Article

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Queering memory: Toward re-membering otherwise

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Abstract

This editorial introduction provides a theoretical framework for analyzing relationships between gender, sexuality, and memory. Using the concept of queering memory, the special issue proposes queering memory as a practice of innovative and generative history-making that has the capacity to reorder time and memory. The contributions collected in this special issue take up the notions of "queer" and "queering" in their multiple forms, not only in reference to gender and sexuality but also as disordered, non-normative, and subversive potentialities that unsettle power relations. Building on this approach, the contributions engage with art, archives, museums, television, performance, philosophy, and cultural artifacts to explore how queering memory can serve as a strategy for building alternative narratives that impact which memories are privileged and which are hidden or silenced.

Keywords

queering memory, archival silences, visibility, queering archives, queering museums

This Special Issue of *Memory Studies* engages with gender- and sexuality-related aspects of memory through the concept and practice of queering memory. As scholars like Hirsch and Smith (2002) have argued, technologies of memory and ways of transfer and transmission are gendered. Meanwhile, Ann Cvetkovich's (2003) groundbreaking work on sexual trauma brought together queer theory and affect theory to highlight how broader socio-political structures inform emotional experiences of sexual trauma, charting the ways for personal and political transformation. A growing body of feminist and queer scholarship has begun to engage in theorizations of queer memory, particularly in relation to generations and temporality (Moskowitz, 2021) and possibilities of dismantling heteronormative family structures (Dragojlovic, 2018). In this sense, queering memory allows for an analysis of the ways in which memory, gender, and sexuality are intertwined

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and co-constituted. Queer and postcolonial scholarship has also demonstrated the non-linear nature of memory and temporality (McCormack, 2014) as well as the ways in which queer historical resonances may offer the potential for political change and social transgression (Amin, 2017). Although our approach here is not limited to communities and narratives that might be broadly captured under the label "LGBTQ," it is critical to acknowledge how the pasts (and presents) of marginalized genders and sexualities have long been marked by erasures, gaps, and silences. In this framework, memory has a unique capacity to reverse the flow of time and to undo expected chronologies, thereby queering temporality (Quinan, 2020, 2021).

Against this backdrop, we propose queering memory as a practice of innovative and generative history-making, one that has the capacity to reorder time and memory. The contributions to this special issue take up "queer" and "queering" in their multiple forms, not only in reference to gender and sexuality, but also as disordered, non-normative, and subversive potentialities that unsettle power relations and encapsulate contradictions. Moreover, a queer approach to memory has a potential to contest traditional lines of futurity and constructs an archive that is neither fixed nor teleological, allowing for a more extended processing of erasure, silencing, and trauma (Quinan, 2021). Building on this approach, the contributions collected here engage with art, archives, museums, television, performance, philosophy, and cultural artifacts, and both humanities- and social sciences–informed approaches are reflected in explorations of how queering memory can serve as a strategy for building alternative narratives that deeply impact which memories are privileged and which are hidden or silenced. From different vantage points, all of the papers in this issue utilize queering memory as a method that reorders traditional approaches and conceptualizations of both remembering and forgetting.

Queer(ing) memory, archival silences, and politics of visibility

> As a writer committed to telling stories, I have endeavored to represent the lives of the nameless and the forgotten, to reckon with loss, and to respect the limits of what cannot be known. For me, narrating counter-histories of slavery has always been inseparable from writing a history of present, by which I mean the incomplete project of freedom, and the precarious life of the ex-slave, a condition defined by the vulnerability to premature death and to gratuitous acts of violence. (Hartman, 2008: 4)

Ways of remembering and archiving are politically inflected and culturally specific, even as they are inevitably contested by structures of inequalities and power relations in which they are embedded. This inevitably leaves us asking, "How can evacuated, repressed, unknown, and often unspeakable histories of marginalized peoples and groups be represented and made visible?" And in contrast, what might such visibility look like, and to what ends might it be deployed? Archival silences about groups and individuals historically marginalized have frequently been confronted by counter-memory and counter-history projects. Yet, as articulated in the above epigraph, Saidiya Hartman (2008) cautions against a romance of resistance embedded in a desire to represent those whose lives have been eradicated, thereby pointing to the limits of producing narratives as counter-history. In her careful attention to writing history "with and against the archive" and without intending "to give voice to the slave" (Hartman, 2008: 12), Hartman (2008) argues for the importance of *not knowing*. It is in and through the unknown that irreparable violence "resides precisely in all the stories that we cannot know and that will never be recovered" (p. 12). Instead, Hartman (2008) suggests writing about what cannot be verified, that is, to imagine the unknowable past. Echoing Hartman, C. Riley Snorton (2017) mobilizes Black feminist thought, queer- and trans-of-color critique, visual studies, and disability theory to present what he calls "a racial history of trans identity." This approach to history—and, we might add, to memory—is grounded in "fiction, as

fiction, and as fiction as 'facts'" (Snorton, 2017: 183) and works to unsettle and upend ways in which gender-diverse lives can be represented.

A politics of visibility and representability of marginalized groups and individuals whose voices have not been recorded, or who themselves have been unwilling or unable to verbalize or document their memories, have for some time been an integral part of memory work, and intergenerational memory work in particular (Dragojlovic, 2021; Hach, this issue; Hirsch, 2008). Yet, investments in unmasking archival silences might be trapped in a romance of making visible, as every representation is inevitably partial and, as such, always contains aspects that escape representability. Interventions that make visible histories of personal and collective injuries that have been silenced might emerge as acts of *haunted speakability*; that is, "[t]he aspiration to affectively unmask silences" might in turn "endanger the very existence of particular kinds of silence" (Dragojlovic, 2021: 426). These affective dynamics underpinning the work of visibility necessitates a careful attention to what might be concealed or is indeed unspeakable and beyond representability (Dragojlovic and McGregor, 2022).

Haunted speakability also permeates historical and contemporary representations of queer intimate relationships, which, as queer writer Carmen Maria Machado argues, silences and conceals representations of harm and abuse, thus producing archives about queer intimacies in an idealized and romanticized fashion. With a commitment to write about experiences that are usually silenced in queer memory projects, Machado's (2019) memoir *In the Dream House* details her personal experiences of domestic abuse in a queer relationship. Interwoven with childhood memories, conventional modes of queer representation, and a legal history of lesbian domestic abuse, the text dismantles queer archival silences about intimate partner violence. Machado's (2019) memoir opens with a quote by Saidiya Hartman: "sometimes stories are destroyed, and sometimes they are never uttered in the first place; either way something very large is irrevocably missing from our collective histories" (p. 2). This epigraph serves to open a discussion of the "violence of the archive" and to introduce some of the challenges of writing about unspeakable experiences.

Machado argues that the absence of narratives about queer domestic abuse makes it difficult for an abused partner to find a language to name harmful behavior. She contends that the abused partner develops a sense of shame believing that something might be wrong with them, as the conventional mode of representation of queer intimacies is one of idealized love and care. Machado details how this significant lack of context in which she could place her experience made it particularly difficult for her to understand her experience of an intimate relationship in which her partner's cruelty was followed by denial and sweetness, leading her to doubt her own perception of reality. Aiming to represent the affective presence of such a relationship, Machado constructs an inventive narrative form, a structure for "the dream house" that allows her to create an archive that will both hold her story and make it affectively real for the reader. The layers of the "dream house" are built around short chapters entitled after the narrative traditions of romance novels, self-help bestsellers, and literary tropes, such as "Choose Your Own Adventure" and "Unreliable Narrator." Chapters vary in length, with one titled, "Dream House as Epiphany" that contains a single line: "Most types of domestic abuse are completely legal." This narrative structure succeeds in producing an eerie representation of a queer intimate relationship where domestic abuse is normalized, with the abused partner feeling shame and questioning her own sanity. In charting the silenced experiences of queer domestic violence and acknowledging the challenges that such writing projects entail, Machado quotes the following passage from the late queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz: "queerness has an especially vexed relationship to evidence . . . When the historian of queer experience attempts to document a queer past, there is often a gatekeeper, representing a straight present" (Machado, 2019: 3). This engagement with queer scholarship allows Machado to go on to ask a series of questions that guide the creation of an archive of queer experiences otherwise. And the

questions she develops in reading Muñoz directly speak to the challenges that many of the contributors to this Special Issue on Queering Memory grapple with in the articles that follow:

> What gets left behind? Gaps where people never see themselves or find information about themselves. Holes that make it impossible to give oneself a context. Crevices people fall into. Impenetrable silence. . . .What is the topography of those holes? Where do the lacunae live? How do we move towards wholeness? How do we do right by the wronged people of the past without physical evidence of their suffering? How do we direct our record keeping towards justice? (Machado, 2019: 3–4).

Creative work like Machado's centers queer memory (as a noun) and, consequently, queering memory (as a verb). Many of the contributions collected in this issue are similarly inspired in their engagement with erasure, silencing, trauma, and loss, grappling with challenges of re-membering differently by analyzing topics and themes such as the following: the potentialities for unsettling homocolonial frames of remembering (Failler); memory activism around a former concentration camp for girls and young women (Luhman); "transfilial" justice in the Argentine human rights movement (Page and Sosa); homonationalism and the politics of memory in Argentina (Insausti and Ben); drag performances' refashioning of socialist memories (Pope); and revisiting representations of a queer icon upon which a television series was based (Reed).

Queering archives, queering museums

A spate of recent scholarly work and creative production has looked to the ways in which these notions of silence, visibility, loss, and recovery are both present and absent in archives. A compelling recent example of this queer approach to creative archival repurposing is multimedia artist Sadie Barnette's 2019 installation titled *The New Eagle Creek Saloon*, which takes up questions around archival recovery, queer memory, intergenerationality, and collective organizing. Like in her other works, Sadie Barnette investigates and challenges memories of both repression and resistance, but here in this installation she makes a connection with her own family history. The work is based on a space called New Eagle Creek Saloon, the first Black-owned gay bar in San Francisco, which was established in 1990 by her father Rodney Barnette who was also one of the co-founders of a local branch of the Black Panther Party. The bar's slogan spoke to its aim of inclusiveness and community support in a time when that was particularly difficult to find: "A friendly place, with a funky bass, for every race." Barnette reimagines this glittering bar that had offered a safe haven and space of connection for queer communities who were marginalized in other urban spaces (including gay spaces) due to racial discrimination.

The installation is constructed as a semi-circular bar with a pink surface and six barstools surrounding it. The space is low-lit, while a pink neon sign in cursive lettering spelling out "Eagle Creek" over a large bookshelf with framed photographs, various books, and other items. This is all set against a mirror that creates the illusion of a much larger space. Barnette's recreation of this queer space resonates with Muñoz's reflections in *Cruising Utopia* on his friend Kevin McCarty's photographic archive of Catch One, a predominantly Black gay space in Los Angeles. He writes,

> The utopian performative charge of this image allows one to see the past, the moment before an actual performance, the moment of potentiality; and the viewer gains access to the affective particularity of that moment of hope and potential transformation that is also the temporality of performance. The stage at Catch One juts out into the audience; it looks like a catwalk, and its edges are lined with small shimmering light bulbs. (Muñoz, 2009: 103)

These words could easily be applied to Barnette's installation, which does this sort of work of shoring up potentiality with a "utopian performative charge." In recreating the bar, she materializes the archive of not only the environment itself but also of this historical moment marked by intersectional violence directed at queers of color. By physically reconstructing the space, the exhibition also draws visitors in by putting themselves in the bar itself, which creates an affective and sensorial experience. Barnette also created a zine for visitors to take home, with newspaper clippings, photographs of her father and his friends, advertisements, handwritten notes, and other items from the bar's heyday, which serve to bring this individual history and collective archive alive. By integrating her own family story into the narrative, the project reimagines the past by, as Barnette writes in her artistic brief, introducing the New Eagle Creek Saloon "into the channels of existing queer histories but am also manifesting its own archive which recognizes the limits of 'official histories' and celebrates the unknown and unknowable."[1] Echoing this Special Issue's own conceptualization of queer(ing) memory, Barnette describes the installation as "honorific but also generative." That is, by recreating and reimagining the past, we are able to dream new futures that may enact, like Muñoz reminds us, new and different approaches that allow us to imagine queerness as both horizon and utopia, outside of time and space.

While Barnette's work could be seen as creatively engaging with personal and collective queer archives, similar sentiments are also reflected in a plethora of recent museum exhibitions—and even entire museums themselves—dealing with queer topics, some of which are also analyzed in this Special Issue (e.g. Queer Britain in London, the Schwules Museum in Berlin). This has even gathered mainstream attention, as evidenced by the *New York Times* recent article titled "What Should an L.G.B.T.Q. Museum Be? Approaches Vary" (Faber, 2022). In the Netherlands, IHLIA's LGBTI Heritage archive located in Amsterdam maintains a collection that represents material from 150+ countries. Meanwhile, in the United States, the American LGBTQ+ Museum is slated to open in New York in 2026. In our home city of Melbourne, the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) recently staged the exhibition "Queer: Stories from the NGV Collection" (March–August 2022), which drew from the museum's permanent collection to reveal the queer stories that art can tell. The exhibition took an approach that highlighted work *from a queer perspective*, rather than attempting to provide a definitive statement on what constitutes queer art.

Another approach has been taken by Chris E. Vargas who founded MOTHA (Museum of Trans Hirstory and Art) in 2013. Although similarly invested in these issues in a trans context, the museum is "imaginary" and is mainly composed of temporary events and performances (Vargas, 2017). Despite its ephemeral nature, Vargas is clear that it still forces us to critically interrogate what transgender visual history might look like and how it could be organized, even as it simultaneously asks if it is even possible "to compile such a history around an identity category that is relatively new, still evolving, and often contested."[2] This fluid and constantly "under construction" museum stays close to our own conceptualization of queering memory and speaks well to the possibilities that such novel projects hold for queer and trans memory projects, including museums and archives.

Growing interest in this topic is reflected in recent scholarship as well. For instance, Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton's (2020) book *Queering the Museum* takes a queer approach to analyzing how museums construct themselves and their publics through inherited epistemologies and ontologies. As they state, the queering of museums is

> a process without end, and, perhaps more importantly, without a definitive goal (for example, social inclusion) that is presumed to be universally beneficial and achievable by following a particular path. As the progeny of poststructuralism, queer/ing necessarily eschews singular certainties. (Sullivan and Middleton, 2020: 6)

We also take a cue from Sullivan and Middleton in the approach that they articulate, writing that their book

> should be viewed not as a blueprint, a game plan for a brave new (queer) world of museums and museological practice, but rather as a (necessarily incomplete) toolbox that can be used, expanded, and adapted in ways that are, perhaps, currently unimaginable. (Sullivan and Middleton, 2020: 6)

This notion of incompleteness, expansion, and adaptation resonates with the approach that this Special Issue takes to cultivating and rethinking the concepts of queer memory and queering memory, themselves always incomplete, adaptable, and forever in progress.

In this Special Issue, this engagement with queer curational strategies as well as the afterlife of the archive ranges from topics like queer collective memory projects during COVID (Merryman) to the politics of memory in Italy's first trans archive (Virtù and Voli), and from creative writing as a way of re-membering the fractured ghosts of trans history (Cerankowski) to reimagining archives of haunting (Hach). Similarly, the review essays we include at the end of this issue engage with HIV/AIDS memory in Berlin's queer museum (Schulze) and explore how queering and decolonizing approaches were employed in a recent exhibition at Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum (Dragojlovic & Quinan).

Special issue overview

This Special Issue opens with Angela Failler's article "Unsettling Homocolonial Frames of Remembrance: Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer Interventions at the Museum," which focuses on a Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer protest at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, to discuss how memory-making institutions, in their attempts to address diversity and inclusion, often rely on tokenistic inclusion of some and dispossession and devaluation of others. Detailing the Canadian Museum for Human Rights investment in what is termed "homocolonial framing of remembrance" which represents LGBTQ history through a "progress" narrative of inclusion of mainly White, middle-class queers, to the detriment of others, primarily Two-Spirit and queer and trans Black, Indigenous and people of color, Failler highlights how protest commentaries by Two-Spirit and an Indigenous queer museumgoer, and a short film Woman Dress by Plains Cree artist TJ Cuthand screened as part of a virtual program but not include in the on-site exhibits, have a potential to forge ways for more complex decolonial queer memory work in museums spaces. The theme of queer activism is also taken up in "Memory Care and Queer Akinship at the Former Uckermark Concentration Camp for Girls and Young Women" by Susanne Luhmann. The article discusses two decades of queer memorial activism of the Uckermark Initiative in Germany and memorializes girls and young women incarcerated by Nazi for their non-conforming gender, sexual, and social behavior. Luhmann argues that the Uckermark Initiative network comprised of feminist, lesbian, queer, and trans antifascist activists has been involved in long-term counter-memory activism that operates as an affective "memory care work." This network of care, Luhmann suggests, enables formation of queer akinship—queer relationships developed through ongoing care work to remember victims of state violence forgotten in the mainstream memorialization of Nazi terror.

An exploration of how disobedience can be approached as queering memory with a capacity to destabilize conventional activism is explored by Philippa Page and Cecilia Sosa in "On Disobedient Daughters of Perpetrator Fathers: 'Transfilial' Activisms across the Argentine Human Rights Movement." Based on fieldwork conducted as part of a documentary film project, the article explores feminist imaginaries of state terrorism in Argentina and explores why and how the praxis of disobedience, as articulated by the daughters of the perpetrators of state terrorism during the last

dictatorship (1976–1983), might be read as an instance of queering memory. Their analysis focuses on the individual "comings out" of two figures—Liliana Furio (founding member of the Historias Desobedientes collective) and Mariana Dopazo (ex-daughter of one of the dictatorship's most infamous perpetrators)—to illustrate the differing ways in which the personal, political, and societal mandates have been challenged through public acts of defiliation. Their contribution considers how the public emergence of these disobedient daughters enacts an unprecedented disruption of the normative familial imaginaries that have historically given shape to the memory and post-memories of state terrorism in Argentina. They ultimately argue that such disobedient performance of defiliation — either via disidentification or open repudiation of their ties to their criminal fathers—offers a significant queer arrangement that unsettles the established landscape of human rights activism in Argentina and beyond.

Santiago Joaquín Insausti and Pablo Ben also engage with the Argentine context in their article "Homonationalism, LGBT *Desaparecidos*, and the Politics of Queer Memory in Argentina." By taking a methodological approach that integrates a critical reading of hegemonic queer memory in the history of the Argentine LGBT movement, they reveal the relative success of LGBT rights. In particular, they examine the emergence of a hegemonic queer memory based on Argentina' self-representation as a "white" and "European-like" nation that distances itself from "the rest" of Latin America. In examining the history of Argentine constructions of whiteness, Insausti and Ben theorize contemporary understandings of hegemonic queer memory. To advance this argument, they juxtapose the 1976–1983 dictatorship, which has been hyper-memorialized, with state violence against queer people during democratic times, which has been often downplayed. They also argue that as homonationalism has shaped the formation of a hegemonic queer memory in the twenty-first century, alternative memories of police harassment of both travestis and homosexual men before and after the dictatorship have been hidden in plain sight through reframing, displacement, temporal transpositions, and other forms of scripting.

An exploration of how socialist memory could be queered is explored in Jill Pope's engagement with how drag performers in postsocialist Belgrade engage in queering memory to challenge the erasure of the city's socialist Yugoslav past. Titled "Spectral Fabulations: Belgrade Drag Performances Refashioning Socialist Memories," the article analyzes performances of two drag identities (Gospodja Pereca and Novoslovenka) and details the performers' engagement with specific ideological and cultural production from socialist Yugoslavia. Mobilizing scholarship on hauntings and queer performance, Pope argues that drag performers produce spectral fabulations as posthuman apparitions to disrupt linear understanding of history, to imagine utopian futures and confront current political depression. Concerns with queer collective memory and memorialization of queer experiences are further explored in Molly Merryman and Moira Armstrong's contribution titled "Queer Collective Memory During the Time of COVID: Timelessness, Isolation and Resilience in the UK." Here, Merryman and Armstrong chart an emergent expansion of an ongoing queer oral history collection Queer Britain during the time of COVID. Focusing on the video-based oral histories produced during the pandemic, Merryman and Armstrong highlight the importance of collecting queer memories of personal experiences of isolation and timelessness for the fuller understanding of how individuals in marginalized communities experienced and coped with the COVID pandemic.

From here, we move to an engagement with trans archives. In "Collective Memory and Trans History in the Italian Context: Archival Practices and the Creation of the First Trans Archive in Italy," Ludovico V. Virtù and Stefania Voli negotiate challenges encountered in creating Italy's first trans archive. In looking to the Italian context, they examine a variety of nodes of thought surrounding trans memory and archives. By listening to silence, recognizing what is not said, and attending to the politics of absence, Virtù and Voli recount the story of the founding of the MIT

archive and the history that allowed it to take shape. By putting forth new methodological approaches for thinking and doing archival work—including, for example, dis/organization, non-linearity, transfeminist methods—it lays the groundwork for theorizing trans memory and trans temporality and doing trans archives differently. Taking a speculative approach to queer and trans memory, KJ Cerankowski's "My Autobiography of Reed Erickson, or, How to Re-member a Ghost" eloquently embarks on a trans-temporal figuring of matter and body in order to re-member the fractured ghosts of trans history's past, present, and future hauntings. In recent years, transgender philanthropist Reed Erickson has gained renewed attention from trans historians as more of his personal material has become available in various archives. While other scholars have set out to piece together the life story of this eccentric multi-millionaire who invested substantial money and energy into improving gender-affirming healthcare, Cerankowski takes a different approach to the Erickson archive. Rooted in affect studies, archive studies, and trans/queer theories, this contribution plays with fabrication and fabulation to produce an embodied encounter with the material afterlife held within the archive rather than any clear or straightforward history. Also engaging with ghosts and hauntings is Maria Hach's creative non-fiction piece "(Re)imagining an Archive of Haunting." This text utilizes Hach's research and writing practice to explore intergenerational haunting among women of the Cambodian diaspora in Australia. Detailing processes through which affective traces of the past keep re-emerging in the present, Hach engages in creation of a (re)imagined archive of haunting.

From here, we move to an interview we conducted with Ann Cvetkovich (2003) on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of her groundbreaking book *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. This text has had an immense influence on the field of memory studies, including on many of our own contributors to this Special Issue, and has inspired new bodies of scholarship dealing with queerness, trauma, and memory. We conclude the Special Issue with a review section that includes three interventions, two that look to recent museum exhibitions and one that discusses a recent television series: Heiner Schulze's "Queering Memory—Queering HIV/AIDS," Jennifer Reed's "From Anne Lister to Gentleman Jack," and Ana Dragojlovic and C.L. Quinan's "Queering and Decolonising the Museum: 'In the Presence of Absence' Exhibition at the Stedelijk."

Notes

1. https://www.sadiebarnette.com/projects/
2. http://www.chrisevargas.com/motha

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CL Quinan is Lecturer in Gender Studies in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. Their expertise lies in the fields of queer theory, trans studies, postcolonial studies, and feminist/queer pedagogy, with a particular focus on examining how anxieties around nationality and racial difference come to be transposed onto queer, trans, and gender-diverse bodies and subjectivities. Quinan is the author of the monograph *Hybrid Anxieties: Queering the French-Algerian War and its Postcolonial Legacies* (University of Nebraska Press, 2020) and co-editor of the volume *Homonationalism, Femonationalism, Ablenationalism: Critical Pedagogies Contexualised* (Routledge, 2022). Their current research intervenes in discussions around recognition, documentation, and mobility for trans and non-binary individuals.