectives'. Additionally, the wall text in the final gallery states 'The banners that hang from the ceiling contain comments by museum visitors. They are replaced regularly and encourage discussion'. The wall text continually asks the visitor to think critically about what they are experiencing and what the museum is doing. The community input directly influences how visitors might perceive the permanent collection. Beyond the physical space of the *Werksalon*, the banners are the most visible intervention. Or as Neugebauer articulates, it 'gives a certain lens or filter to how you perceive the collection displayed and this is supposed to go even further in the coming years' (2018).

The banners are a tool of critique and another example of how the museum is working towards a queer utopia. Though they are legitimated by the institution, they are created by the constituencies in the utopian hope of provoking visitors to think about the role and capabilities of the museum – as earlier, engaging power and imagining change (Ashcroft, 2009). They prompt the visitor to think about why these questions are being asked, and what it would mean if they were already broadly understood. That is, if these discourses were already so ubiquitous in the museum that they no longer needed to be questioned. This would be a queer utopic future. At the time of my visit, the banners read: 'Does a gay identity create gay art?', 'Is any community a normative entity in itself?', 'Whose feminism is your feminism?', 'Do-Don't? Blend, Behave, Belong', '*Jij vliegt. Zij vluchten. Jij vliegt. Meer Vluchtelingen*.' (You fly. They flee. You fly. More refugees.), '*El arte como verbo'* (Art as a verb) and 'Art as a verb. *Wat kunnen tijdelijke ons vertellen over de stad?*' (What can the contemporary tell us about the city?) (Figure 5.7). There was also one in the *Werksalon*'s workspace which read: '*Hoe kunnen we actief*

burgerschap en artistieke betrokkenheid vieren?' (How can we celebrate active citizenship and artistic involvement?) (Figure 5.7). Finally, during the course of our interview, Lundin mentioned a new one made by the Queer Book Club: 'Gender Is Drag, All Curation Is…'. These banners are reflective of the constituency groups' interests.

Though I have argued that these banners as curatorial intervention are indicative of the queer utopic potential of the museum, they are not without criticism. They highlight a direct, in-gallery dichotomy between the curators, the constituency groups and other visitors, but their impact is lessened because they do not come until the last gallery of the second presentation of the permanent collection. These questions might be more effective if they were encountered from the beginning. There is no apparent theme which connects them to the works present in the final gallery of *The Way Beyond Art*. However, due to the architecture of the museum, one can glimpse these banners as they move throughout the upper floors. The main staircase goes directly through the middle of all floors in the 2003 addition and there are large openings in some of the walls such that you can see the end of *The Way Beyond Art* even as you enter its first gallery. It might be that these questions are meant to help the visitor digest and contemplate the permanent collection displays after they are seen rather than act as a guide to utilise as one goes through. Or, of course, their placement might be due to the architecture of the museum and the space available to install them. Despite this, the constituency banners are an essential element of the VAM's queering project because they connect the constituency to the permanent collection presentation on an ongoing basis.

Conclusion

Taking all the facets of the VAM together, I believe it exemplifies one form of the queer utopic museum. Through unwavering directorial support, and a holistic approach which merges queering practice with other 'de-practices', the museum is able to engage its local communities and visitors by facilitating and utilising the production of new or marginalised knowledge. As Neugebauer argues, *Queering the Collection* works to make the museum more explicit, outspoken and colourful – '…we're a step closer to practising what we preach and that is like an overarching institutional goal…' (2018). Each section in this chapter worked to delineate both practical steps taken by the museum to 'queer it' – including collecting practices, curatorial interventions, staff changes and community engagement – but also the theoretical positions behind the initiative. In this way, the museum engages queerness as an issue of LGBTQI+ people and also a radical, theoretical position. In terms of collecting, the VAM highlights the importance of looking at existing objects with new frameworks so as to move past the colonial, modern, heteronormative categories used previously. Additionally, by understanding curatorial interventions through a Muñozian, performative, utopic, queer framework one can re-imagine the relationship between the museum and its visitors. Such queer performances make tangible interventions which invite affective responses to marginalised positions. Further, the VAM

cements these changes through long-term engagement with the queer community and employing a liaison for the community and institution. Their community work is distinct from other museums because its purpose is to have interactive and creative dialogues about the institution and its practices. It is a reciprocal relationship that benefits both a museum committed to changing its ways and a marginalised community which gains space, funding and camaraderie within an institution to which they might previously have been indifferent or hostile. However, the VAM can always go further in its pursuit of queering, as discussed, for example, in its reliance on traditional museum staff structures. Though this chapter does not argue that this is the only way to queer a museum, it presents an example of a version of what a queer utopic museum might be. In this case, it emphasises critical reflection as an ongoing process and the importance of a symbiotic knowledge exchange. This culture of radical thought and experimentation facilitated by its director and pushed for by staff creates an environment in which a queer utopic museum can exist – even if only intermittently. The sprawling nature of the chapter reflects the way in which queering touches all facets of the museum's work and highlights the messiness that comes with re-imagining what a museum is and can do.

Notes

1 Bishop (2013) notes that before his tenure at the VAM began, Esche ran the Rooseum Centre for Contemporary Art in Malmö, Sweden, and set up two alternative art institutions in Scotland called the Modern Institute and the Proto-Academy. Additionally, he has curated many biennials including 2016's *Le musée égare* during *Le Printemps de Septembre* in Toulouse, France, the 2015 Jakarta Biennial and the 2014 São Paulo Biennial among others.
2 These practices are also discussed in Rensma, Neugebauer and Lundin (2020).
3 The idea of the 'white cube' was introduced by O'Doherty (1999, originally published in 1976) to describe the seeming objectivity of modernist museums (like the Museum of Modern Art in New York, USA) which display artworks on clean, white (or 'ideal' and 'pure') walls with little to no interpretation in an attempt to let the artworks speak for themselves.
4 For further discussions and criticisms on the idea of the 'post-museum', see Alivizatou (2006), Keene (2006) and Smith (2014).
5 For more on Western art museums' biased accounts of art history, see Hein (2007) on the move towards what she calls the 'renunciation of the masterpiece' or the move away from exemplary objects created by lone male geniuses. This is echoed in Reilly (2018) as well.
6 The VAM has a stable budget which comes from a variety of sources. These include, Eindhoven's local authority, the *BankGiro Loterij* (a Dutch cultural lottery), the Friends of the Van Abbemuseum (VAM, 2020), and different grants from local businesses and Dutch and European institutions.
7 For example, in the UK 51.1% of white people over the age of 16 have visited a museum or gallery, while only 33.5% of black people could say the same (out of 8,161 people surveyed) (GOV.UK, 2019). There are no available museum statistics which delineate the sexual orientation of visitors. On the other hand, the Dutch government and

Museumvereniging do not publish this type of demographic statistics, instead focusing on local versus international visitor numbers (*Museumvereniging*, 2018).

8 For examples of decolonial and queering turns in Western museum practice, see Kassim (2017); the On Curating issues *Decolonizing Art Institutions* (Richter and Kolb, 2017) and *Queer Curating* (Katz and Söll, 2018); Jilani (2018); Sullivan and Middleton (2018, 2019); Sentance (2019); Adair and Levin (2020); Museum Detox (the BAME network for museum and heritage professionals in the UK) and various recent museum-focused conferences themed around these topics (for example, 'Decolonising the Museum in Practice' at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, UK, in 2018 or 'Queering Memory: Archives, Libraries, Museums and Special Collections Conference' at the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* [HKW, House of World Cultures] in Berlin, Germany, in 2019).

9 Visitor research at the VAM concludes that 60% of their visitors come from the Brabant area (or locally), 20–25% from the rest of the Netherlands and only 15–20% are foreign tourists (almost half of what is seen in the Dutch museum sector overall) (Neugebauer, 2018; *Museumvereniging*, 2018).

10 The 'Queering the Collections' network meets regularly to create long-term plans and develop both independent and collaborative projects that 'foster the wider public acceptance of sexual and gender diversity by finding, studying, interpreting and showcasing records, heritage, and histories of the lives of LGBTQI individuals…' (van den Hoonaard *et al.*, 2017)

11 For an earlier discussion of the radical practice of the VAM, see Bishop's (2013) *Radical Museology: or, What's Contemporary in Museums of Contemporary Art?*

12 For more on issues of tokenism within museum work, see Macdonald (2002); Levin (2010); Lynch and Alberti (2010); Robert (2014); Ross (2015); Mason, Robinson and Coffield (2018); and Adair and Levin (2020).

13 *Deviant Practice* has been hosted twice and began in conjunction with the 'de-practices'. During 2016–2017 it hosted 9 artists, archivists, writers and/or curators and 11 during 2018–2019 (VAM, 2017c, 2019g). For more information on the *Deviant Practice* residents see the VAM's website, their 2017 publication: *Deviant Practice: Research Programme 2016–17*, and their 2019 publication, *Deviant Practice: Research Programme 2018–19*, also available on their website.

14 The outcomes of the trans-/intersex residencies fell outside of the scope of this research due to timing and logistics. It would provide an interesting avenue of future research to see how these residencies have concretely affected or not the VAM. They are briefly discussed in Rensma, Neugebauer and Lundin (2020).

15 This project is further discussed in Rensma, Neugebauer and Lundin (2020).

16 One example of this kind of metadata work can be found at the V&A where their LGBTQ Working Group strives to update the collections database as and when they can (Clayton, 2017; Clayton and Hoskin, 2020).

17 Boudry/Lorenz are an artist duo based in Berlin who, '…are interested in the question of how "normality" can be reworked today, how difference can be lived without constant disempowerment, without being appropriated and without taking on the neo-liberal economy's offers of integration' (Boudry and Lorenz, 2019). The VAM owns *Normal Work* (2007) and *Toxic* (2012). A deeper discussion of the display of these works can be found in Rensma, Neugebauer and Lundin (2020). Another of their works (*I Want* [2015]) is owned by the Walker Art Gallery and was present in their exhibition, *Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender & Identity* as discussed in Chapter 4.

18 For the works listed when searching 'queer', each has a 'queer perspective' in their object description (alongside other object metadata) and a list of queer tags by which to

describe its themes. See, for example, the page for *Models* (1994) by Marlene Dumas (VAM, 2023a).

19 Lundin (2018a) states that a future goal for the Queer Glossary project is to develop an online platform – something 'Wiki-esque' as he describes. In essence, to find a better format for an evolving glossary that can include textual, audio and visual information. The goal is to make it less concrete than a printed document.

20 The use of the word 'neutral' is not here meant to imply that museums are neutral spaces as such. More to argue that there are few, if any, other cultural or educational institutions where this kind of project could be successfully pursued in the same way and with the same kinds of interactions.

21 Although Lundin is no longer at the VAM, he did work as a 'Constituent Curator' from 2019 to 2020 (Lundin, 2023). It is unclear if this is a similar role to the queering coordinator, a progression of it or something else altogether.

22 Those groups marked the first season of the *Werksalon* which ended with a ceremonial closing on 09 June 2018 (VAM, 2018). For the 2018–2019 season, the constituency groups included 'International School Eindhoven', '*Vluchtelingen in de Knel*' (Refugees in the Knel) and 'IamSHERO'. For more information, see the VAM's website (VAM, 2023c).

23 Heterotopia is a term coined by Foucault which he describes as a counter-site, or an enacted utopia which exists in reality and is 'simultaneously represented, contested and inverted' (1984, p. 3, originally published in 1967).

24 This quote comes from an interview in which Charles Esche discusses the 2013 exhibition, *Museum of Arte Útil*, but is still relevant to ongoing projects at the VAM (Van Abbemuseum, 2014).

25 For further discussions of community curation, see, for example, Golding and Modest (2013), Cole (2014), Gosselin (2014), Robert (2014), Jensen and Grøn (2015) and Curran (2019).

6 ‘We have to do it ourselves. No one else will do that’

Queer Feminism and Activism at the Schwules Museum

The Schwules Museum (SMU) is a unique institution within the German cultural landscape and is one of only five LGBTQ+-themed museal institutions in the world.[1] As such, this chapter differs from the preceding three in that it discusses a museum which is not in need of finding or including more LGBTQ+ content in their displays and programming, but rather how its gay male activist past rubs against a queer feminist future. It is a politically driven, ideologically diverse, community-supported space that describes itself both as a community centre and an internationally recognised LGBTQ+ museum (SMU, 2018c). The macro and micro politics at play within make it a challenging and diverse environment which must reconcile its radicality and activism with increasing professionalisation and reliance on the state. These challenges are discussed through the lenses of queer failure (Halberstam, 2011) and queer utopia (Muñoz, 2009) in order to better understand how this Gay Museum has evolved into a queer one. Attention is paid to the queer feminist ideological struggle of the Gay Museum’s identity; the SMU’s activist history and founding and how this affects their current positioning and governance; their amateur curatorial strategies and flexible permanent collection display and their atypical archive and collection.

There are unique challenges facing the SMU both within the scope of queer museology and due to its history and embeddedness within the Berlin queer community. To better understand queering at the Gay Museum, I conducted several one-on-one semi-structured interviews with board member, curator and activist Dr Birgit Bosold; and pursued archival research alongside display, site, programming and document analysis. Using this research, I work to present a picture of the SMU’s processes and ideology as I found them in the spring of 2018. I argue that by using an activist framework alongside the lenses of queer utopia and queer failure – here characterised by Halberstam (2011) as intimately connected to forgetting and amateurism – the SMU can be understood as a gay museum which has evolved into a queer, and even queer utopic, one.

Understanding the Schwules Museum

The SMU is located in the *Tiergarten* district of Mitte in the city centre of Berlin, Germany (Figure 6.1). *Schwul-* is a German word specifically referencing gay

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Figure 6.1 A map of Berlin showing the sites of the SMU and *Museumsinsel* (Museum Island). Map by the author.

men and though this reflects the museum's initial focus at its founding, the 'Gay Museum' has expanded to represent the wider LGBTQ+ community. Berlin is Germany's capital and largest city with over 3.8 million people (Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg, 2023). It is home to over 20,000 artists and 160,000 people working in the cultural or creative sector (Senate Department for Culture and Europe, 2019b). Berlin contains hundreds of cultural institutions, historic sites and monuments and three UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including *Museuminsel* (as seen in Figure 6.1) which houses some of Berlin's most famous and well-attended museums including, the Pergamonmuseum and the Neues Museum. The SMU is a relatively small institution within the Berlin cultural landscape.

In an unassuming building on *Lützowstraße* acquired in 2013, the SMU houses a library, archive and exhibition space dedicated to preserving and presenting

German LGBTQ+ history. Founded in 1985, it is the oldest LGBTQ+-themed museum in the world.[2] Originally formed in the offices of the *Allgemeine Homosexuelle Arbeitsgemeinschaft AHA* (General Homosexual Working Group) on *Friedrichstraße* and moving to a building on *Mehringdamm* in 1988, the *Lützowstraße* address marks their biggest and most professionally furnished location (SMU, 2019a). The idea for the SMU initiated when Andreas Sternweiler, Wolfgang Theis and Manfred Baumgardt, then museum guards at the Berlin Museum (now the Märkisches Museum), collaborated with lesbian activists to create *Eldorado - Homosexuelle Frauen und Männer in Berlin 1850–1950* (Homosexual Women and Men in Berlin 1850–1950) which was exhibited at the Berlin Museum in 1984 (SMU, 2019a). This group founded the *Verein der Freunde eines Schwulen Museum in Berlin e.V.*[3] (Friends of a Gay Museum in Berlin) in 1985 and hosted their first exhibition in 1986 (*lgitt - 90 Years of Homo Press*) (ibid.). Although its collections specialise in German and specifically Berlin-based LGBTQ+ history, it contains objects from all over the world, and especially from Western Europe and the USA. Its archive now contains over 1.5 million objects (largely uncatalogued) and continues to grow daily with donations from individuals, activist and/or political groups, public archives and associations (SMU, 2019b).

It is important to consider the SMU not only in relation to other LGBTQ+ museums but to the wider museum environment in Germany. The Federal Republic of Germany (which includes 16 states) works diligently to safeguard German heritage. This is reflected, for example, in the German government's €2.3 billion 2022 budget for culture (a 7% increase from 2021) (Abrams, 2022). Cultural affairs are the purview of local federal states, but it is written into Berlin's legal framework that the 'Federal State of Berlin [the governing body of the city of Berlin] shall protect and promote cultural life' (Senate Department for Culture and Europe, 2019a). Due to the historical significance of Prussia, the German Empire, the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, the German government highlights the importance of funding its cultural sector and preserving this history (ibid.). To that end, there are more than 900 museums in Germany, advocated for by the *Deutscher Museumsbund*[4] (German Museum Association), including the SMU (Deutscher Museumsbund, 2019a). Berlin itself has over 170 museums which recorded 7.5 million visitors in 2022 (almost back to its pre-pandemic numbers) (Visit Berlin, 2023). As a capital city, Berlin enjoys a booming tourism economy that translates into a high attendance rate at its museums.[5] Though a relatively small and niche institution located several miles from Berlin's most well-attended museums on *Museumsinsel*, the SMU had an average of almost 23,000 people per year visit the museum between 2015 and 2018 (Bosold, 2019b). Further, SMU board member Dr Birgit Bosold is cited as claiming they hosted an all-time high of visitors in 2018 and have continued to outdo themselves post-pandemic (Ludigs, 2018; Visit Berlin, 2023). Despite this growing success, Bosold (2018a) claims that displaying neglected, explicit and intersectional histories is more important than visitor numbers.

The SMU has historically relied on individual donations and voluntary work to sustain itself (Bosold, 2018a). Bosold contends that more than half the work of the museum is done by its 80+ volunteers which proves the involved community's

strong civic engagement and activism ethic. In 2010 they began receiving institutional funding from the city of Berlin. The Federal State of Berlin is now the largest sponsor of the museum (ibid.). These public funds helped the SMU to move and upgrade its facilities in 2013. The *Stiftung Deutsche Klassenlotterie Berlin* (DKLB, German National Lottery Foundation) and the European Regional Development Fund jointly awarded the SMU €644,400 in order to update the new building to international museum standards (SMU, 2019a). Bosold (2018a) argues that it was necessary to have a stable source of funding to contemplate making such a huge investment. The museum also earns limited revenue from its café and ticket sales. As will be explored later, the SMU does not feel beholden to the financial gains made by ticket sales and is instead financially stable enough to be experimental and radical in their exhibition choices.

A Queer Feminist Turn at the Gay Museum

Unlike other institutions which are trying to redress past exclusion of LGBTQ+ people from their official narratives (as seen, for example, in the preceding chapters), the SMU instead must contend with its past as a specifically gay male institution. Although the exhibition which marks the catalyst for the SMU's creation was curated by a group of both gay male and lesbian activists, the women of the group were not present for the museum's founding. Hence, the SMU must navigate this history and contend with ongoing debates within queer communities about how to increase visibility not only for white, cisgender, gay men but other identities as well (for example, trans- people, BIPOC, people with disabilities, intersex people and more). The following details several instances which highlight this challenge, including various re-brandings pursued by the museum, the slow inclusion of women and eventually others to the governing board and the internal 2018 debate which saw a gay male faction pitted against a queer feminist one.

The SMU's initial steps towards a more diverse and inclusive institution are different than non-LGBTQ+-focused museums. They already represent a marginalised community but must still ask the same questions as mainstream institutions – whose narratives are being told? From which perspectives? What is being privileged? As Conlan asserts,

> Museums embrace, enable, and legitimize specific knowledges while simultaneously excluding and rendering illegitimate vast areas of human experience. The parameters of possibility are mapped along lines of class, race, gender, and sexuality. Omission from the museum does not simply mean marginalization; it formally classifies certain lives, histories, and practices as insignificant, renders them invisible, marks them as unintelligible, and, thereby, casts them into the realm of the unreal.
>
> (Conlan, 2010, p. 157)

As a queer institution, it must work even harder to be a standard bearer for other institutions to take cues but also for the community it represents. It is a matter

of acknowledging that even LGBTQ+ histories can be exclusionary. Identifying as queer does not equate to a utopian viewpoint in which all perspectives are considered and understood. For Bosold (2018b), 'queering' is helpful in understanding how previous knowledge might be deconstructed because it forces one to look at how certain subjectivities are formed and become dominant. As she argues, this questioning of traditional narratives is '…much more interesting than, than to reproduce it always!' (ibid.).

Queering as Re-branding

As seen in my discussion of the VAM in Chapter 5, self-reflexivity and criticism are essential to the queer utopic museum because they require both the deconstruction of harmful representations or structures and change to remake them. The issue of who was being represented and how within the SMU has been under internal discussion for over 15 years. Attempts to make visible changes which demonstrate the SMU's openness and diversity show that even an exclusively gay museum is not immune to in-fighting about representation nor to accusations of tokenism where the symbolic gestures are not perceived as progress by the communities they are trying to reach. For example, in 2004 the museum sought to address this issue in part by changing its name to the Schwules Museum*, where the asterisk mirrored the '+' of LGBTQ+ to symbolically represent all those who do not identify as *schwul-* (gay) (McGovern, 2018). The museum would later receive feedback that instead of signifying inclusivity, these asterisk-ed communities felt relegated to a footnote (SMU, 2018c), or as Conlan (2010) refers to it, the 'realm of the unreal'. This initiative, though significant because it highlights the ongoing debate within the museum, was then recalled in 2018 with the launch of their new website, logo and abbreviation (SMU). However, the asterisk still remains on the front of the building. According to the museum,

> The SMU abbreviation has been used internally and externally for years. The new SMU logo highlights the process of change our museum has undergone, and also nods at its queerness by using the three letters in constantly changing format. You will find many variations of SMU – in many shapes and colors – in our publications, on our website, and on handouts. They all reflect the evolution and re-definition of a 'faggot' museum to a 'queer' museum.
>
> (SMU, 2018c)

The careful reconsideration of how the museum is presented to the public reflects the constant self-criticism and willingness of the museum to evolve.

German Political and Queer Theoretical Context of the Schwules Museum

The political issues found in the discourse within the SMU (that is the tensions between the white, gay male perspective and a more diverse, intersectional one) reflect an anti-queer feminist sentiment found in the larger Berlin queer community.[6]

This is mirrored more widely in Western queer communities where radical social change is often pitted against the attainment of respectability and acceptance in a neoliberal system. These negative feelings can be linked to conservative attacks on political correctness and intersectionality and the rise of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD, Alternative for Germany) – a homophobic, anti-immigrant far-right German political party.[7] Bosold (2018a) questions whether these political debates are due to generational conflicts between older, white, cisgender, male gays and younger queer, trans-inclusive people. For example, one of the leaders of the AfD is a partnered lesbian with children and the party has an LGBT group called *Alternative Homosexuelle* (Alternative Homosexuals) led by a middle-aged, white, gay, cisgender AfD politician. Beyond this wider political context, one must look at the practical effects of political arguments. That is, one must question how money and resources are distributed within the museum, who produces the museum's content and interpretation and who involved has the most political influence in the wider public sphere?

Queer theory often engages with the tensions here discussed , and further the assimilating effects that increased social acceptance has on queer communities. Queer and cultural theorist Lisa Duggan (2002) terms this assimilation and privileging of certain queer groups over others homonormativity. She suggests,

> This New Homonormativity comes equipped with a rhetorical recoding of key terms in the history of gay politics: 'equality' becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions, 'freedom' becomes impunity for bigotry and vast inequalities in commercial life and civil society, the 'right to privacy' becomes domestic confinement, and democratic politics itself becomes something to be escaped. All of this adds up to a corporate culture managed by a minimal state, achieved by the neoliberal privatization of affective as well as economic and public life.
>
> (ibid., p. 190)

From a similarly Marxist, feminist perspective, Hennessy earlier warns that

> Redressing gay invisibility by promoting images of a seamlessly middle-class gay consumer or by inviting us to see queer identities only in terms of style, textuality, or performative play helps produce imaginary gay/queer subjects that keep invisible the divisions of wealth and labor that these images and knowledges depend on.
>
> (2000, p. 140)

She argues that by remaining within the social and cultural spheres, sexualities remain fetishised – that is, she relates queer (in)visibility to Marx's conception of commodity fetishism and the hidden labour and value of objects within a capitalist society. Instead of hiding humanity's relation to labour however, she claims that contemporary depictions of gay media merely create a new illusion behind which

queerness is still marginalised. Her main argument is grounded not just in language but in promoting what she calls 'historicisation', and an extension of Marxist ideas of fetishisation to today's conceptions of queer politics and representations. For her, it is the process of 'historicisation', or a fuller account of the context, that can remove these harmful portrayals. This echoes Bishop's (2013) call for increased social and political context within museum exhibitions.

Hennessy's (2000) and Duggan's (2002) work is critical in considering the context of the SMU. During one of our interviews, Bosold (2018a) commented, 'We should queer our queer museum'. As agreed upon by the many practitioners I spoke to for this book, this means opening the institution up to non-heteronormative, non-white or marginalised perspectives. In pursuing a queer museum, it cannot continue to promote, as Hennessey summarises, the middle-class, gay, white consumer perspective as all that queer can be. The SMU and museums more generally must contend with a central tenet of queer theory, to problematise the fetishised position of a queer subject – broadly within the society it represents and within institutional cultures as well. How does an institution un-fetishise these ideas, and what would be the end result? Is it not *because* queer subjects are fetishised that they remain abject, outside or different, and thus queer? If queer is removed from Butler's (1993) exclusionary matrix,[8] where is it? How can one museum address these questions?

In the context of the museum, we can compare the common idea in queer theory that people with non-normative genders and sexualities have historically been considered less than human (as Foucault, 1998, originally published in 1978, argues a 'different species', or as Butler, 1993, describes 'abject beings') to the 'inhuman'[9] framework of past museum display in order to consider a new method of museum representation. We can recognise a museum's inherent subjectivity (Whitehead, 2009) as a strength instead of a shortcoming. That is, to consider in- and ex-clusion not as opposites but as concepts resting in tension with each other. We might compare it to Butler's (1993) conception of gender performativity and her insistence that 'intelligible' (heteronormative) and 'unlivable' (queer) bodies are not opposite but indeed reliant on each other. This is the crux that queer theory contends with. If the subject is neither fetishised, nor rendered further into invisibility, nor further still forgotten, where does it stand? Does this still apply in a self-proclaimed queer institution like the SMU? Is there a radicality to be found in remaining outside and continuing to exist within the fetish, the spectacle or the exotic as a personal choice instead of an enforced position? Or is it merely a function of time? Will queerness have existed too long as fetish so as to become null – remaining abject, and yet not equal or unequal? I don't mean to rest these questions on the shoulders of one institution, however queer it may be. However, these are critical considerations for the queer museum to grapple with. This is where Hennessy's conception of historicisation becomes important because it allows queer theory to ask what or where the conclusion is and represent it in a fully contextualised way.

This discussion of theory helps to contextualise the conflict of queering a gay museum. The SMU has been a gay male institution for so long that it can be a

difficult process for it to evolve to include broader LGBTQ+ perspectives. In addition to the way the museum is marketed to the public and the communities it represents, the SMU also sought to make internal changes to the voices represented within the museum. In 2006 the then entirely gay male board questioned their primacy and recruited their first female board member, Dr Birgit Bosold. Bosold has been involved in lesbian-feminist activism since she moved to Berlin in the 1980s. She (2018a) cites how because German gay and lesbian movements have always been politically and structurally separate, this made her initially hesitant to join the board of such an institution. As Bosold further articulates,

> …it was clear at the time that museum [*sic*] has to open up its perspectives. To open up to words like lesbian and woman, or a history of lesbian culture. And lesbian activism. But then further on, as well as to trans- perspectives. POC (people of colour). Like, all the diversity aspects.
>
> (ibid.)

Widening perspectives is crucial for a queer museum because, as Conlan argues,

> As a space of representation, the museum is also a site for recognition, and the need for representation, for the recognition of possibility, is urgent and life-giving. As Butler says: 'Possibility is not a luxury; it is as crucial as bread'.
>
> (2010, p. 258, citing Butler, 2004, p. 18)

These new perspectives became obvious not only in the composition of the board but the exhibitionary themes pursued by the board. Appendix B lists a number of exhibitions which record the slow inclusion of perspectives other than gay male from 2007 to 2019.[10] These represent 28% of the SMU's total number of exhibitions from that period with a sharp increase as we approach the present that only continues to grow.

A queer museum must contend with the aforementioned questions and find innovative ways to address them. At the SMU, these issues included the challenges of marketing the Gay Museum inclusively; the broader influence of national politics on the local queer community; how to resist the neoliberalisation of culture; and the difficulty of placing queerness in a world of increased assimilation and acceptance. The SMU addresses these internal and external issues through community discussion and the funding of queering initiatives put forward by both the board and the community. It is helpful here to return to Muñoz who reminds us that queerness is steeped in action: 'When I refer to the animating force of queerness I specifically want to discuss a mode of queer performativity – that is, not the fact of a queer identity but the force of a kind of queer doing' (2009, p. 84). Despite the theoretical abstraction, there is a baseline practicality that must happen for the queer utopic museum to move past modes of critique to modes of seeing and being.

An Ideological Fight for Identity

The aforementioned challenges played out dramatically at the SMU in 2018. The discourses present in the museum directly exhibit how the tensions of what queerness means are just as high within the community as without. The whole conflict may have been exacerbated by the museum's programming in 2018, the so-called *Year of the Women**, which focused exclusively on exhibitions and events which attempted to redress the unequal representation of women's* perspectives and histories in museums and societies more generally (SMU, 2020b).[11] This year-long effort – which, among other things, hosted debates on different feminisms, changed the museum café to *Spirits: A Dyke Bar for Queers, Gender Chameleons and Other Everydeities*, and updated its permanent collection exhibition to argue that gay liberation is indebted to the preceding activism of many feminist and lesbian groups – may have represented an unwelcome and radical shift in focus to some members of the Gay Museum.[12] The *Year of the Women** was seen by the museum 'as an experimental field with transformative potential, the goal of which is a more future-oriented and participative (museum) practice' (ibid.). This kind of radically experimental programming seemed to negatively change some members' perspective on what the SMU is and what it is supposed to represent.

At the *Queering Memory: Archives, Libraries, Museums, Special Collections* conference held in Berlin in the summer of 2019, Bosold (2019b) presented a paper entitled, *The Year of the Women* at Schwules Museum Berlin: A Case Study of Power Dynamics within 'Queer' Politics of Memory*. In it, she recounted how the museum (or those members involved in this queer feminist turn) were accused of being 'misandrists', 'queergida'[13] or somehow a 'Gender-Taliban'. Amelung, a white, gay, German journalist, commented,

> The contempt for the history(s) of gays – the basis of the museum – is disturbing…The gay museum is increasingly developing into a gallery and playground for hipsters, but there is not enough basic educational communication of historical knowledge.
>
> (Amelung, 2019; Bosold, 2019b)

The museum found further criticism on Facebook: 'In all corners and ends gay institutions are captured and abused by the same lesbians who otherwise like to remain invisible, do not get involved and hallucinate that their social and legal situation has always been worse than ours', and from their own volunteers: 'One wants to destroy the history of the museum' (Bosold, 2019b). Bosold cites another article from *Mannschaft* which states,

> Queerfeminism is not an invention of parts of the SMU board - this current from the USA has long since arrived in the German university and activist scene. Authoritarian prohibitions of thought and speech are also common there, as can

> be read in the anthology *Beißreflexe* (Bite Reflexes), published by the gender researcher and *Polittunte*[14] Patsy l'Amour lalove.
>
> (ibid.)

Bosold and Hofmann summarised by arguing,

> Voicing mechanisms of marginalization and discrimination within 'the family' seems to be inviting the skeletons out of the closet. Expressing this is obviously just as taboo as it is in any other family. We don't know how this intense experiment of self-critique will go and where we will stand at the end of the year. We will see. We hope during the course of the year that the recognition that misogyny and sexism damage not only women* but men* as well, especially gay men, will spread.
>
> (2018, p. 11)

These tensions reflect Ashcroft's assertion that

> The relation between the individual and the collective continues to be one of the most vexed issues in utopian thinking because while the equality of the individuals in the collective is a fundamental principle of utopian thought, the collective is always inimical to individual fulfilment.
>
> (Ashcroft, 2009, p. 11)

This is a direct example of the tension between homonormative and queer feminist positions. It highlights the difficulty within a queer utopic museum in finding common ground in a community that is at once marginalised and diverse.

The queer turn of the museum's perspective is also representative of how queer failure functions in the SMU. It can be used as a framework which helps combat critiques which say museums present assimilationist narratives, or who pursue diversity and inclusion for the 'wrong' reasons or in a way not universally agreed upon by some of the museum's stakeholders. That is, queering is a process of ongoing failure. In this case, the SMU has built up certain processes over decades and must now trust other people with new perspectives to come in and initiate change. Lynch and Alberti argue that as museums turn towards democratisation and participation there needs to be 'radical trust' between those involved because '… shared authority is more effective at creating and guiding culture than institutional control' (2010, p. 15). Queer failure is also about trust. Trusting the institution to be capable of serving these new communities with the same success as gay, white males; trusting that those who come in will find the institution a useful space for the kinds of narratives they want to tell. The trust must run through several generations and be somewhat blind, as change is never certain. As Bosold argues, it is necessary to have a '…welcoming culture, or a welcoming atmosphere of difference, for difference. For people who tell us, "oh, you have to do it in a completely different way" ' (2018b). This reflects Charles Esche's (the director of the Van Abbemuseum) view that queerness can be a form of hospitality (as discussed

in Chapter 5). The queer feminist turn, then, is bound up in ideas of failure and utopian ideological battles.

The ideological debate is ongoing at the SMU. However, 2018 and 2021 both saw activists, artists and academics voted onto the board (SMU, 2018a, 2023a). Bosold kept her position and continues to fight for a queer feminist perspective to guide the museum. Though this reflects that a majority of those involved with the institution favour this path, the struggle between the museum's historical positioning and a queerer future remains. This conflict is necessary for a queer utopic museum and inevitable for an activist museum in that it must remain critical of authority.

The Schwules Museum's Activist Ethos

The SMU's history is saturated with gay, and more recently LGBTQ+, activists. Its current internationally recognised position belies the protest and struggle that went into its founding as described earlier. These foundations are today reflected in their reliance on over 80+ volunteers and a governing board of directors filled by activists, artists and academics (Bosold, 2018a; SMU, 2023a). Though many Western museums rely heavily on volunteer work, it is usually not to this extreme extent where volunteers outweigh paid staff by about 8:1 (Merritt, 2016; Museums Association, 2018).[15] The continued reliance on volunteers is a form of activism which influences how the museum operates and is perceived. This important work is given freely by the community and highlights their desire to maintain the museum, but also characterises the amateurism built into the institution as further discussed later. The founding of the museum and its governing structure have a direct impact on their political positioning and the programming pursued. It is a museum owned by a specific movement and community (represented by the *Verein der Freundinnen und Freunde des Schwulen Museums in Berlin*) and is thus deeply intertwined with the people it represents on the gallery walls. Its democratically elected board of directors is atypical of most museums. This type of structure is not without issue as even when an institution is committed to and part of a community, there are still questions of whose voices become dominant. Bosold (2018a) acknowledges that although this situation can be risky, it also allows for creative and political strength and flexibility. She states,

> …the critique on institution (*sic*) which is really important…within the whole discourse of (the) museum. Do we – this type of critique is incorporated in a way, in the institution itself, right? Which is a very strange and also complex… structure you have to deal with. Because you are – in the same time – you are the institution.
>
> (ibid.)

Institutional critique is built into the museum's governing structure, and the decisions of the board are always filtered through a collective, activist lens. This

differs from, for example, the institutions discussed in previous chapters which also focused on auto-institutional critique but not at these highest levels of governance.

The SMU's activism is both separate from and related to the activist turn seen in museums today (Janes and Sandell, 2019; Adair and Levin, 2020). Janes and Sandell assert, 'Museums, as social institutions, have the opportunity and the *obligation* to question the way in which society is manipulated and governed. Activism also means resistance – the critical questioning and re-imagining of the status quo' (ibid., p. 6, italics original). Although this definition meshes with the SMU's institutional framework, they have pursued this resistance and re-imagining of the status quo (a queer utopic position) from their founding almost four decades ago. It is less a matter of the SMU adapting into activist museum practice, and more that other Western institutions are now also pursuing community-driven, politically minded processes. Where Janes and Sandell (ibid.) suggest internal changes are needed to become an activist museum – including thinking about shared authority, museums' reliance on corporate governing structures and preoccupation with capitalistic growth – the SMU has been structured differently from its beginning. Its task is not to become an activist museum but rather to remain one.

As Bosold (2018b) acknowledges, the impulse of the SMU lies in a utopian moment where gay and lesbian activists sought better representation of their histories by critiquing the contemporary norms of German museums and the society they reflect. They rebelled against the Berlin Museum's refusal to maintain the same level of representation after they exhibited *Eldorado – Homosexuelle Frauen und Männer in Berlin 1850–1950*. Bosold argues that

> …one of the main challenges we have is how we can…keep this moment. How we can shelter it. Because the more you become like a (*sic*) official institution, the more you become professional…the more difficult it is…to remain (*sic*) this moment of revolution.
>
> (ibid.)

As Muñoz affirms, 'The calculus of exploitation and liberation dogs queer culture' (2009, p. 106). This is an inherent tension within queer theory more generally and especially as applied to institutions. As seen throughout the book, the queer impulse is a political, anti-assimilationist, anti-normative one that seeks to uncover and break binary thought where it is found. Therefore, the desire to queer an institution is paradoxical because many would argue institutions are the epitome of normative structures which continue to frame society and its outputs for neoliberal, capitalistic ends.

Bosold (2018b) connects the success of the activism which underpins the SMU as a utopian characteristic. As historian and philosopher of technology Lewis Mumford (2008, originally published in 1922) summarises, people who easily inhabit the narrow environment of the normative social world have no need for utopia because our world is already built for them and they have no need to seek further or imagine differently. Muñoz further compounds this with his '… belief that minoritarian subjects are cast as hopeless in a world without utopia' (2009,

p. 97). The SMU, then, acts as an activist-utopian institution by pushing against heteronormative representations of German (and global) history. It enables the display and acceptance of non-homogenous communities to flourish in a neoliberal society. In a global context, the existence of such a museum is unreachable for many. While it can be considered utopian to have such a space in a country which 80 years ago was brutally killing such minorities, it does not negate the history of colonialism or the ongoing discrimination and violence perpetrated against LGBTQ+ people.

An Activist Perspective on Museum Visitors

The SMU has never been one of the most visited museums in Berlin due both to its narrow focus and competition. Though their visitor numbers have increased in recent years, the museum's political focus is more important to its board than total visitor numbers (Bosold, 2018a, 2019a). The museum has been funded by the Federal State of Berlin since 2010 and this stability allows the institution, its curators and collaborators a freedom to pursue what they find politically and intellectually important for the museum without the pressure of guaranteeing high visitor numbers. This characteristic is key to understanding the museum. As Bosold (2018a) summarises, '…the museum understands itself much more like a political project or a…collective institution…I would say the programming is, it's not so much based on the numbers of visitors'. This prioritises content and politics over visitor and monetary interest. It reflects both a utopian desire and a deviation from the way many museums might prioritise the visitor experience and their bottom line (Vergo, 1989; Babich, 1993; Mason, Robinson and Coffield, 2018). Although creating an exhibition is always a subjective process (Whitehead, 2009), the SMU endeavours to make it a collective and queerly ideological one as well. Bosold (2018a) states,

> …the process of deciding which exhibitions we want to organise or which ones we want to show, which main issues want to deal [*sic*], which political directions we really want to…focus on. These are collective decisions and as well…decisions…taken by like a collective of activists. So, I think it's really very, very rare.

Indeed, this way of working undermines museums' elitist image by replacing it with the experiences and interests of a marginalised community. Subjectivity is not escaped, instead certain subjectivities are elevated and celebrated by and for a community that is usually ignored in wider society, history and museums. It is work pursued at a micro level (changing the normal process of exhibition making) in order to pursue wider goals concerning queer representation in society.

The SMU's existence is also a form of utopian activism for all international visitors who come from countries where such an institution would be unthinkable. The museum guestbooks are filled with appreciation and support. For example, the 2014–2015 book includes entries like: 'Thank you for the great exhibitions here. It

is amazing and important that a place like this exists! Thank you so much! *Tusen takk*! (Thank you very much!) James C. 28.5.14', '21/5/14, It's appropriate that we visited this exhibit today in Berlin because it is our 33rd anniversary today. And yesterday our state in the US (Pennsylvania) struck down the ban on same-sex marriage. So my husband and I were particularly pleased to discover your fascinating exhibit. David & Brian, Pennsylvania, USA' and 'Keep up and you will be kept up! This museum and all those who care for it are precious!' (Schwules Museum, 2015). Its long history and even its government funding represent the success of years of protest that is still ongoing in many parts of the world. Many countries struggle with colonial-era prejudice and the legal discrimination which exists in postcolonial contexts (Han and O'Mahoney, 2014). It highlights the privilege of Western countries to have government-sanctioned institutions such as the SMU, despite its alternative, activist roots.

Queer Failure and Amateurism at the Schwules Museum

Queer failure and amateurism play an important role in understanding the queer utopic institution. This is particularly true of the SMU. The following narrows from the broader focus of looking at the museum's founding and ideological positioning to look at the museum's day-to-day functioning. I will frame the way in which the museum can be understood institutionally, its curatorial strategies, its unique permanent collection display and its 'wild' (or largely uncatalogued and vacillatingly cared for) archives through the lens of queer failure and amateurism. I characterise queer failure in the museum particularly through Halberstam's (2011) ideas surrounding unbecoming and anti-mastery, and Muñoz's (2009) assertion that queer failure is about an escape that is necessary for queer utopia. The SMU engages with these frameworks and also, as described earlier, ideas of amateurism and activism. In thinking about the SMU, I link Halberstam's (2011) conception of 'anti-mastery' to ideas of amateurism and lived experience. Amateurism is characterised by the

> [promotion of] skill-sharing over professional specialisation; fluidity and horizontal forms of organisation over hierarchies; sites for learning and personal growth away from the more controlled environments of formal education; and a celebration of playful inefficiency over the earnest efficiency of alienated work.
> (Brown, 2011, p. 146)

Similarly to amateurism, lived experience is often positioned below the academic or professional in a hierarchy of knowledge, and particularly within a museum context. However, in queer theory and queer museology – particularly, for example, in transgender studies – lived experience is presented as an invaluable asset to further understanding (Stryker and Currah, 2014; Browne and Nash, 2016; Sandell, 2017; Scott, 2018a). The SMU's history, founding, governance and ideological stand can be understood as an interplay between queer failure and amateurism which both prioritise the expertise of lived experience.

Failure is not often considered a desirable trait for museums. That is, if they are traditionally understood as sites of tangible and intangible history, education, aesthetics and knowledge it might seem incompatible to consider them queer failures. However, I find it necessary to consider the recent trend towards the inclusive museum (Dodd and Sandell, 2001; Steedman, 2012; Cole, 2014; Middleton, 2017; Sandell, 2017) alongside Halberstam's (2011) conception of queer failure in order to understand how to combat threats of homonormativity, assimilation and/or 'diversity' as window dressing. Homonormativity (Duggan, 2002) and assimilationist politics, as mentioned earlier, are used to reference the non-queer, non-radical political positions sometimes taken by particularly white and cis- gay men and lesbians who have achieved legal and economic 'equality' in Western democracies and fail to continue fighting for others in the LGBTQ+ community like trans- people and black, indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) who still suffer from violence and discrimination. Queer failure is an important concept in the face of such posturing, be it of an individual's, an institution's (in this context, a museum's) or a society's politics. Halberstam states,

> Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world. Failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well; for queers failure can be a style, to cite Quentin Crisp, or a way of life, to cite Foucault, and it can stand in contrast to the grim scenarios of success that depend upon 'trying and trying again'.
>
> (ibid., pp. 2–3)

This variable understanding of failure, as both a style and way of life, suits museum work both in the sense that these ideas could influence their mission and ideology (or way of life) and the more ephemeral aspects of museum work like programming and display (or style). Elsewhere, Halberstam characterises queer failure as the inability 'to conform, to belong, to cohere' (2012). This mindset could encourage museums to be more experimental when engaging with new communities and ways of working. If a museum is trying to change its processes, programming or ideology – especially towards a more inclusive, activist bent, or in the SMU's case, a queer feminist one – then it is useful to think in terms of how it no longer conforms or coheres to its past iterations. The queer museum, I argue, requires both internal and external criticism to effect change. Queer failure, therefore, provides a framework in which to think about both the past and future of the museum. By embracing failure, it makes it easier to integrate needed institutional critique. There is no final step, exhibition or programme that will indicate a finished inclusive museum, but rather the institution can consider itself an ongoing process of queer failure.

The SMU's founding is indeed saturated with the failure of the Berlin Museum to enact permanent change after hosting *Eldorado – Homosexuelle Frauen und Männer in Berlin 1850–1950* in 1984. The utopian desire for a mainstream state museum to be fundamentally changed by one exhibition became an instance of

failure which ignited a desire to create a specifically gay museum and archive. It's an example which fits neatly into Muñoz's insistence that 'Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world' (2009, p. 1). Though the SMU can be characterised as a utopian project, it always had to embrace the possibility of failure and uncertainty for as Jameson reminds, '…the best Utopias are those that fail the most comprehensively' (2005, p. xiii). It is particularly bold for amateurs (students) to create such an institution and reflects how unimportant expertise is when the desire and drive is there. As Bosold (2018b) argues, 'Just – no one allows you, no one – you do not have any like legitimation, or there is no governmental support – nothing, you just do it. Because you decide it's important to do that'.

Although the SMU is built on a foundation of amateurism and community need over expertise and institutional or governmental backing, since 2010 the museum has received substantial funding from the Federal State of Berlin. Where the museum had relied on private donations and voluntary work for decades, the increase in funding saw an inevitable move away from the amateur towards professionalisation. Bosold (2018a) comments that this is most apparent in their upgraded facilities, but that it also affects their standing within the community. For example, when the SMU curated *Homosexualität_en* (Homosexuality_ies) together with the prominent Deutsches Historisches Museum, Bosold found '… we were the outsiders. Within our own communities we are the dominant institution. It was schizophrenic' (ibid.). The museum's description of itself reflects the tension professionalisation brings, as they describe, '…we are an intimate community center in the heart of Berlin-Tiergarten, and at the same time an internationally renowned institution for archiving and presenting LGBTIQ* history and culture via exhibitions, events and education programs' (SMU, 2018c).

The increase in funding and professionalisation forces the museum to move further from the utopian, activist impulse. Though this creates stability for an institution which cares for a marginalised history, Bosold (2018b) highlights how there is always the possibility that the SMU will become a relatively traditional, conservative institution, such that it would inspire a new generation of activists to make their own space. This possibility and institutional understanding is utopian. Allowing change and space for new organisations to follow in the wake of the SMU is a part of embracing failure. It reflects Muñoz's (2009) future-oriented, hope-infused positioning, in which even though the SMU can continue in the capacities it has done since 1985, it does not preclude those involved from considering how they might change in the future, or how new structures might become necessary as the old ones succumb to age, tradition and professionalisation. Muñoz argues,

> Utopia is not prescriptive; it renders potential blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibility, not a fixed schema. It is productive to think about utopia as flux, a temporal disorganization, as a moment when the here and the now is transcended by a *then* and a *there* that could be and indeed should be.
>
> (2009, p. 97, italics original)

If queer utopian futures are vital to the framework of a queer museum, but the path forward remains forever unmapped and susceptible to failure, then it follows that a truly queer museum is one which continually engages with these questions despite knowing it will fail. This always leads to more questions of how to be 'better', more 'inclusive', more 'queer'. Additionally, Muñoz asserts, 'Queer failure…is more nearly about escape and a certain kind of virtuosity' (ibid., p. 173). Further, that failure and virtuosity are equally and vitally important to queer utopias. This aligns the museum with a queer utopian project because the museum allows for the indulgence of escape through the perusal of objects and ideas both virtuosic and mundane. This understanding further elucidates how queering the museum is an ongoing project that might eventually result in the evolution into something quite different from a museum's origins.

Like the VAM discussed in Chapter 5, the SMU embraces a queer utopic vision by placing self-critique at the forefront of its identity (though this is not always a smooth process as evidenced by their recent ideological struggles). Despite the difficulty, the deconstruction of traditional processes is not to obliterate the museum or negate the good it does, but rather to make it even better for more people. The utopian impulse is always characterised by deconstruction because it is necessary for change to occur. It is about accepting failure and enjoying it for the potential future it will bring. Bosold (2018b) understands this connection between failure and the utopian. She cites Hannah Arendt in arguing that there is a human ability to be born again, start anew as something different, and how this could be called '… queer in a… utopian sense. That (*sic*) Schwules Museum could become an institution which…celebrates critique' (ibid.). This is an important characteristic of the queer utopic museum, as further explored in Chapter 7.

A destined failure need not be doomed, however. As Halberstam argues, queer failure can be a playful process in which one needs to accept '…the finite' and '… the embrace of the absurd, the silly, and the hopelessly goofy' (2011, pp. 186–187). Similarly, Tyburczy argues,

> Whether or not the gatekeepers of queer theory predict its death, its ludic utility to the exhibition of queer subjects in museums is just beginning. Above all, these museums and their exhibitionary struggles remind us that now is not the time to abandon queer theory. Now, more than ever, we need queer praxis.
>
> (2016, p. 124)

A queer museum benefits from thinking about self-critique through this framework (ludic failure) because it forces focus on change and play over defeat. As Bosold comments, 'This is fun. It's fun to…question things. It's fun to…see it in a different way. It's fun to…open up new questions, new perspectives…And this would be for me, like, very, very queer if we could do that' (2018b). It is important to note Bosold's use of 'if' because it implies that such self-critique or desire for it is not inevitable despite the museum's best effort to make collective decisions. It is a constant process which starts over with every move.

Curatorial Strategies at the Schwules Museum

Reliance on amateur knowledge also plays out in the museum's curatorial strategies. Given the relatively small number of paid staff, the SMU does not have a curatorial department. Though it often works with outside curators – for example, the curator and art historian Vincent Schier organised *Irène Mélix: Lonely Hearts* in 2021 (SMU, 2023b) – there is also opportunity for non-curators to pursue exhibitions. For instance, the 2019 show, *Karol Radziszewski: Queer Archives Institute*, was curated by the artist and publisher Karol Radziszewski (SMU, 2023c). Further, Bosold, an activist who works professionally in finance, did not curate until she became involved with the SMU. She did not come from a cultural background but rather uses her own expertise and political acumen to infuse the museum with her own subjectivity. Bosold (2018a) reflects that her first exhibition, *L-Projekt: Lesben in Berlin von den 1970s bis heute* (L-Project: Lesbians in Berlin from the 1970s to the present), in 2008 was important for the museum in that it opened up lesbian perspectives, though not a 'good' exhibition because the curatorial team failed to consult widely. Instead of pursuing curatorial training, the curatorial process was one of learning-by-doing because of a personal, amateur interest in the subject. These examples show how a diverse group of voices influence the tone of the museum. They highlight the importance of trusting the expertise of lived experience in order to provide a broader spectrum of perspectives within the museum. As Frisch argues in the context of oral and public history, museum exhibitions,

> …should be not only a distribution of knowledge from those who have it to those who do not, but a more profound sharing of knowledges, an implicit and sometimes explicit dialogue from very different vantages about the shape, meaning, and implications of history.
>
> (1990, p. xxii)

This type of thinking, he argues, promotes a broader and more democratised view of history that is more deeply informed. Widening such perspectives or understandings of authority mean that exhibitions are not merely media through which to translate scholarship to the public, but rather creates a 'public-historical context' that is 'alive' and can have immediate consequences to those who consume it (ibid., p. 226).

By entrusting people of varying skills to create shows, curating at the SMU becomes an important way for the museum to interrupt or intervene into political discourses and structures. For example, the 2017 exhibition *Odarodle – An imaginary their_story of naturepeoples, 1535–2017* took a postcolonial position to examine the museum's own history and collection (SMU, 2017a). Instead of worrying about how inviting in non-curators might damage a museum's perceived trustworthiness to the public, the SMU invites more and more perspectives into the museum's authoritative voice. This trust is not always found within institutions. As Sullivan and Middleton (2019) experienced in curating their two-day pop-up

exhibition *Queering the Museum* at the History Trust of South Australia, some staff members questioned whether their curatorial strategies of presenting alternative interpretations could result in misinterpretation or possibly 'anarchistic Babel' which undermined the museum's credibility. It is clear, therefore, that this trust in experimental display strategies is not yet the norm in museums. As Simon argues,

> Co-creative projects require 'radical trust' in community members' abilities to perform complex tasks, collaborate with each other, and respect institutional rules and priorities. To execute a successful co-creation project, staff members must not only trust the competencies and motivations of participants but deeply desire their input and leadership.
>
> (2010)

She further characterises the participatory museum as an institution which '… supports multi-directional content experiences' or as a 'platform' through which 'users' are 'content creators, distributors, consumers, critics, and collaborators'. Though the SMU does not fit exactly into Simon's model of co-creative projects, her insistence on the necessary radical trust is an important element of the SMU's curatorial strategy.

The careful consideration of curation and those who perform it is important to be able to express alternative viewpoints and lesser understood or represented histories. At the SMU, this strategy is also used to go against the hegemony of a gay male perspective. Prioritising lived experience allows one to claim an authority or subjectivity of what is personally most important even if it does not fit into traditionally established narratives. It is not about creating a well-rounded 'objective' history, but rather one in which personal perspectives become equally important. This is seen, for example, with the 2017 exhibition, *ğ – queer forms migrate*, in which Aykan Safoğlu and Emre Busse – both artists who migrated from Turkey to Berlin – imbued it with their own subjectivities and experiences (Hunn, 2017; SMU, 2017b). This is vitally important for an institution that is trying to prioritise lived experience and queer forms of knowledge. Curation at the SMU sometimes becomes a form of amateur social history that prioritises alternative subject positions. Bosold (2018a) asserts that one does not have to be a 'proper curator' in order to do the work of one. This position conflates the activism and amateurism which characterise the museum. However, I would argue it is important to remember, as Frisch (1990) too reminds, that the inclusion of new localised and subjective perspectives cannot escape a critical self-awareness which engages with how changing such processes affects how the message or theme is communicated to the public. Such tactics should not exclude forever the perspectives of more traditionally understood experts, for example, curators or historians.

Beyond this 'amateur' curatorial strategy, the SMU's exhibitions can also be understood in terms of queer failure. Understanding curation through the framework of queer failure allows one to think about how alternative narratives about minoritarian subjects can be pursued differently. In this case, the 'failure' of low

visitor numbers becomes less important than the stories the museum is able to tell and the communities it is able to engage. It is a matter of embracing failure in order to promote and make visible more radical histories. Bosold argues, '…I think it's also important specifically for us that we can…exhibit issues which probably wouldn't get so much visitors (*sic*)', '…but nevertheless, it's important to honour these, kind of, activists or activist-artists. And, so, it doesn't matter if they're, if it's not, like, successful in regard to financial issues or financial results' (2018a). It is a failure not just of the museum (in terms of visitors and finances) but also reflects a more general failure of history and society that these narratives have been left out. As Halberstam comments in a discussion of Scott's (1998) *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*,

> For Scott, to 'see like a state' means to accept the order of things and to internalize them; it means that we begin to deploy and think with the logic of the superiority of orderliness and that we erase and indeed sacrifice other, more local practices of knowledge, practices moreover that may be less efficient, may yield less marketable results, but may also, in the long term, be more sustaining. (2011, p. 9)

The SMU tries to combat this internalised order by promoting and displaying radical, queer, niche narratives. As Halberstam (ibid.) emphasises, the privileging of knowledge or experiences that do not fit neatly in an institutional framework is a queer way to engage more productively and think about the future. The SMU does this by choosing displays for their content and visibility over their ability to draw in funding and visitors.

Impermanent Permanent Collection Display

In understanding the SMU through the lens of queer failure, it is important to consider how they have re-worked the idea of a permanent collection display. Where most museums dedicate a large portion of gallery space to their 'most important' objects and keep them on display in the same arrangement for an average of ten years (though this depends on the type and resources of an institution and does not include the many years spent planning such an endeavour) (Lord, Lord and Martin, 2012; Ross, 2015), the SMU works to challenge this process. For example, at the British Museum, only 80,000 of their 8 million objects are on display at any one time (The British Museum, n.d.). They acknowledge, 'This is 1% of the collection, however, the displays include many of the most important items', or that 99% of their collection fails to be displayed on a permanent basis (ibid.). In contrast, at the SMU,

> The permanent exhibition has been designed as an 'open system' with many aspects and angles. The structure developed together with exhibition architect Rainer Lendler allows for regular changes and additions. Exhibits and display groupings are arranged in a way that avoids any impression of conveying the

> definitive or solely valid view of historical developments. Within each thematic set it remains clear that the objects are merely fragments and more or less haphazard findings.
>
> (Sternweiler, 2004, pp. 10–11)

This reflects a deep understanding of how a museum's narrative can be cemented as 'truth' and how this reputation has left out many marginalised histories. At the time of my visit in 2018, the wall text described:

> **Tapetenwechsel 2.03: Work in Progress** Hildegard Knef sang *Ich brauch' Tapetenwechsel sprach die Birke* (*I need a Tapetenwechsel, said the birch*) and set off to write her own lyrics. *Tapetenwechsel* is the word for when a situation requires a radical change, a change of scenery. However, Tapetenwechsel is more than a gloss-over, it is an incisive transformation, yet nothing more than a new backdrop for the old inventory. An interpretation guide, a new perspective, not only in every day life but also in questions regarding the quest for self-discovery, as well as questions of theoretical and ideological nature. As a series, Tapetenwechsel prefers to stay flexible; it is planning on giving small presentations time and again in the course of an ever-changing exhibition… .
>
> (SMU, 2016)

Therefore, when objects or themes are changed, it is not in the context of something new, but a continuous exhibition which is able to transform along with the changing ideals of the institution. It is more flexible than a permanent display and closer in duration to a temporary one. For example, temporary exhibitions usually last three months, where the Tapetenwechsel lasted for four.[16] Rather the exhibition remains 'permanent' because the objects come from the SMU's collection and are permanent fixtures of the collection if not the display. Bosold (2018b) echoes Sternweiler in arguing that it is difficult to make permanent exhibitions because they become authoritarian statements. This is an inherent failure in museum processes that the SMU tries to address by being more flexible and open with the structure of their 'permanent' exhibitions.

The Tapetenwechsel style of permanent exhibitions attempts to dismantle the practice in most museums of the permanent collection display. What does this disruption do? It is an attempt to equalise all collection objects because none of them become prioritised over others as having to always be on display. Additionally, because the SMU is neither completely a social history museum nor an art gallery, both types of objects are present within the collection and are displayed with no discernible order or hierarchy. Each object contributes to the narrative of the museum regardless of its individual status as artwork or ephemera because they are all objects in a largely undocumented archive and not split neatly into subjective departments like most museums. This further disrupts traditional museum classification which usually places an object within a specific department with specific lenses by which to interpret it. As Nettleton argues, museums have the potential to '…override the boundaries of disciplines, to create different sets of

boundaries which can be dismantled as quickly as they are set up, to create a roll-over of utopian visions which, as Jameson clearly establishes, inevitably critique the status quo' (2013, pp. 424–425).[17] It is important to remember, as Mason and Sayner argue,

> The inescapable problem inherent in all archives and museum collections is that as one set of memories are to (*sic*) selected to come to the fore, many others will be pushed out of sight. Such is the inevitable consequence of the process of selecting things for display.
>
> (2018, p. 3)

While no museum can escape this problem entirely, the SMU's Tapetenwechsel tactic works to deconstruct the assumption that some objects must always be on display. Permanent collection displays create myths around objects and entrench certain understandings of history (Pearce, 1992), and for a history that is already plagued by silence, forgetting and lack of tangible evidence it is important for the SMU to engage with new ways of displaying collection objects.

Amateurism, Forgetting and Residue in the Archive

Another characteristic of the SMU which reflects its amateur, activist beginnings is its status as the largest repository of German LGBTQ+ history. The collection of over 1.5+ million objects contains personal collections of gay activists and artists, documents from political organisations, private photographic collections and letters (SMU, 2019b). There is no distinction between the museum's collection and archive. Additionally, the museum houses a library of more than 25,000 titles covering a variety of subjects including rare pornographic magazines (SMU, 2019c). Despite these extensive holdings, there is no collections database. Bosold (2018b) describes the archive/collection as a 'state of wildness' or 'flea market' in which over 90% of the collection is not yet reviewed. Its contents instead are mentally categorised by several volunteers and some staff who work in the archive, as Bosold describes, 'a biological database' (ibid.). Additionally, the SMU has no collecting plan because there is no acquisition budget. Their archive/collection relies solely on donations made by the community. This means their collection is characterised by the personal relationships and connections of the founders and staff at the museum. Although it creates a haphazard history of collecting which comes with its own blind spots and inconsistencies, it asserts that what is preserved is entirely community driven. This does not guarantee that all facets of the community are included (and indeed may have precluded donations from people or groups who feel or felt excluded by the museum's founding gay male perspective), but it still represents a different acquisitions process than many museums which often rely on curators to make airtight historical arguments for new additions.[18] The quality of care for the collections has fluctuated over the decades because the archive was managed by volunteers of varying skill levels and time commitments. Bosold contends it is difficult to

find specific objects within the storage, but also that many things survived that might not have in traditional museum or archival acquisitions. She argues that the ability to continue to preserve and collect is more important than classifying their current holdings. For her, it is imperative to keep taking in these objects from the community for the future than it is to try to reclaim the archive from its chaotic state (ibid.).

The SMU's archive is a paradox that can be partially understood through Halberstam's (2011) understanding of forgetting. He argues, '…*forgetting* becomes a way of resisting the heroic and grand logics of recall and unleashes new forms of memory that relate more to spectrality than to hard evidence, to lost genealogies than to inheritance, to erasure than to inscription' (ibid., p. 15, italics original). That is, one must consider this archive in the context of the massive erasure and state-mandated forgetting of LGBTQ+ lives and stories and the consistent spread of orderly, normative histories. Recovering these 'lost' histories is a common mission now among both museums and historians. However, the creation of LGBTQ+ archives is often met with a lack of funding and resources (Queering Memory: ALMS, 2019). In the case of the SMU, material objects are not lacking, but there remains limited documentation and organisation. Halberstam's call to 'suspect memorialisation' because it 'has a tendency to tidy up disorderly histories' (2011, p. 15) is necessary in the face of a state and academy that has brushed away LGBTQ+ histories for so long. The structure, or lack thereof, of the SMU's archive is both a result of their desire to recoup that which was lost, and to acknowledge that forgetting is a necessary mechanism for a community to reconcile traumas and successes, the mundane and the radical.

In addition to considering the structure - or lack thereof - of the SMU's archive/collection, it is also important to examine how they use these objects. Although the SMU can be broadly classified as a social history museum, Bosold (2018b) comments that they tend to use art in their exhibitions as a way to complete the narrative that the ephemera and other archival material provides. She argues that it makes an exhibition more complex and offers imaginative possibilities in a way that other objects cannot. As Bishop (2013) notes, this tactic highlights how the archive and art can function in tandem within the gallery space to give the visitor a richer understanding of the topic. It also recalls my deployment of Muñoz's (2009) theory of anticipatory illuminations (as fleshed out in my discussion of Tate Britain's *Queer British Art* in Chapter 3) which similarly highlights an art object's ability to initiate a complex reaction within the visitor, particularly under a queer lens. I find that in addition to adding complexity and nuance to exhibitions, queer archival material must also be considered in terms of 'residue'. In her discussion of exhibitions displaying queer sex toys, Tyburczy argues,

> In this display, the curators queerly interpreted the archive as a site for historicizing sex objects as a place of residue, a process that Rebecca Schneider (2001) describes as 'flesh in a network of body-to-body transmission of enactments – evidence, across generations, of impact.'.
>
> (2016, p. 120)

This idea plays into Halberstam's (2011) conception of the spectral described earlier and Muñoz's (2009) ideas of the ephemerality of performance which I discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to the traces of the VAM's queering projects felt throughout the museum. As Muñoz argues in a discussion of a drag show he attended as a child, 'It lives [the drag show], then, after its dematerializations as a transformed materiality, circulating in queer realms of loving and becoming…It is an ephemeral proof' (ibid., p. 70). He argues that it has become unquestioned in performance studies to think that they only exist while performed, but he instead argues for a 'hermeneutics of residue', or the idea that ephemera remains. I argue that if we extend Muñoz's queer performances to consider all queer events, then these queer becomings can be reactivated through their archiving and display. The SMU's ephemera is queer both because of their original purposes and contexts but also in that they are outside of the traditional museum purview. The residue of ephemera – as opposed to art objects – is important in its bodily and social connections to queer lives. They are intimately connected to queer events and/or impulses not meant to be remembered by outsiders and certainly not kept by the state.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have argued that the SMU is a queer feminist, utopic, activist institution that can be understood through Halberstam's (2011) conceptions of failure, amateurism and forgetting and Muñoz's (2009) consideration of queer utopias. Though the museum differs from Janes and Sandell's (2019) description of an activist museum due to its history and context, it sets an important precedent for museums which represent marginalised communities and host the ephemera and objects of queer activism. By looking broadly at the museums' recent internal discussions over queer feminist ideology versus a gay male-centric positioning, its activist history and the effects this has today, and more narrowly at the museum's curatorial strategies, permanent collection display and the importance of its archive, I have delineated how the SMU can be considered a queer utopic museum. By considering the SMU's curatorial processes through frameworks of queer failure, amateurism, impermanence, forgetting and lived experience, I have sought to redefine how to represent minoritarian subjects. The SMU becomes a queer utopic institution by focusing on the production of marginalised narratives despite financial or visitor gain. Under its current board, they take a Muñozian position by focusing on how changes in representation can help create a queer feminist, intersectional way forward for the museum. The SMU provides a very different example of a queer museum than the VAM (discussed in Chapter 5) due to both the context and founding of each museum. However, it does provide another institutional model for how queering can affect the entire museum, rather than just its exhibitions or programming as seen in my discussions of Tate Britain (Chapter 3) and the Walker Art Gallery (Chapter 4).

The SMU, due to its history and the current composition of its board, reflects the paradox of queer theory and the idea of 'queering' an institution. The inherent tension

between queer (anti-normative, activist, utopian) and institutions (professionalised, cemented histories and processes) is difficult to navigate. In order to be both 'an intimate community centre' beholden to a specific Berlin queer community and an 'internationally renowned institution' beholden to museum standards, there needs to be constant auto-institutional critique and a fostering of dialogue between diverse voices within the community. The SMU should not be taken as an 'ideal queer museum' but rather one which strives for the queer utopian ideal of welcoming all parts of a disparate community and representing them in unique and innovative ways. The SMU is a queer utopic museum *because* of its conflicts and failings, and its constant striving towards a better, queerer reality over its gay male past and contested present. It is an important and unique example within queer museology because its history and current functioning expand notions of how to do LGBTQ+ representation and what queer/ing museums means.

Notes

1 The others include The American LGBTQ+ Museum and the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art both based in New York, NY, the GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender) Historical Society in San Francisco, CA, and Queer Britain in London, UK.
2 The GLBT Historical Society is often cited for its longevity as well. However, though also founded in 1985, the society did not have a functioning museum space until 2011 (GLBT Historical Society, 2019). The Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art is also an important LGBTQ+ art institution. Its history began in 1969 when Charles Leslie and Fritz Lohman held their first exhibition of gay artists in their apartment. They later founded the Leslie-Lohman Gay Art Foundation in 1987 and became an accredited museum in 2016 (Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, 2019). In much more recent history, Queer Britain opened in 2022 (Jones, 2022). Finally, the American LGBTQ+ Museum is set to take over gallery space within a newly renovated New-York Historical Society in 2024 (McShane, 2021).
3 'e.V.' is an abbreviation for '*eingetragener Verein*', or registered association.
4 The *Deutscher Museumsbund* was founded in 1917 and claims to 'stand up for a diverse and sustainable museum landscape as well as for the interests of the museums and their employees' (*Deutscher Museumsbund*, 2019b).
5 Berlin is the third most visited European capital behind London and Paris (Visit Berlin, 2019).
6 For more on the current sentiments within the Berlin queer community contrast the edited volumes: *Beiß-reflexe: Kritik an Queerem Aktivismus, Autoritären Sehnsüchten, Sprechverboten* (Bite Reflexes: Criticism of Queer Activism, Authoritarian Yearnings, Forbidden Speech) (l'Amour laLove, 2017) and *The Queer Intersectional in Contemporary Germany: Essays on Racism, Capitalism and Sexual Politics* (Sweetapple, 2018).
7 For more on homophobia, the AfD and the political climate of contemporary Germany, see, for example, Staudenmaier (2017), Hutton (2018) and Solomon (2023).
8 Butler argues, 'The exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not "subjects", but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject' (1993, p. xiii). That is, the normative subject is created through the exclusion of others to 'an abjected outside', which she reminds us is also ' "inside" the subject as its own founding repudiation' (*ibid.*).

9 Here, I refer to Whitehead's characterisation of museum displays where he argues,

> …the museum display has been traditionally presented as asocial and inhuman: this is to bolster the authoritative selection, narration and evaluation inherent within it by diminishing the sense of curatorial artifice. The seamlessness of museum display and its ostensible authorlessness help to naturalise the theories it embodies.
>
> (2009, p. 42)

10 A list of all the SMU's past exhibitions can be found on the SMU's website (SMU, 2020a). The appendix points out those which show a non-cisgender, non-gay male perspective. This is not to argue that the SMU never included women before 2007, just to highlight the sharp increase in representation from Bosold's involvement. Additionally, some past exhibitions include women as subjects within the art or as part of a larger exhibition. The purpose of the appendix is to highlight those exhibitions which emphasise a feminine and/or trans- perspective as crucial to the themes of the exhibition.

11 The SMU is not the only museum to take radical steps to try to address issues of diversity. For example, the Baltimore Museum of Art controversially chose to deaccession highly valued works by white male artists in order to fund future acquisitions of work by women and POC artists (Halperin, 2018).

12 A full list of programming for *Year of the Women** can be found in Appendix B.

13 According to the Magnus Hirschfeld Foundation, '*queergida*' can be understood as a derogatory word which downplays the *Pegida* (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* [Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident]) movement, undermines LGBTTIQ emancipation and education work and victimises a version of the gay community which does not actually exist ('*"Queergida" ist eine schlimme Wortschöpfung: Sie verharmlost die sog. Pegidabewegung, diskreditiert LSBTTIQ-Emanzipations- und Bildungsarbeit und konstruiert eine schwule Opfergruppe, die es so überhaupt nicht gibt. Jörg Litwinschuh*') (Hirschfeld-Stiftung, 2019).

14 *Polittunte* is a German contraction of '*polit-*' and '*Tunte*' where *polit-* is a prefix for *politisch* (political) and *Tunte* is a pejorative word (depending on usage) which refers to effeminate gay men similar to the English 'fag' or 'fairy' (Collins Dictionary, 2019).

15 Götz (2015) found that a substantial majority of German museums (and particularly small institutions) relied on volunteer work of some kind.

16 *A Change of Scenery 2.03: Lotte Laserstein*, for example, ran from 06 December 2017 to 28 March 2018 (SMU, 2018b).

17 For more on disrupting traditional classifications of objects, see Nettleton's (2013) full article on re-thinking the categories of objects as ethnographic or artistic in colonial-era African art museums.

18 This is not true of every museum's collecting practices. For example, see *Collecting the Contemporary: A Handbook for Social History Museums* (Rhys and Baveystock, 2014) on the challenges of collecting contemporaneously to reflect, for instance, modern, urban communities and minority groups. Malone (2020), as well, discusses the challenges of contemporaneous collecting. She describes the collecting process of trying to capture the varied beliefs and activism which happened during the Irish abortion rights referendum in 2018.

7 The Queer Utopic Museum and Its Limits

Throughout this book I have posited the idea of the 'queer utopic museum'. I define this as a museum, art gallery or heritage site which seeks to increase its queer representation through fomenting a relationship with its local queer community, engage in repeated institutional critique, work to welcome queer bodies and narratives into its galleries and foster the possibility that certain queer objects can affectively inspire visitors. The term arises from my understanding of José Esteban Muñoz's (2009) ideas around queer utopias, and his belief that queer is not yet here, but a future utopia to be striven for. This idea can of course fluctuate given different exhibitions, programming, staff and directorial support. I don't mean to suggest that it is a permanent state to be gained, but rather a set of goals to be achieved over and over again. To paraphrase Muñoz, queerness is as ever out of reach, but remains to be pursued as we journey closer to the horizon.

The previous four chapters gave overviews of recent queering practice at Tate Britain, the Walker Art Gallery, the Van Abbemuseum (VAM) and the Schwules Museum (SMU). Despite the distinctive situations of each institution – ranging from national art galleries in metropolitan cities to smaller regional art galleries to community-run museums and/or community centres – I endeavoured to demonstrate the commonalities between them. These included a willingness to embrace local LGBTQ+ people and narratives, a desire to represent marginalised histories that may have been socially and institutionally ignored in the past and an understanding that there is not a straightforward way to accomplish these goals. Each institution also provides an example of the varying levels to which queer/ing can be experimented with. For example, Chapters 3 and 4 discussed two temporary exhibitions in which I argued *Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender and Identity* at the Walker Art Gallery was more radically queer than *Queer British Art* at Tate Britain, Chapter 5 looked at an art gallery dedicated to queering the whole institution whilst still maintaining a traditional hierarchy and local government funding and Chapter 6 looked at the complexities of queering an already LGBTQ+-focused institution. In order to better compare each museum (to the extent that such unique institutions can be) and understand how to describe the queer utopic museum, the following discussion looks at: the importance of visible community work in the museum, the need to think critically about intersectionality and

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institutional critique, the necessity of queer bodies and voices in the gallery space and the affective provocations of queer objects and their horizonal potential. I will synthesise ideas in contemporary museology and queer theory as used in my previous analyses to argue that together they enable a deeper analysis of museums which work to better represent LGBTQ+ people (among other marginalised communities).

Creating Tangible Change in the Museum: Queer Community Work

An emphasis on queer community work by museums – alongside other marginalised communities – is important because it creates connections between a largely ignored or lost past with a vibrant present. Three out of the four institutions analysed throughout the book broadened the idea of what it means for a museum to work with a local community. Though each institution is bound by its own context, history and approach to community, they all serve as examples which embrace the turn in museology towards community input and the prioritising of lived experience on par with traditional disciplinary curatorial expertise (Golding and Modest, 2013; O'Donnell, 2020). This is critical work for museums, because as Conlan argues, they can facilitate representation of or recognition by communities of traditionally marginalised people which is 'urgent and life-giving' (2010, p. 258). Thus, I will describe how despite the different ways in which the Walker (Chapter 4), VAM (Chapter 5) and SMU (Chapter 6) engage with their local communities, the commitment to this work is crucial in considering them queer utopic museums even if only for the duration of their community work. At the Walker this occurs for the length of *Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender & Identity* – though their ongoing work and experimentation with FORUM provides a dynamic example for future research. The VAM's *Werksalon* began as a four-year project and provides another engaging avenue for future research to see how it evolves and what lessons were taken from involving different community groups (but especially the *Queering the Collection* group) so explicitly and centrally within the museum. Finally, the SMU is a unique example in that it was founded by a specific gay male activist community and has evolved to include an ever-widening definition of what a queer community can be. However, like the Walker and VAM it is reactive to the needs of the specific Berlin-, Liverpool-, Eindhoven-based LGBTQ+ communities. Their differences prove that it is critical, as Binnie reminds, to remember the '…important geographic differences in gender and sexual politics in regional contexts away from the metropolis within a particular nation state' (2016, p. 1636). By focusing on these three institutions, I mean to emphasise that *Queer British Art* at Tate Britain did not show these same community-forward innovations. Despite Tate Britain's engagement with London's queer community with the now yearly *Queer and Now* festival described in Chapter 3 (Tate Britain, 2018), the queer community was not inseparably entwined with the very nature of the exhibition (as with FORUM in *Coming Out*'s case) or the museum itself (as with the *Werksalon* at the VAM). *Queer and Now* could indeed be described as helping create a queer utopia at Tate Britain for its duration; however, inside my narrower analysis of the

experience of *Queer British Art*, the festival's impact on the museum was not visible unless you were there the day it was happening.

Despite the growing importance of museum community work, it is not necessarily easy or straightforward. As noted in the introduction, queer theorists often acknowledge the difficulty in ascribing what a 'queer' or 'LGBTQ+' community actually means because it can be used differently by different groups or individuals (Duggan, 1992; Sullivan, 2003). Indeed, the notion of a queer community is contingent, changing and transient. Though it is important to acknowledge the contradictions inherent in such a term, this book provides variable examples by looking at extremely localised queer communities involved with the specific institutions described in each chapter. They are contingent on the geographic location of the museum and community group, the willingness of each community to be involved, the success of museum staff in interacting with community members and the ability of communities to be involved at the specific time of the museums' projects. Despite these difficulties, I aimed to demonstrate how important it is to work with local communities by addressing their specific needs as they arise and not projecting the museums' past practices as the best or only way for these communities to use a museums' facilities. It is therefore impossible to make broad claims about a 'queer community' or a 'queer museum community'. However, the examples within the preceding chapters highlight the success found in navigating a relationship with local queer communities that prioritises the lived expertise inherent in each and acknowledging the fluidity with which it evolves. As Scott (2018b) argues, there is a need to breakdown the hierarchy between museum experts and those with lived experience. As he articulates, it is not 'us' and 'them' because 'We are the experts'. Or, as Frisch (1990) understands, within this type of public history there should be a 'shared author-ity' through which professionals and the community are equally respected and whose methods both need to be critically self-examined.

Though it is not my aim to limit what a queer utopic museum can be, there were certain common characteristics across each institution which help identify one. For example, as evidenced earlier, I found that the Walker, VAM and SMU engaged in queer utopic work by focusing on local LGBTQ+ communities. The concentration on the local is important because each institution was responding to specific group needs. This local emphasis occurred in each institution despite the varying national, metropolitan and demographic contexts of each museum. However, because there were commonalities found across institutions from three countries, one can surmise that museums which engage with Anglophone museology and queer theory all emphasise community input. They each ascertained what the local, queer community was asking for and how the museum could contribute to that need. This is important because instead of asking museums to contend with broad or abstracted 'LGBTQ+ issues', they can instead focus on the particular needs of specific queer museum communities as determined through discussions with them. To do so, they must keep in mind how a queer utopia can be understood as a blueprint for a world unknown wherein the power structures which encourage the marginalisation and Othering of specific groups of people are undone. In a museum context this

translates to how its stories and narratives need to be utopically re-imagined thereby facilitating the inclusion and complex representation of these marginalised communities. This affects every level of a museum's function and not just the representation seen in permanent and/or temporary exhibitions. The queer utopic museum relates closely to the 'post-museum' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000) but is understood through a framework of queerness. As Hooper-Greenhill argues, the post-museum is one which (among many other activities) allows community groups to use the space as and when they wish. Additionally, the knowledge pursued and learned is not monolithic but rather reliant on a variety of perspectives where 'The voice of the museum is one among many' (ibid., p. 152). This helps enable the building of 'radical trust' so necessary in an engaged relationship between communities and the museum (Lynch and Alberti, 2010).

Building further upon the post-museum or the importance of polyvocality in the museum (Mason, 2005), a queer utopic museum is one which facilitates and highlights new queer knowledge as generated by its staff and participating communities. Community or constituency work can inspire ideas of queer utopian futurity when the queer constituency is funded and given material help to generate structural change as at the Walker and VAM. This is especially effective if multiple perspectives work together. Lynch (2013) turns to Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) (who spoke specifically about Māori oral histories) to remind that knowledges produced in different contexts by different cultures or subcultures can be in direct competition with each other. In a queer context and as seen, for example, in my discussion of the SMU in Chapter 6, this competition can be productive and affirming however contentious. Therefore, I argue that it is important for a museum to engage with varied knowledge structures to represent marginalised communities in a meaningful way. This approach allows museums scope for queer utopian experimentation that can build and inspire structural change. These changes can become blueprints for other institutions despite differing contexts and communities – as I hope my previous discussions illuminate a way forward for other museums, art galleries and heritage sites. It is a radical, queer act to initiate this structural change (especially in museums which are partially or wholly funded by their state or city) because many museums are traditionally understood as providing 'mainstream' or state-sponsored narratives. This switch to focusing on marginalised peoples and narratives is a commitment that requires a re-orientation of programming and sustained engagement as seen in the example of the VAM. That is, museums have the power to re-create the 'museum' in terms of what is beneficial and/or representative of marginalised communities - a queer utopic museum.

Intersectionality and the Importance of In-/Ex-ternal Institutional Critique

The previous focus on welcoming variegated knowledges into the museum serves as a reminder that these types of projects cannot work in silos, but rather should be thought about intersectionally so as to create substantial change and progress for multiple and converging marginalised groups. Intersectionality is a running if

not explicit theme throughout each chapter. Rooted in Black, feminist thought, intersectionality reconceptualises issues of identity and oppression and the way in which different aspects of identity interact to produce different effects on our social subject position (Crenshaw, 1989). Therefore, when thinking about LGBTQ+ communities, it is important to remember that these individuals and their relationship to the museum are also affected by issues of age, class, dis/ability, ethnicity, gender, race and other critical factors. These must all be used to inform institutional critique – a necessary process for the queer utopic museum. This is seen, for example, in the way the VAM correlates queering with decolonising and demodernising or the SMU sees queer through an intersectional feminist lens. It is critical to deconstruct past marginalisation or lack of representation within displays in order to re-make them and to look at the structures in place which made those narratives become reality. It is not simply a matter of replacing or amending cis-, white narratives with more 'inclusionary' ones but to transparently address the disparity and situate it in a wider social context.

As well, if a queer utopic museum is one that evolves as it implements new ideas generated during its reflections, then broader perspectives are crucial. This is reflective of the turn towards social justice in museums and museology (Sandell, 2007; Janes and Sandell, 2019) which argues that as society changes so too should museums. As Borja-Villel argues, 'All political action in an institution must take place from self-reflection and self-critique, for questioning the museum is not enough; there is a need to democratize it' (2018, p. 181). Institutional critique must come from both within and without the institution. As Lynch also maintains, 'A courageously reflective practice…based upon a radical transparency and trust, and practiced both inside and outside of the museum, may be an important beginning' (2013, p. 11). The example of the VAM reminds that while a queer utopic space centres local community groups (particularly their queer constituency), it does not neglect how queering aligns with decolonising, demodernising and cripping[1] museal narratives and institutional positions. It centres how institutional critique can force a future-oriented utopic stance that shows what the museum could be when it pursues such large-scale re-positioning. It embeds external critique within the heart of the museum space in order to 'engage power' and 'imagine change' (Ashcroft, 2009). These utopian elements are essential to any museum trying to fundamentally question their position and create institutional change.

Though I argue a queer utopic museum highlights a mutually productive interchange of ideas and criticisms between the community and institution, I would also warn that this process must be continually interrogated. It cannot be that the museum brings in a community to do critical work which descends into a symbol of diversity and is quickly forgotten as the work stops or does not reach all facets of the institution. That is, community work cannot make only surface-level changes which masquerade as diversity and inclusion while promulgating traditional museal structures and processes. This is often identified as tokenism – an accusation placed on institutions whose efforts towards diversity are seen as symbolic and lack any material, positive changes. This issue is, for example, what inspired the founding of the SMU to begin with when the Berlin Museum failed to

consider further LGTBQ+ representation after one temporary exhibition. Sullivan and Middleton provide another example in a discussion of artist interventions in museums, where they assert that '…the museum reaps the benefits of being positioned as progressive, supportive of diversity and inclusion, and so on, without taking responsibility for or fully committing to the content or the present and future effects of the intervention' (2019, p. 57). This issue is not always recognised internally. Macdonald (2002) describes an instance at the Science Museum in London where she found that while staff thought their attempts to include women's and minority perspectives in new exhibits were revolutionary, outsiders did not observe any real challenge to the status quo. As Lynch (2013) warns, there is a need for senior staff to support internal debates and also give time for reflection in order to properly engage with the ideas and debates that come out of encouraging community participation in an institution.

If a museum is dedicated to shifting from the 'mainstream' to 'queer', it must debate for itself what this means and how it will change their procedures and audiences. As Grinell summarises (citing Ramadan, 2009), 'Dialogue is not merely about seeing the others and letting their voices be heard, dialogue should instead be a means to help us see our own shortcomings and the need for reforms to be undertaken about oneself' (2011, p. 237). Critique begins with past practice but must evolve with queering as it ebbs and flows in a constant state of self-reflection. It must question, how does the museum's subject position change with time as these projects go on? Is it still mutually beneficial work for the museum and the communities it engages? An important aspect of the queer utopic museum is the symbiosis between the museum and that participating queer community. This is highlighted, for example, in my discussion of the VAM with Lundin's (2018a) insistence on reciprocity. If utopias are tools of critique, then an ongoing project must reflect and reiterate its goals and position. As Jameson reminds,

> …Utopian form is itself a representational meditation on radical difference, radical otherness, and on the systemic nature of the social totality, to the point where one cannot imagine any fundamental change in our social existence which has not first thrown off Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet.
>
> (2005, p. xii)

The museum must continually go back and reflect on the 'utopian visions' or institutional critiques which motivated them to begin with.

Despite my arguments that auto-institutional critique is a necessary component of the queer utopic museum, it remains paradoxical because institutions often represent normative structures to certain communities which have been marginalised and oppressed by other sectors of society. However, doing queer activist work at an institution represents a new ideal for the way in which a queer utopic museum might operate. For example, the SMU pushes against hetero- and homo-normative, patriarchal narratives present in German society and museums in order to focus on those who have been ignored in the past. It is a queer utopic institution which prioritises content and politics over finance and even visitor interest.

Despite the commitment and passion shown by its organisation, it does remain that there needs to be some form of relatively stable support for this to function. In the case of the SMU, which receives funding from the city of Berlin, they are still able to remain autonomous and stay true to their founding ethos and political intentions. Accepting state funding – and thus increasing stability and the professional capacities of the museum – exemplifies this paradox wherein queer, utopian activism cannot be sustained without continued labour and funding (in this case, from both the queer community and the city government). Part of thinking about this needs to include and celebrate queer failure (Halberstam, 2011). That is, even if the museum evolves away from its original intentions (or *fails* to sustain them), it leaves scope for change and for new things to arise in its place. Muñoz (2009) argues that utopias are not prescriptive, but rather offer a horizon of potential. This plays into the idea of auto-institutional critique because failure is inherent within it. A queer utopic museum is one which embraces failure and deconstruction as primary to what it does. This is not to argue that it focuses on the failure or destruction of past structures but rather what will come after. That is, to look at the museum as a Muñozian project which must be dismantled with an eye towards the queer possibilities on the horizon.

A final consideration of museal institutional critique must consider museums' governing structures. A museum's governance directly impacts the ideological positioning of the museum and the programming it pursues. Where the institutions discussed in Chapters 3–5 have typical, hierarchical structures, Chapter 6 considers an institution in which the local LGBTQ+ community plays more directly into its function and future. Tate Britain, the Walker and the VAM have long histories and are supported by municipal or national governments, whereas the SMU has a much more recent history of being a strictly volunteer, donation-based space which houses archives and exhibitions. The SMU insists upon auto-institutional critique at the highest level of governance. The board works collaboratively with the local Berlin LGBTQ+ community and this means that queer political issues are at the heart of the institution instead of being invited in on the ground level as at the VAM or the Walker. That is to say, where most institutions want to start involving the LGBTQ+ community more actively, it *guides* the SMU – even with all the inherent tensions and debates that characterise it. As argued earlier, the SMU must think intersectionally about in- and ex-clusion – particularly because it was founded as a gay male institution. Just because the Berlin queer community is embedded within the institution does not create an assimilation of opinion across all facets of that community. It is utopian to be open to as many voices as possible but merging together many ideas given limited time and resources still creates conflict. The SMU's structure does more in addressing this issue than most other museums however, because it is led by a board occupied by queer feminist activists and not by people who have been entrenched in the art and/or museum world. Its board of directors serves two-year terms (though a member can serve more than one term) and this turnover in leadership affects the ideological positions of the museum. In its most recent iterations, its decisions and programming have been controlled by a collective of activists and serve to make it a queer utopic museum

at least while the board's composition remains thus. It provides one of very few examples of an explicitly queer-, community- and politically-driven museum and also a queer utopic one.

Valuing Lived Experience and the Presence of Queer Bodies in the Museum

When pursuing a queer course, it is important for museums to consider a central paradox within queer theory – that is to problematise the notion that a queer subject is both Othered and deserving of recognition while retaining the essential characteristics which marked them Other to begin with. As Warner argues more colloquially, queer signifies that 'We're not pathological, but don't think for that reason that we want to be normal' (1999, p. 59). In order to engage with this and discourses of diversity and inclusion, organisations must use an intersectional approach to focus on perspectives given from those with lived experience. As Gosselin argues, 'Practising diversity means taking into account many strands of identity in the way we hire staff and engage with the public but also in the way we collect, classify collections, research, provide access and share stories' (2019, p. 206). It is important to consider what this means in relation to both object display and the presence of contemporary LGBTQ+ voices and bodies in the gallery. The following arguments utilise the notion of radical trust (Lynch and Alberti, 2010; Lynch, 2013) to articulate why particular examples from the discussed museums were effective at increasing LGBTQ+ inclusion in their institutions and thus becoming examples of queer utopic museums. These include having directorial support and a shared institutional understanding of queer/ing, providing dedicated space and funds to LGBTQ+ communities who use the museum, highlighting contemporary LGBTQ+ voices in gallery and thinking theoretically about queer gestures and bodies in the museum.

In order for radical trust to occur in the museum it requires the institution and its staff to 'dissolve' the 'traditional centre/periphery relationship' it has with outside groups (Lynch, 2013, p. 10). This is queer in its desire to deconstruct a binary; however, it becomes less queer in its requirement of support from top-down hierarchies which structure museums. Despite adopting rhetorical postures which support diversity and inclusion efforts, it is the museum's director or board who still holds all the power over whether or how queer a museum can become and what funding can go toward such an effort. For example, the VAM's director is enthusiastically supportive of decolonising, demodernising and queering and works to implement concrete projects with real implications for practice. However, if his position were to change or these projects were taken to an institution with a less influential director or a more conservative board, they could not happen in the same way or to the same extent. It is antithetical to a queer project to first receive permission from the leader of those structures. As Foucault understands,

> …if repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age, it stands to reason that we will not

> be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost: nothing less than a transgression of laws…and a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power will be required.
>
> (1998, p. 5)

Halberstam (2011) later argues, a queer, utopian thinking offers alternatives to hegemonic structures, not ways of navigating them. The SMU, then, provides a counterexample to normative museum structures. It is run by a board of queer activists whose lived experience greatly impacts the decision-making of the museum. They operate via communal decision-making with no responsibility to a higher board or worries about funding (at least given current funding strategies). This lies in stark contrast to most Western museums.

In addition to directorial support, the use of queer/ing needs to be understood institutionally and acknowledged beyond identity-based definitions. As Katz and Söll argue, 'The question here, in short, isn't about literal presence; it's about discursive presence, about how often, or not often, queerness is named, defined, or referenced' (2018, p. 2). The theoretical understanding of queer affects the kind of structural change and knowledge exchange that can occur within the institution. It is important to educate staff and discuss these issues both with them and the local community. As seen in my discussions of Tate Britain and the Walker, due to a different understanding or use of queerness, *Queer British Art 1861–1967* and *Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender & Identity* were organised in radically different ways. This is particularly apparent in the Tate example because the institutional understanding as a sweeping identity term is conflated with a narrative that follows primarily upper-class, white, able-bodied, male artists and subjects. Therefore, although it was not the intention of Tate to create either a canon of queer British art nor to definitively define what queer should mean, as described in the exhibition's catalogue (Barlow, 2017a), it did not do enough in the exhibition to make sure that other positionalities and definitions come through to be engaged with by the visitor. Widespread institutional knowledge of the potentiality and variability of queerness and its indebtedness to the lived experiences of queer people is essential and must help inform practice. Queering is not a static process, but one that must be reiterated and reconsidered with each new project.

In conjunction with a shared understanding of queer/ing, it is important for museums to fully embrace their histories, subject positions and biases in order to actively engage with marginalised communities in a way that promotes radical trust. As Lynch and Alberti (2010) argue, radical trust is necessary if museums are to take a democratising, participatory turn. There needs to be trust from the local community that the museum can handle their narratives as fully and sensitively as they have served a dominating patriarchal, heteronormative one in the past. This is crucial because, as Conlan (2010) asserts, museums are sites of 'urgent' and 'life giving' recognition and representation. By allowing other voices into the museum, museal authority is not lost but rather expanded. Instead of further marginalising groups one is hesitant to trust, they can be brought in to help broaden the museum's appeal and abilities. As Dilenschneider (2017) argues,

visitors appreciate when institutions tackle politically contentious subjects in a complex and transparent way. In addition to the oft practiced use of consulting in co-curation, it is important that marginalised voices and bodies are present in the gallery space as well. This is necessary because museum work is often not transparent enough, and consulting work is largely unacknowledged in gallery spaces (Robert, 2014). Both the Walker and the VAM provide examples of how prominent physical presence promotes the visibility of LGBTQ+ perspectives in the museum. Each institution had designated galleries obviously demarcated as community spaces – though this lasted at the VAM for a considerably longer period of time. In additional to space, these groups were given funds to host events as prescribed by them and not dictated by the museum. These practical steps work fundamentally differently than consultation and demonstrate radical trust from both the institution and community. This also connects to the value found when the expertise of lived experience is prioritised and trusted. It gives authority back to a community whose history has been marginalised. When the collaboration extends beyond developmental phases to the exhibition or project itself, it allows the voices of the contemporary community, the institution, the curatorial narrative and the objects to co-mingle and incite dialogue that would otherwise be hard to conjure during initial phases of exhibition making.

These examples highlight the necessary materiality of the presence of queer bodies and/or actions in the gallery space. It is critical to utilise Muñoz's (2009) understandings of queer performance and ephemera to understand community work in museums and the knowledge produced within these types of relationships. If we understand the interaction between the community and the museum as a Muñozian performance, each gesture becomes a piece of queer ephemera to be traced. The materiality of these gestures can be found in the tangible changes they have on a museums' practices and structure. That is, though many examples in this book discuss the queer imaginaries or futures that are encouraged through affective responses (and/or anticipatory illuminations) to queer objects as discussed later, it is critical to consider how these gestures fundamentally change the museum space. Queering projects re-map the geography of the museum with the inclusion and prioritisation of queer bodies, ideas and gestures. As Muñoz argues,

> We can understand queerness itself as being filled with the intention to be lost. Queerness is illegible and therefore lost in relation to the straight minds' mapping of space. Queerness is lost in space or lost in relation to the space of heteronormativity.
>
> (2009, p. 72)

As the museum strays from dominant heteronormative narratives and reiterations of traditional power relations between visitor and institution, community and curator, it comes closer to the illegibility of queerness as obscured by a past beset by violence and erasure. In the case of the Walker and VAM, the creation of temporary spaces within the gallery begin a literal re-mapping and re-orienting towards

queerness. Again, the SMU provides a unique example because it is so saturated with queer gestures and its own history that it becomes embodied in the space itself.

In addition to making LGBTQ+ bodies visible and active in the museum space, this same principle can be deployed in exhibitions (and especially historical or social history exhibitions) by including contemporary LGBTQ+ voices via wall text or audio. This tactic helps draw connections between living queer communities and a history that has been traditionally ignored or excluded. This again highlights the importance of lived experience in queering projects. It subverts the idea that museums are able to tell objective histories, and rather equates the lives of marginalised people with those of experts. When employed, connections are made between historical narratives and the contemporary world which brings new life into the interpretation of historical collections. The inclusion of contemporary LGBTQ+ voices in gallery was discussed earlier at the Walker and the VAM, but it also occurred at Tate with the limited addition of small object labels and at the SMU due to the nature of their institutional structure and history. Despite the effectiveness of these strategies, they cannot be applied uncritically. As Sullivan and Middleton (2019) question, whose voice has a right to come through in an exhibition, and why is the curatorial voice often the only accepted form of authority or expertise in the museum space? Additionally, they are wary that the benefits of communities giving emotional labour are outweighed by the costs whereby the power and privilege of the museum is reified in the wake of their work. That is, that a museum will be able to claim a decolonised, queered or cripped space, but the marginalised community does not reap the same benefits. As Lundin (2018a) reminds, these relationships must be mutually constitutive and beneficial.

Finally, though it is important to consider the queer utopic museum as one which values including queer bodies, voices and gestures in the museum space, one must also consider how objects might connect us to historical queer bodies. By queering collection choices and thinking through a Muñozian lens of residue[2] – that is, how we might understand queer events to leave behind tangible evidence that can be reactivated through archiving and display – one can re-think how an object encounter might reactivate queer desire. Museums generally display the best or most exemplary objects from their collections, leaving many thousands of objects in storage (depending, of course, on the size of the collection and the capacity for display)[3] (The British Museum, n.d.). Sullivan and Middleton (2019) question this practice during their discussion of *The Gay Museum* at the Western Australian Museum in 2003 which exhibited collection objects usually considered 'insignificant' or 'improper'. This notion subverts normal display practices and equalises the importance of all collection objects while opening up interpretive options. It also highlights the subjectivity inherent in a museum and/or curator's choices in the telling of history and the choosing of objects.

This interplay between residue and ephemera is especially pertinent at the SMU because its archive is filled with objects of marginalised events and lives. In this case, the prioritisation of some objects over others would delve into the dangerous task of comparing levels of marginalisation and importance. Because the SMU deals with lost or suppressed narratives, it must think about its collections

differently and initiate a new queer paradigm for display. Its *Tapetenwechsel* method (a German word meaning a change of scenery) – in which the traditional permanent collection display is upended and objects are displayed for a briefer period and often interchanged so as not to cement one reading of history – creates a lack of hierarchy between objects and therefore moments in or readings of history by highlighting the importance of queer ephemera. This is particularly important for queer histories because it can bring viewers into contact with historical queer bodies. For example, a bench in the SMU galleries is both a functional and an ephemeral artefact because it was created from a toilet door upon which queer-themed graffiti is written and allusions to cruising are evident. The SMU brings the visitor into contact with disposable objects meant to be forgotten and torn down but instead are saturated with residue which illuminates a queer past filled with protest and desire. These objects become, in Muñoz's (2009) words, ephemera, or the traces of queer performances. These philosophical claims to residue and ephemera work to help one understand an exhibition as a more complex, affective experience that counteracts state-mandated forgetting. Queer historical events, large and small, are reactivated through display. They create bodily and social connections to queer lives – intimate connections remembered despite the fact that they were often made to be forgotten. The intent of their use is extended past the initial thought of creation and works to engage visitors in a more visceral way.

Re-framing Queer Objects as Utopic Horizons

Despite recent calls (echoed in this book) to increase the amount of community work done in museums, it is equally important to return to the use of objects in telling marginalised histories. The museums here discussed represent institutions whose directors and boards are willing to allow curators to engage in and experiment with the telling of LGBTQ+ narratives. Given this context, paring down the focus from wider institutions or exhibitions is essential because specific objects are polysemic (Mason, 2006), have the ability to exceed the overarching narrative in which they are placed (Mason, 2013) and remain the base unit around which most museums emanate. Curatorial choices of specific objects (particularly ones relating to widely familiar stories or histories and/or those connected intimately to queer bodies, for example the auto-archival, non-art object *Box of Buttons* exhibited in *Queer British Art* which symbolises the various trysts of one long enduring couple as discussed in Chapter 3) can help create queer utopic, affective environments in the gallery space. That is, certain objects framed by queer curatorial choices can be understood, I argue, through an affective lens that furthers Muñoz's (2009) ideas of a future queer utopia. He asserts that one can gain glimpses of a future queer utopia through encounters with queer aesthetics or art. He explains,

> To call for this notion of the future in the present is to summon a refunctioned notion of utopia in the service of subaltern politics. Certain performances of queer citizenship contain what I call an anticipatory illumination of a queer

> world, a sign of an actually existing queer reality, a kernel of political possibility within a stultifying heterosexual present.
>
> (ibid., p. 49)

Given this understanding, I argue that queer display tactics can encourage the reading of exhibitions and objects in this way. If one combines museological arguments about affective experiences within museums (Golding, 2013; Witcomb, 2013; Smith and Campbell, 2015) and the idea that museums can be transformative, ritual spaces capable of renewing identity and order (Duncan, 1995) with queer frameworks and/or objects, then one can argue that curatorial choices can encourage visitors to question their own subject position and think utopically with a queerer worldview. Put simply, the inclusion of specific objects displayed in queer contexts can try to challenge visitors' positionality.

As seen in affective museological studies, not all visitors come to an exhibition with the same knowledge or ability to have the same reaction. As Smith and Campbell (2015) argue, there are 'registers of engagement', or varying levels to which an exhibition might affect a visitor. Over the course of thousands of interviews with museum visitors, they concluded,

> …visitors have expressed a range of emotions from rage to happiness and delight, from fear to confidence and affirmation, from mild and banal nationalism to deep patriotism, from sadness for others to deep and tearful empathy, from a commonplace sense of having a nice day out to cognitive and **emotional epiphanies**. Each affective response occurs through a complex interaction of place or exhibition, personal agency, and social and cultural context.
>
> (ibid., p. 445, bold mine)

Such a range of reactions to museum exhibitions highlights the difficulty in creating exhibitions which have the intended curatorial outcome, whether educative or experiential. It is helpful to return to Rounds who argues, 'Visitors come to museums for their own reasons, and those reasons are not necessarily congruent with the goals of the museum' (2006, p. 134). He argues that instead of faulting the visitor for experiencing the exhibition 'wrongly', their 'browsing' (Serrell, 1998) or curiosity-driven experience (Rounds, 2004) should be seen as part of 'how the visitor uses the museum in his or her lifelong work of identity construction, maintenance, and change' (2006, p. 135). This correlates with the idea that queering is often dependent on individual subjective experiences and understanding. Lynch (2013) as well argues that museums frequently underestimate a visitor's ability to respond to, debate with or be challenged by the museum. In the case of *Queer British Art*, visitors' emotional reactions were recorded clearly by its curator (Barlow, 2017a) – particularly, for example, her observations of deep affective responses to the sight of Oscar Wilde's cell door next to an earlier portrait. Though Barlow does not couch her observations in the theoretical framings of this discussion, the example provides a way to think critically about what it means to encounter queer

objects in a gallery space. *Queer British Art* evidences how objects traditionally classified as social history (like *Box of Buttons* or the cell door as discussed in Chapter 3) can be interpreted differently when framed by the exhibition as art objects. This rejection of tradition and typical categorical thinking creates a necessary rupture with linear narratives and instead places the object in an atemporal, utopian position. It is an anti-taxonomical queer act.

Thinking about the curatorial choices of *Queer British Art* through a queer, utopian, Muñozian framework shows how the juxtaposition of objects and anti-taxonomical acts might encourage critical thinking about hidden or marginalised histories. As Katz and Söll argue, 'Queer exhibitions and queer curating interrogate the passive position of the viewer and demand active engagement, honest investment, and frank questioning, while also leaving room for unanswered questions, gaps, and fissures' (2018, p. 2). The anti-taxonomising or declassifying of an object within a display can disrupt preconceived notions about the history and narrative being told. Despite the fact that Chapter 3 argues *Queer British Art* is not as radically queer as other exhibitions or institutions in this book, it provides examples of ways to exhibit objects which queerly subvert usual understandings of them. In this case, Oscar Wilde's cell door was chosen for inclusion in an art historical exhibition. It is displayed next to an early, sombre portrait of Wilde by Robert Goodloe Harper Pennington and accompanied by a letter displayed nearby in a glass case in which the father of his lover names him a sodomite. It is also adjacent to a wall exhibiting contemporary phallic drawings by Aubrey Beardsley. This display places it in the context of relevant objects very different to those found at the collection which houses it, the National Justice Museum in Nottingham. It pushes a different lens onto Wilde through objects which emphasise embodied knowledge over intellectual. That is, though one might understand how and why Wilde was sent to jail (as with the legal and criminal framework attached to it given its place in the National Justice Museum), confronting the barrier which held him in and the written insult of the man who condemned him fosters an intense emotional environment for the viewer. Barlow (2017b) recounts the way this gallery drove some visitors to tears or later recounted their emotion in the notecards provided at the end of the exhibit. It is an important example of how queer frameworks, curatorial choices and affective museology might merge to create an anticipatory illumination of queer utopia (or a world where, perhaps, Wilde did not meet such a fate).

In addition to framing such curatorial choices affectively, material queer objects can also act archivally. They become testaments to past queer desire (as with the example given in Chapter 3 of *Box of Buttons* in *Queer British Art*). Here again, the type of object, the way it is categorised and how it is displayed is important. In this case, a non-explicit, non-art object relating to explicit queer acts is juxtaposed with the explicit, emotional artwork of Francis Bacon and Keith Vaughan in the following gallery. This comparison functions by conflating mundane or everyday life with queer desire. It provides a framework for visitors who might not tend to think of queer life in terms of the everyday and instead only of 'deviance' or explicit sexual desire. Objects like *Box of Buttons* provide tangible evidence of queer life divorced from the imagery of queer desire. Cvetkovich describes items

like this (in her case, the unusual items often collected by LGBTQ+ archives like the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco) as invested with personal emotional meaning and resistant to '…documentation because sex and feelings are too personal or ephemeral to leave records' (2003, p. 242). She emphasises how the affective characteristics of lesbian and gay life (for her, filtered through the lens of trauma) are usually lost in the traditional historical record. *Box of Buttons* contrasts with the example of Oscar Wilde's cell door because instead of an intellectual knowledge becoming embodied, it is rather a queer encoded knowledge reclaimed from a private collection concerning a then illegal relationship which becomes embodied in the viewer. This understanding will always be contextualised by the way one is taught and understands historical queerness. As Tyburczy argues,

> Museums perform sexual heritage queerly whenever they reorient the emotional habitus between visitors and queer objects. That is, when museums interrupt, create a performative rift, or transform the habitual ways in which bodies relate to these objects, they forge new relationships, queer relationships, and thus a queer kind of sexual heritage that exists nowhere else.
>
> (2016, p. 123)

Though Tyburczy's work is speaking specifically about sex museums, both she and I try to articulate the importance of understanding how affective queer objects framed by specific curatorial choices might re-situate a viewer's understanding of queer narratives. However, these theoretical understandings demonstrate a clear need to do further visitor research to more thoroughly understand how encounters with queer-coded objects affect a visitor's understanding of queer narratives and their own subject position.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have sought to define the queer utopic museum (without limiting its potential) by exploring four institutions which, I argue, embody queer utopic work in one way or another. I combine the theoretical positioning of Muñoz's (2009) work on queer utopias with museological understandings of community practice and affect. I argue that community work in museums must involve localised marginalised communities on their own terms; that this work must include institutional critique coming from both staff and community members; that these critiques lead to practical and structural changes within the museum and are not only symbolic gestures of diversity; and finally, that it must affect a museum's governing board and structure. I discuss the importance of radical trust in accepting the expertise of lived experience and the need to make queer bodies and desires visible in gallery spaces. This requires a shared understanding of queerness among staff, directorial support for changes in structure and process given this understanding and the provision of dedicated space and funding for marginalised groups in order to increase visibility and make material change. Further, the institution must acknowledge the importance of including contemporary LGBTQ+

voices in exhibitions and recognise how queer gestures and the residue of queer life might give access to historical queer bodies. I end the chapter by looking at how curatorial choices of specific objects and their display might encourage anticipatory illuminations and affective readings of queer stories. Each section provides a different way to consider the queer utopic museum and asserts that there is no one way to define it or improve it. In the context of queer museology (Tyburczy, 2016; Sandell, 2017; Sullivan and Middleton, 2019; Adair and Levin, 2020), the queer utopic museum echoes calls to be critical of diversity and inclusion discourses to instead utilise Muñoz's optimistic and future-oriented characterisation of queerness in order to re-think what it means to queer the museum. I characterise the queer utopic museum by looking at the broader level of intersectional and reciprocal community-museum relationships, to the necessary presence of queer bodies within galleries and, finally, at the micro-level of specific queer objects. Each of these themes bears out in each institutional example and highlights how understandings of queerness can and should affect all aspects of museum work from governance to programming and exhibitions, to collections and beyond. This chapter summarises some crucial ways in which to understand the queer/ed museum.

Notes

1 Though not discussed explicitly in this book, cripping is an important element concerning the representation of marginalised communities in museums. Cachia (2013) and Brophy and Hladki (2014) discuss 'cripping' or 'disabling' the museum. Cachia argues that it is necessary to '…challenge the museum to think about how access can move beyond a mere practical conundrum, often added in as an after-thought once an exhibition has been installed, to how it might be used as a dynamic, critical and creative tool in art-making and curating' (2013, p. 4). Similarly, Brophy and Hladki argue, '…that cripistemologies fundamentally depend on practices of disturbance and unsettlement: cripping in our argument, entails scraping - the troubling, the uncovering, the rupturing - of embedded knowledges that otherwise tend to sediment into uninterrogated ableist and diversity discourses' (2014, p. 215–216). More recently, Boys and Partington (2022) affirm the need to have more and diverse disabled people involved in the development of museum projects. Additionally, understandings of the intersections of crip and queer theory are discussed by McRuer (2006) who argues that able-bodiedness is analogous to heterosexuality as the presumed normative position. It should be noted that the VAM pursues various programming committed to cripping or dis/ability issues in museums that fell outside the scope of this book.
2 I am here building off my discussion in Chapter 6 about the way in which we might consider the SMU's archive and the ephemera it contains as a site of residue. Citing Schneider (2001), Muñoz (2009), Halberstam (2011) and Tyburczy (2016), it is a way to connect the reality of past queer lives, performances and events to the few material objects left behind, and how they might be reinvigorated through their collection and display.
3 Sometimes museums will address this dichotomy of displayed versus stored objects by creating a 'visible storage' display. Objects are usually displayed much more densely and without the usual interpretation. For example, at the Brooklyn Museum in New York

City, NY, they have the Visible Storage Study Center which gives access to 2,000 objects as opposed to the 350 objects from the same department which are displayed in the galleries (Brooklyn Museum, 2023). The Victoria and Albert Museum has taken the notion to the extreme by building an enormous open-access storage building in East London at the former 2012 Olympic site projected to open in 2025 (Bailey, 2023). It will house over 250,000 objects and provide display space for 5 of the V&A's largest objects which are difficult to display at the main museum in South Kensington.

8 Conclusion

What does it mean to queer the museum? What does this look like in practice? Throughout this book I have sought to describe recent queer museum practice and to establish a theoretical framework by which to understand it. Far from rigid prescriptions or staid processes, I hope the 'queer utopic museum' provides a flexible foundation by which to understand and further experiment with queerness in museums. Given the elastic nature of queerness as an identity, political stance and theoretical position, it is critical to understand that there is no one answer to these questions or one best practice to institute. Rather, queering is a state of mind that enables an institution and those who work in it to be self-critical of both the internal and external processes which characterise museum work. That is, beyond including LGBTQ+ narratives into museum displays, it is essential to engage with local LGBTQ+ communities and other marginalised people in a mutually beneficial way, to be experimental and even radical when planning new exhibitions and programming and in rethinking naturalised museum processes and structures.

The aim of this book is to understand museums' engagement with queering and their representations of queer communities in order to better understand how queer theory is understood and used museologically. To do this, the research highlights four case studies posed at Tate Britain (Chapter 3),the Walker Art Gallery (Chapter 4), the VAM (Chapter 5) and the SMU (Chapter 6). Each institution engaged with the idea of queerness – either through exhibitions, collecting projects, institutional projects or institutional identity – and illuminates where current queer museological practice stands in a Western European context. This survey of praxis from a diverse group of institutions allows comparative analysis and sheds light on the evolution of queer practice since Levin's (2010) edited book, *Gender, Sexuality and Museums*, which was the first volume to detail issues of queer representation in museums (as discussed in Chapter 2).

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this project, it was important to contextualise the ways in which queer theory and museology relate to LGBTQ+ representation. The focus on queer theory proved especially important because, as seen throughout the book but most succinctly in Chapters 1 and 2, most museologists working on LGBTQ+ representation in museums (or queer museology) do not engage with the more abstract, theoretical concepts found in queer theory beyond

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acknowledging the ways in which it helps open up ways for thinking about gender and sexuality, and sometimes binary thinking more generally (Adair and Levin, 2020; Sullivan and Middleton, 2019; Sandell, 2017). This book (and some institutions therein) instead relies on the elasticity of queerness, and the possibilities it brings to thinking about the museum beyond non-normative sexualities and gender identities. It focused on concepts found in queer theory (for example, queer futurity, utopia, failure and amateurism) in order to critically engage with frameworks for understanding the museum and its potential. It asserts that a queer museum is one which not only works to include LGBTQ+ histories and narratives, but actively engages in internal and external critiques in order to confront its past practices and re-think its processes (whether in collections, acquisitions, community engagement, staff structures, display, etc.). A queer museum should not only seek to expand those it represents, but to critically examine and practically address how those communities were neglected to begin with.

More concretely, it was critical to understand the context of each case study institution and the way this affects its understanding of queer/ing. In surveying current European queer museological practice, it is apparent that although LGBTQ+ representation is increasing in museums of all remits, the actors pushing for such change and the way that queerness was understood varied from institution to institution. The 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of male homosexuality in England and Wales in 2017 left an indelible impact on the representation of LGBTQ+ people in English museums. The exhibitions there were framed around the legal advancements of male homosexuals over the past century and a half, and this historical and rights-based framework infused some English institutions and practitioners' understandings of queerness with an identity focused bent that often superseded other definitions of queer. The Dutch and German examples, on the other hand, were not tied to anniversary events, but rather changes in institutional ideology that put greater focus on self-reflection of institutional history and the way past processes or issues might be redressed through a queer framework. Changes at the VAM and the SMU were both led not by the curators of specific exhibitions but rather the director's and/or the board of directors' desire to engage with and better represent local queer communities. Chapters 3–6 therefore flesh out contemporary examples of queer museum events and/or practices in different national and regional contexts in order to demonstrate the breadth of queer museological praxis and to compare how understandings and uses of queerness deeply affect the way programming is pursued and/or realised.

Finally, it was critical to use queer theoretical concepts (particularly from Muñoz, 2009, and Halberstam, 2011) in order to critique museal practice and widen understandings of a queer museum. Building upon the analysis done of each case study, the idea of the queer utopic museum is consolidated in Chapter 7 in order to re-think the queer museum away from inclusivity discourses and towards notions of queer futurity and utopia. I define the queer utopic museum as one which combines queer theoretical understandings of queerness with constant critique (stemming from both the institution and externally) in order to make sure that tangible, positive change occurs internally within the museum through adapting its processes.

These changes must sit alongside enduring and embedded queer community work. The community work discussed in this book often included the prioritisation of queer lived experience and for the presence of queer bodies to be present in-gallery. This process occurred differently at every institution and highlights the way institutions are affected by the social, political and geographic context in which they sit. However, the basic premise remains the same – the examples provided by the Walker Art Gallery, the VAM and the SMU show that community engagement that was mutually beneficial was the bedrock upon which queer change happened.

Expanding Queer Museological Knowledge

This book differs from current scholarship in queer museology (see Chapter 2) and offers a comparison of unique examples of queer exhibitions and queer institutional work that help characterise and challenge what it means to queer the museum. It addresses different methods of queer community engagement. The book posits a fundamentally different way to think about inclusion that can positively affect institutional ideology to create mutually beneficial relationships between museums and communities. That is, by changing usual methods of community involvement which often only occurs during the development stage of projects (as seen, for example, with co-curation), the research instead promotes inviting communities into exhibition galleries or specific community work galleries. This increases the visibility of LGBTQ+ communities and materially and fiscally supports the way in which community members want to interact with the museum.

I build upon and in some cases challenge arguments made by Hein (2007), Sandell (2017) and Sullivan and Middleton (2019). Each author seeks to redress the ways in which some Western museums have excluded narratives of marginalised peoples, where Hein (2007) specifically focuses on women and Sandell (2017) and Sullivan and Middleton (2019) emphasise LGBTQ+ communities. This book works towards a similar goal by focusing on LGBTQ+ communities, but places greater emphasis on how queer theoretical ideas can help to challenge and characterise understandings of the queer museum. It contrasts with Hein's article which seeks to '…undergird the museum of the future' through the use of feminist theory (2007, p. 31). She advocates a feminist positioning to re-think the museum and promotes the telling of women's experiences. Though there is ample evidence that museums often promote a white cisgender male-oriented perspective (especially in art galleries) (Hein, 2007; Reilly, 2018), a feminist perspective is sometimes limiting when compared with the wider perspectives of queerness. Hein (2007) focuses on 'woman' as a category without defining it. She does not make explicit statements about gender and essentialism, but equally neglects through omission trans- and non-binary perspectives. Alternatively and as seen throughout this book, the importance of thinking intersectionally and addressing the concerns of communities which have been further marginalised within the LGBTQ+ community itself (for example, trans- and BIPOC) is of critical importance. This is reflected, for example, in McDonald's creation of FORUM to address the lack of

trans- perspectives in the collection, the VAM's specific trans-/intersex residencies and more generally in the queer feminist turn at the SMU which works to broaden the institution away from its white, gay male past.

In contrast to Hein (ibid.), Sandell (2017) frames his work within human rights discourses and morality. He argues that it is important to look beyond anonymous institutional façades to consider how human rights issues work in policy, programming and exhibitions locally and tangibly. This book builds upon and furthers his assertions that museums are not neutral and have moral agency (without having to give all moral positions equal weight) to tell previously marginalised histories by employing a queer theoretical lens. This book does not question the existence or necessity of LGBTQ+ rights and takes for granted that they are moral foundations that should and can be integrated into any museum display. Instead, it queers LGBTQ+ representation and/or community involvement already pursued in museums by analysing ideas of inclusion, representation and critical reflection (both by visitors and the institution itself). This is seen in both the VAM's commitment to accepting and integrating critique and at the SMU through its democratic structure of governance and free discussion of ideological positions which affect the museum's programming decisions.

This book is grounded in queer theory because it finds its commitment to flexibility and non-normative, anti-assimilationist positioning invaluable to thinking about LGBTQ+ representation in museums. Queer theory functions similarly to Hein's (2007) feminist framework, which for her allows for an open-endedness and pluralism with the aim of 'conceptual restructuration' and not 'equality'. Queer theory often intersects with feminism and as Marinucci (2016, originally published in 2010) argues, feminism is queer. However, as mentioned previously, this book finds queer theory allows even broader perspectives than feminism and 'women' because it highlights perspectives of non-normative genders and sexualities in addition to being an open-ended theoretical position. As well, it allows for the deconstruction of the inclusionary discourses which have become prevalent in Anglophone museology. As Sullivan and Middleton (2019) argue, sometimes 'inclusion' equals 'assimilation' and the commoditisation of Others is co-opted in order to prove the 'diversity' of a museum. I agree that discourses of inclusion can be linked to assimilation, but where Sullivan and Middleton speak of it in terms of the political aspects (as with some gay and lesbian groups in the 1990s fighting for equal rights under the law), I find it important to focus on the queer theoretical aspects of it. Where queer museological scholarship largely avoids queer theoretical discussions, this work relies on them to think critically about the future of the museum and methods of queer representation. This is seen throughout the book in the way it explicitly connects, for example, Muñoz's (2009) understandings of anticipatory illuminations and queer utopia to curatorial choices and visitor experience, how ideas of ephemera and residue invigorate queer history and its representation or how Halberstam's (2011) depiction of queer failure helps define the queer museum as one which is unafraid to fail and fail again.

In agreement with Sullivan and Middleton (2019), I argue that critical self-reflection is necessary to redress past issues of marginalisation within museums.

They argue, and I would reiterate, that queering must be about challenging museum processes and being self-critical. We both assert that critical self-reflection is necessary for radical change and in order to engage with the complexities of representing Otherness above issues of inclusivity. My research, in line with this and other post-structuralist, postmodernist critiques of museums, articulates that visitors, community groups and the institutions themselves must be both self-aware and self-critical in order to create lasting structural change for the museum. Hein (2007) discusses how a self-aware viewer enables museum displays to be experienced on an equal footing instead of casting the visitor as passive as women so often are. She argues that the museum could house 'contrast and discord' in order to 'cultivate sympathy and reflection' (ibid., p. 38). Sandell (2017) too argues museums are part of the mediascape and are capable of providing educational opportunities for active audiences who negotiate such experiences through their own backgrounds and knowledge. By focusing on the subject positions of all those perspectives involved, it helps illustrate how and why issues of museal representation exist in the first place. Self-aware self-critiques are the necessary first step of institutional change towards a queer utopic museum.

The aforementioned scholars and this book seek to critically analyse how one might re-shape the museum and question how it positions certain objects and perpetuates certain classifications and histories of historically marginalised groups. As previously described, Hein foregrounds women's experiences and argues they should carry influence and weight in museal narratives. She focuses on the way art galleries revere the lone male genius and the production of their 'masterpieces'. In a parallel vein but focusing on the inclusion of trans- narratives in museums, Sandell (2017) argues that it is important to recognise the expertise of lived experience over curatorial concerns. Similarly, Sullivan and Middleton (2019) argue that it is necessary to be critical of display techniques which reproduce 'taxonomies of normalcy'. They challenge meaning-making and the idea that meaning is inherent in objects but also ask how to challenge ideas without alienating visitors. They view efforts (like exhibitions) towards inclusion as processes rather than endpoints to be criticised. This book incorporates these positions to look more broadly at artworks, ephemera and historical objects exhibited at specific case study institutions to think about how they might be recast (or cast at all) to widen the narratives told in museums (with a special focus on LGBTQ+ histories, which of course includes female or femme and trans- perspectives). Important examples were discussed at the SMU in Chapter 6 which seeks to de-fetishise objects with their *Tapetenwechsel* style of display and focus on niche subjects. As well, the research proposes that the Walker's use of an atemporal display, discussed in Chapter 4, helps to disrupt a 'straight' art historical reading like the one reiterated in *Queer British Art*, explored in Chapter 3.

To conceptualise the queer museum as one in which queering work is never finished, the research proposes the use of the term 'queer utopic' museum which builds off Muñoz's (2009) conception of queerness as a future ideality not yet achieved in the present (as developed in Chapter 7). Without limiting how future practice may evolve, the book argues that the queer utopic museum is characterised

by a detailed institutional understanding (especially on the part of the director and/or board) of the elasticity and potential of queer/ing, a commitment to institutional critique performed by both staff and external parties that leads to productive structural change, the desire to work reciprocally with queer communities without issuing top-down directives of what such a relationship looks like, and a dedication to including intersectional queer bodies and narratives in museum spaces in a way that increases visibility and is conscious of and combative towards issues of tokenism. Characterising the queer museum through the lens of queer utopia simultaneously provides the intangible goal of reaching a queer utopia while building in the chance to fail and fail again. As Muñoz argues,

> An antiutopian might understand himself as being critical in rejecting hope, but in the rush to denounce it, he would be missing the point that hope is spawned of a critical investment in utopia, which is nothing like naive but, instead, profoundly resistant to the stultifying temporal logic of a broken-down present.
>
> (2009, p. 12)

Alongside recent calls for social justice-oriented museum activism (Reilly, 2018; Janes and Sandell, 2019; Adair and Levin, 2020), I argue that once diversity and inclusion becomes common or expected practice within an institution, it cannot remain uninterrogated or static. Queering, alongside complementary practices like cripping and decolonising among others, becomes essential to the pursuit of representing, engaging and welcoming as broad a public as possible.

Queer Museum Practice

The practical implications of this research indicate that queering is predicated upon institutional support at the highest levels of governance and that understandings of queer/ing at these levels and throughout the institution affect the practices pursued. There is an obvious difference, for example, in the case of Tate Britain (Chapter 3) pursuing an identity-based, art historical queer exhibition and the VAM's institution-wide queering project (Chapter 5). Using the same comparison, these attitudes also affect the incorporation of LGBTQ+ communities into the museum (i.e., through the use of focus groups pre-exhibition and comment cards during it versus a four-year investment in the *Werksalon* and the *Queering the Collection* group). The inclusion of LGBTQ+ communities in museums should operate with mutual respect which recognises the fluidity and transience of such communities and the highly individualised ways people understand queerness. This allows for the recognition of lived experience and 'amateurism' as a form of expertise which broadens the authority of the museum instead of threatening it. It can create a relationship which both recognises inequities and inconsistencies in museum processes and representation and also promotes the perhaps non-typical use of the museum by such communities. As seen, for example, in the varied uses of FORUM at the Walker Art Gallery (Chapter 4) or the *Werksalon* at the VAM.

In addition to the higher-level considerations of how queering affects institutions, governance and relationships to communities, it is equally as important to consider queering practice in terms of exhibitions, objects and intended visitor experiences. For example, performative interventions in the gallery space can encourage dialogic reactions in the visitor that might help them question the museum and their own subject position. This was seen at both the VAM with Lundin's *Qwearing the Collection* and in the rhetorical style of *Coming Out*'s wall text. Performative and affective interventions in collection displays and interpretation allow access to what Muñoz (2009) calls 'minoritarian lifeworlds' and what Smith and Campbell (2015) argue evokes a 'deep empathy' within viewers through which they can engage with received narratives and marginalised histories. In the case of *Qwearing the Collection* discussed in Chapter 5, the performance extends beyond the museum itself if the visitor buys and subsequently engages with the prop in the outside world. It casts Lundin as an embedded minoritarian performer invited into the museum in order to facilitate societal and institutional change. As Muñoz argues, queer utopian practice must be about 'building' and 'doing' in the face of a heteronormative world which marginalises certain groups by characterising them as '…hopeless in a world without utopia' (2009, p. 97). Performative interventions and rhetorical phrasing encourage the visitor to be part of an active audience and might more readily command affective reactions than simple visual encounters.

Alongside the use of performative props in the gallery space or direct rhetoric in wall texts, it is also important to consider what a museum can do when traditional lenses seem to obscure a queer past and make it seem as though there is a dearth of queer objects. That is, when historical evidence is missing, how can the topic be broached in the gallery space? I suggest that instead of focusing on the lack of material objects, it is important for a queer museum to approach missing perspectives creatively and experimentally. For example, where *Queer British Art* lamented the lack of evidence in the catalogue and held some extra-exhibitionary programming to address the lack of BAME and trans- representation in the gallery, *Coming Out* instead worked intersectionally to bring those perspectives into the heart of the exhibition both through FORUM and by acquiring new works which addressed the absence of a variety of queer voices. The lack of a material history can be broached by approaching those objects the museum does own through different frameworks and/or by engaging with contemporary communities to see how they might interpret them differently. As Sullivan and Middleton argue,

> …we queer both the belief that meaning is inherent in objects, and the pluralist/inclusive approach to "multiple ontologies". Drawing on the work of Bruno Latour, we suggest a move away from the question of what things *mean* and towards an analysis of what things *do*, how and why.
>
> (2019, p. 65)

As discussed in Chapter 7, they argue that through the juxtaposition of 'normal' objects with insignificant and/or improper objects that a museum might not

normally display can help make new queer meanings. By explicitly addressing these issues in the gallery, it helps to better deal with issues of race, class and gender found in many institutional histories. It disrupts past curatorial or institutional silence by directly communicating to visitors the historical collecting and organising biases of the museum.

The examples within this book prove the necessity of infusing a LGBTQ+ museum or exhibition with the political urgency that queerness demands. At the Walker this functioned by asking the visitor not just to understand the objects through an LGBTQ+ framework but rather to question both their own and the museum's subjectivity and how the narratives beyond each object might challenge it. This provocation happens not only through the presence of the objects themselves but also through the language used to talk about them in the wall text. As well, it queers the exhibition-making process by focusing on marginalised narratives which are perhaps even marginalised within the LGBTQ+ community itself. Where most museums try to focus on programming which will bring in as many visitors (and money) as possible (as seen, for example, with the popularity of blockbuster exhibitions), the SMU, for example, actively looks to showcase work and history that is important to remember regardless of widespread appeal. As Marstine (2006) argues, blockbuster exhibitions are not often daring, but rather recycled themes which ensure success (for example, showcasing the Impressionists or mummies). It is small changes like these which alter how queer people are represented in society more generally and enrich the social justice-oriented museum.

Throughout the book I also suggest how important it is to question traditional categories and the way museums organise themselves. I found that the act of upsetting traditional knowledge structures within the museum not only happens in the gallery space but also in the behind-the-scenes processes. It is commonly understood in museology that the organisation of objects is subjective, but these subjective decisions often become entrenched. Nettleton (2013) re-thinks collections through a utopian framework to see these categories as horizons rather than firmly fixed. This book argues that one can find hidden histories or untold narratives by looking at alternative ways of cataloguing and classifying within collections databases. This was seen, for example, at the VAM with Lundin and Venir's 'Queering the Collection: Inventory of Queer Aspects of the Art Collection'. Objects can be re-interpreted and re-purposed in ways that complement or inspire the telling of marginalised histories. Just as Tyburczy (2016) argues all museums are sex museums, this book contends that all museums are queer museums. Regardless of how an object might be interpreted during a temporary exhibition or project, if this additional layer of interpretation is not recorded by registrars, collections managers and curators, then these additional frameworks will constantly be undermined by what is recorded in object records. Both Steorn (2012) and Zepeda (2018) argue how important metadata is to changing the frameworks of interpretation. Steorn suggests that it is not always about acquisitioning new objects, but about applying different emotional and political contexts to them. Sullivan and Middleton (2019) as well argue that museum documentation needs queering in order to open up interpretive practices. The queering of traditional organisational frameworks and how

these are recorded can open up ways of understanding queer objects and the queer museum.

Alongside issues of interpretation, use of objects and how these interpretations are recorded in collections databases, this book has also considered queer display. Tyburczy (2016) argues that queer curatorship is about embodying queer theory in display by repositioning the viewer's bodily relationship to the object. To extend the idea of embodying queer theory within display, this research points to understandings of queer temporality. Specifically, it looks at atemporality and/or ecstatic time and how they can function in display. It is often noted in museology that museum objects are out of time - conserved and displayed out of context. Their existence becomes atemporal and removed from their original use. As noted in Chapters 3 and 4, 'ecstatic time' is Muñoz's (2009) description for those moments when one feels ecstasy, both physically and mentally, and is a release from 'straight time'. For Muñoz, ecstatic time is queer time, a questioning of the naturalised way time is constructed in a straight world and a look towards the ecstatic, horizonal potential of queer futurity. This book argues that ecstatic time can be experienced in the museum similarly to other discussions by museologists of museums as sites of contemplation. That is, through display cues (such as those in *Coming Out*) museums might prompt visitors to question assumptions about chronological and heteronormative narratives and straight time. The example of *Coming Out* shows how a museum's liminal qualities allow the curator to interrupt straight time in order to encourage experiences of ecstatic time through queer history and narratives. This emphasises the importance of adding a political tone to a museum or exhibition because it helps disrupt straight time and the knowledge binaries that have traditionally organised museums. *Coming Out* represents an exhibition which rejects straight time, and typical exhibitionary boundaries by encouraging an atemporal consideration of the work and by placing the community at its centre. Hierarchies among artists, works, the curator and her audience begin to equalise through display and collaborative community experimentation. Another way to consider this ecstatic display is through Halberstam's (2011) understanding of queer collage. Exhibitions can be understood as a collage composed of space, artwork out of time, active community participants, curatorial vision and the museum itself. The two frameworks work together to enact what Tyburczy (2016) calls queer curatorship and what this research posits as a queer utopic museal display.

Queer Museum Futures

What will a queer museum look like in the coming years and decades? Although this book discusses several examples of queering work in museums, I believe queering is an iterative practice that will play out differently at every institution it is pursued. This book and its research are set amongst ever-increasing LGBTQ+ representation in museums and other cultural sites as well as the creation of two new queer museums – Queer Britain in London and The American LGBTQ+ Museum in New York. This positive leap forward marks the hard work of museologists, practitioners and activists to move towards an ever more equitable and representative cultural sphere.

As scant museological research looks at the SMU (nor the GLBT Historical Society and Museum nor the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art), closer examinations of the only LGBTQ+-focused museums in the world merit further study to address how queer/ing is understood at already 'queer' museums. Especially given the volatility found in this research at the SMU, further understanding of the national and local contexts of these institutions would give greater insight into the queer communities use and understanding of the value of grassroots museums. As well, comparing these three older LGBTQ+ institutions with the two newly formed ones will elicit important progressions in queer museology and the breadth of what queer museums can be. Such insights could then apply to museums of other remits as they seek to engage their own local queer communities.

As well, and alluded to throughout this book, the most pressing future research needs to examine the visitor experience of the 'queered museum'. Visitor studies concerning both queer communities and/or constituencies involved with the museum and more casual visitors to queer exhibitions or events need to be pursued. Using the theoretical frameworks of this research and investing in Muñoz's aspirations for a queer future, visitor studies could help both scholars and institutions identify what that means and how the museum could play a part in it. Where this research focused on institutions and curatorial choices, visitor research could highlight how institutional changes are actually communicated to and experienced by the visitor. This would create insight into which practices are effective and even aspects which visitors might have preferred or found more useful. Such research would also connect to arguments in this research about the need to prioritise lived experience and community work.

Finally, it must be noted that this research is rooted in Anglophone museology and Western institutions. There are, however, global examples of LGBTQ+ representation in museums and galleries, and the way that queer/ing is done and understood varies significantly in different political and social contexts. As previously noted, though there are still issues of prejudice and violence against LGBTQ+ people in the West, they are largely legally protected and even afforded mostly equal rights as concerns, for example, same-sex marriage. These rights are not universal and, therefore, the extent to which museums can engage in and experiment with LGBTQ+ representation is highly variable. It deserves localised attention in a multitude of contexts with particular focus given to intersectional issues like race, class and dis/ability, and the way, for example, colonial histories affect countries differently than those colonising countries in the West.

Queering museums is not a straightforward or predictable process. It requires deep consideration of past and current museum processes and a willingness to address heteronormative and/or homo-, lesbo-, bi-, trans-, queer-phobic practices where they are found. This necessitates practicing self-critique and listening to it when it comes from outside in order to make structural and material changes in ways that are mutually beneficial to museums and those they represent. As museums continue to desire to be or become community and social-justice oriented, it is critical that they are studied and held accountable to those peoples they wish to engage.

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Appendix A

LGBTQ+ Events at English Museums and Heritage Sites Commemorating the 50th Anniversary in 2017

Location	*Institution*	*Project*	*Dates*
England			**2017**
Aldeburgh	Red House	*Queer Talk: Homosexuality in Britten's Britain* (Exhibition)	01 February–28 October
Birmingham	Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery	*Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender & Identity* (Exhibition traveling from NML)	02 December–15 April 2018
Bournemouth	Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum	*Refracted: Collected Highlights* (Exhibition)	13 May–08 September
Brighton	Brighton Museum & Art Gallery	*Be Bold* (Events and exhibitions)	Throughout
		Gluck: Art & Identity (Exhibition)	18 November–11 March 2018
		Glyn Philpot (Exhibition)	20 July–23 September
		Museum of Transology (Exhibition traveling from Fashion Space Gallery)	20 July–October 2019
Bury	Bury Art Museum & Sculpture Centre	*Diary Drawings* (Exhibition)	23 February–13 May
Chichester	Pallant House Gallery	*John Minton: A Centenary* (Exhibition)	01 July–01 October
Cranbrook	Sissinghurst Castle Garden (National Trust)	Permanent Collection display on Vita Sackville-West (*Prejudice & Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ Heritage*)	Ongoing
Hanbury	Hanbury Hall & Gardens (National Trust)	*The Secret of the Wall Paintings* (Permanent collection) (*Prejudice & Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ Heritage*)	Ongoing

Location	*Institution*	*Project*	*Dates*
		Orlando: The Queer Element (Theatre performance) (*Prejudice & Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ Heritage*)	14–16 June
		World is Chaos, Creativity is Order (Installations and performance) (*Prejudice & Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ Heritage*)	16 June–26 November
Lewes	Monk's House (National Trust)	Permanent collection objects from Virginia and Leonard Woolf (*Prejudice & Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ Heritage*)	Ongoing
Liverpool	Museum of Liverpool	*Tales from the City* (Exhibition)	13 October–31 March 2019
	Sudley House	*Transformation: One Man's Cross-dressing Wardrobe* (Exhibition)	31 March–28 January 2018
	Walker Art Gallery	*Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender & Identity* (Exhibition)	28 July–05 November
		Fashion Icons: Celebrating Gay Designers (Exhibition)	02 July–01 August 2018
		Making Himself Claire: Grayson Perry's Dresses (Exhibition)	04 November–04 February 2018
London	The British Museum	*Desire, Love, Identity: Exploring LGBTQ Histories* (Exhibition)	11 May–15 October
		David Hockney: 14 Poems by C.P. Cavafy (Exhibition)	17 March–24 May
	The British Library	*Gay UK: Love, Law and Liberty* (Exhibition)	02 June–19 September
	Fashion Space Gallery (London College of Fashion)	*Museum of Transology* (Exhibition)	20 January–22 April
	The National Archives and National Trust	*Queer City: London Club Culture 1918–1967* (Recreation of historic space with talks, debates and performances) (*Prejudice & Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ Heritage*)	02–26 March
	National Portrait Gallery	*David Gwinnutt: Before We Were Men* (Exhibition)	09 March–24 September

Location	*Institution*	*Project*	*Dates*
		Double Take: Akram Zaatari and the Arab Image Foundation (Exhibition)	27 March–03 September
		Gillian Wearing & Claude Cahun: Behind the Mask, Another Mask (Exhibition)	09 March–27 May
		Marlene Dumas: Oscar Wilde & Bosie (Exhibition)	29 March–30 October
	National Theatre	*In Visible Ink-Tracing LGBT+ stories at the NT* (Exhibition)	23 June–18 October
	Sutton House and Breaker's Yard (National Trust)	*Sutton House Queered* (Exhibitions and events) (*Prejudice & Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ Heritage*)	Throughout 2017
	Tate Britain	*Cerith Wyn Evans: The Tate Britain Commission 2017* (Installation)	28 March–20 August
		David Hockney (Exhibition)	09 February–29 May
		Queer British Art 1861–1967 (Exhibition)	05 April–01 October
	Tate Modern	*Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017*	15 February–11 June
Manchester	People's History Museum	*Never Going Underground* (Exhibition)	25 February–03 September
		Queer Noise: The History of LGBT+ Music & Club Culture in Manchester (Exhibition)	01 July–10 September
Norwich	Felbrigg Hall (National Trust)	*The Unfinished Portrait* (Film) (*Prejudice & Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ Heritage*)	Ongoing
Nottingham	National Justice Museum	*Crimes of Passion: The Story of Joe Orton* (Exhibition)	22 July–01 October
Oxford	Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums of the University of Oxford	Out in Oxford (Trail)	Ongoing
Sevenoaks	Knole (National Trust)	*Vita and Virginia* (Permanent Collection) (*Prejudice & Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ Heritage*)	Ongoing
		Life in the Tower (Permanent collection) (*Prejudice & Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ Heritage*)	Ongoing

Location	*Institution*	*Project*	*Dates*
Tenterden	Smallhythe Place (National Trust)	*Playwrights, Pioneers and Provocateurs* (Exhibition) (*Prejudice & Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ Heritage*)	01 April–29 October
Wimborne	Kingston Lacy (National Trust)	*Exile* (Exhibition) (*Prejudice & Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ Heritage*)	18 September–12 November
Wolverhampton	Wightwick Manor and Gardens	*Taking Pride at Wightwick* (Several temporary exhibition displays) (*Prejudice & Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ Heritage*)	Throughout 2017
York	Beningbrough Hall (National Trust)	*Sitters and Their Stories at Beningbrough* (Artist residency) (*Prejudice & Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ Heritage*)	12–15 October
	York Castle Museum	*York Out of the Closet: 50 Years of LGBT History* (Exhibition)	05 June–05 November

Appendix B

Exhibitions that Reflect the Queer Feminist Turn at the SMU

These exhibitions represent those presented by the SMU from 2007 to 2019 which emphasise a feminine and/or trans- perspective as crucial to the themes of the exhibition.

Exhibition	*Dates*
Kann denn Liebe Sünde sein? – To Zarah Leander on her 100th birthday (Can Love be a Sin?)	16 March–28 May 2007
Gertrude und Alice: 100 Jahre, 100 Rosen – 100. Jahrestag des Zusammentreffens von Gertrude Stein und ihrer Partnerin Alice B. Toklas in Paris (Gertrude and Alice: 100 Years, 100 Roses – 100th Anniversary of the Meeting of Gertrude Stein and her Partner Alice B. Toklas in Paris)	18 September–31 October 2007
L-Projekt: Lesben in Berlin von den 1970s bis heute (L-Project: Lesbians in Berlin from 1970s to the Present)	22 August–07 December 2008
Frauenbiografien und Berliner Lesbenszene: das Schwule Museum wird immer lesbischer (Women's Biographies and the Berlin Lesbian Scene: The Gay Museum Becomes More and More Lesbian)	20 May–30 September 2009
Der androgyne Blick – Elfi Mikesch: Regie, Kamera, Fotografie. Hommage zum 70. Geburtstag (The Androgynous Look – Elfi Mikesch: Director, Camera, Photography. Homage for her 70th Birthday)	24 March–28 June 2010
"Verzaubert in Nord-Ost": Die Geschichte der Berliner Lesben, Schwulen und Trans in Prenzlauer Berg, Pankow und Weißensee* ("Bewitched in the Northeast": The Story of Berlin's Lesbians, Gays and Trans* in Prenzlauer Berg, Pankow and Weißensee)	11 June–12 December 2010
Gender_Gap: Sadie Lee und Martina Minette Dreier – Zwei Positionen zeitgenössischer Porträtmalerei (Gender_Gap: Sadie Lee and Martina Minette Dreier–Two Positions of Contemporary Portraiture)	05 October–22 November 2010

Exhibition	*Dates*
Emma Trosse, verheiratete Külz – Lehrerin, Leiterin, Autorin: Eine Ausstellung über die Vorreiterin der homosexuellen-emanzipatorischen Publizistik (Emma Trosse, married Külz – Teacher, Head, Author: An Exhibition on the Pioneer of Homosexual-Emancipational Journalism)	22 October–22 November 2010
andererseits: Künstlerische Einwürfe zur Frauenfußball WM 2011 (On the Other Hand: Artistic Objections to the Women's Football World Cup 2011)	24 June–25 September 2011
*Trans*_homo — von lesbischen Trans*schwulen und anderen Normalitäten* (Trans*_homo — from Lesbians to Trans*gay and Other Normalities)	16 August–17 November 2012
Lesbisch. Jüdisch. Schwul (Lesbian. Jewish. Gay)	07 June–09 September 2013
Wenn der Sand sprechen könnte (If the Sand Could Talk)	07 December 2013–10 March 2014
Zanele Muholi: Fotografie (Zanele Muholi: Photography)	22 March–30 June 2014
Exhibiting Queer	03 July–21 July 2014
MakeUpStories – Drags, Trans und Tunten – Fotografiens von Ronka Oberhammer* (MakeUpStories – Drags, Trans* and Tunten – Photographs by Ronka Oberhammer)	04 July–25 August 2015
Homosexualität_en (Homosexuality_ies) (A Collaboration with the Deutsches Historisches Museum	26 June–01 December 2015
SuperQueeroes – Unsere LGBTI-Comic-Held-innen* (SuperQueeroes – Our LGBTI* Comic Heroes)	22 January–26 June 2016
Sara Davidmann – Ken. To Be Destroyed	17 March–31 October 2016
Millionaires Can Be Trans // You Are So Brave**	20 May–03 October 2016
Krista Beinstein: Bio Porno Photografien (Krista Beinstein: Bio Porno Photographies)	11 November 2016–27 February 2017
ğ – queere Formen migrieren (ğ – To Migrate Queer Forms)	02 March–29 May 2017
The Lightest Shade of Aflatoon	17 March–05 June 2017
Simone de Beauvoir: 'You aren't born a woman, you become one'	12 May–28 August 2017
Queer City: Geschichten aus São Paulo (Queer City: Stories from São Paulo)	19 October 2017–08 January 2018
Jahr der Frau_en (Year of the Women*)	1 January 2018–17 February 2018
• *12 Monde* (12 Moons)	17 January 2018–05 January 2019
• *Spirits: A Dyke Bar for Queers, Gender Chameleons and Other Everydeities*	20 April 2018–11 January 2019
• *Lesbishces Sehen* (Lesbian Visions)	10 May–20 August 2018
• *Radikal – Lesbisch – Feministisch* (Radical – Lesbian – Feminist)	06 July–06 November 2018
• *Proudly Perverted – Ein Blick in die FrauenLesbenTrans*Inter* BDSM Community* (Proudly Perverted – A Look Inside the Women's, Lesbian, Trans*, Inter* BDSM Community)	06 September–04 November 2018

Exhibition	*Dates*
• *Hijra Fantastic*	28 September–19 November 2018
• *Sex Im Alter: Hommage zum 69. Geburtstag von Mahide Lein* (Sex Im Alter: Homage for Mahide Lein's 69th Birthday)	16 November 2018–25 February 2019
• *Extra+Terrestrial von Coven Berlin* (Extra+Terrestrial from Coven Berlin)	23 November 2018–14 February 2019
Colony	09 March–15 April 2018
Unboxed: Transgender im Schwulen Museum? (Unboxed: Transgender in a Gay Museum?)	18 January–01 March 2019
TransTrans: Transatlantische Transgender Geschichte (TransTrans: Transatlantic Transgender Histories)	08 November 2019–02 March 2020
Trial and Error: TRANSforming Health and Justice	22 November 2019–17 February 2020

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